

# **SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**

Tuesday ~ Nov. 10, 2009  
Menominee County Courthouse - Courtroom B  
Menominee, MI 49858

## **MINUTES**

The meeting was called to order at 12:00 p.m. (CST) by Chairman Gary Eichhorn

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Roll call was taken with the following in attendance:

Present: Commissioners Furlong, Anderson, Peterson & Eichhorn

Excused: Commissioner Lang

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**Public Comment:**           None

**Approval of the Agenda:** Moved by Comm. Peterson, seconded by Comm. Anderson to approve the agenda. Furlong – Shouldn't we amend the agenda seeing that three of these candidates aren't going to be here? Eichhorn – what do you want to amend the agenda to? Furlong - Seems odd to have the agenda with four candidates, when we only have one. Eichhorn – That's the way it was posted, I think it's appropriate. Anderson – I don't see a reason to amend it. Motion carried, 4-0

### **Agenda Items:**

- 1. Personnel Items: Interview Top Four Candidates for the County Administrator Vacancy.** Chairman Eichhorn introduces Holly Peoples from MI Works. He passed out the questions that Ms. Peoples will ask. Furlong – In light of the fact that we only have one candidate to interview, I would like to make a motion to cancel the interviews for today and research the other available 18 candidates. There was no support for the motion; motion dies for lack of support. Eichhorn – We have one person to interview, that is Mike Erdman. Mike is called forward. Ms. Peoples proceeded to ask the interview questions. **#1. Leadership:** Describe your particular management style and give examples of how this style has assisted you well, or hindered you in the past. Erdman - I think a person has to lead by working hard to begin with. You have to work with everyone involved in the situation and have them be part of the team. You have to lead by example and be willing to rely on everyone else's experience and expertise; it's a team effort. If you don't want to do that I think you're setting yourself up for failure. **#2. Create a Team Work Environment:** Interacting with others can be challenging at times. Please describe your thoughts on how effective communication is achieved within an organization such as the County of Menominee. Describe any differences you perceive in how communication is handled internally (employees, departments, boards) and externally (public). Erdman - We need to present ourselves in a very professional manner. Regretfully this county has been experiencing difficulties in the press because of challenges. I think we have

at all times to remain professional, be effective in what we do, we need to do it efficiently, we need to work as a team and not as an independent operation that's dictatorial, however, this organization works for the public it works for the residents of Menominee County, it's paid for by in large by about 13,000 people who pay taxes here. It's important that we do our job and we do the functions of what this government is supposed to do. That is to keep the records to be the official County Receipt, to provide an effective means of dialogue between the residents and the citizens and to provide the functions of county government. #3. Adaptability: Tell us about some situations in which you have had to adjust quickly to changes in organizational or department priorities. What was the impact of the change? Erdman - I've been working for the past twenty years with MSU Extension. They're continuously in turmoil and change. It's almost a predictable every three to four years they're going to have major crisis; what you have to do is adapt and move on. Probably/possibly the difficulties people have is that they're not willing to give up whatever they perceive as being their territory. That is an issue that can be a real problem. We are here to serve the public of Menominee County & others traveling through, etc. But our positions are not firm. This board can change and I think everyone on this board came to this board because they wanted to move Menominee County ahead. My application for this position is to do that. I don't see myself as having ownership in any of this it's just to transition to a better more efficient form of government. #4. Judgment/Decisiveness: Relate one or more examples of situations where you were involved in the disciplining and/or termination of an employee under your direction and how you handled those situations. Erdman – I was involved in one with MSU, it's done through a process of documentation working with the employee, progressive planning. And following that up with meetings. In our case it was a three month process. We followed that through with the appropriate documentation with all the appropriate legal background and we did the job that we had to do. It's not a one person decision; for example, if I owned a business as a sole proprietor, I could hire or fire you. It's not that way in an organization like this or with MI State. You have to follow the procedures. The goal during the procedures, you're trying to get the individual to see the means necessary to change so that they can continue on as an employee. However, none of us here are exempt employees. All of us are suspect, or potentially, we can lose our jobs. If you look at this job in particular, it's not a two year contract or a one year contract or a six month contract. It's an 18-hour contract. The minimum amount of time necessary to publicly post for a special meeting of the board to remove an employee, as in this case of the Administrator position. So that's how I've done it in the past. It's not a particularly fun experience. I don't think anyone wants to go through that. If you have to do that, you do it in a tactful manner, you do it as appropriately as possible, and the only thing you can say after it's done, is that the employee no longer works for this organization, and can I help you? #5. Customer Service Orientation: How have you handled citizen complaints regarding employees under your direction in the past? With employees you have to deal with the complaints directly, you have to take them at face value, you have to investigate, you have to follow through, you can't be insincere about doing it and you need to resolve the issue. Maybe it happened, maybe it didn't happen. If it's an

employee that you have, you have to deal with that employee, and to talk to that employee and ask what's your side of this story, and get their feedback and come to a conclusion or consensus and how we can improve this and avoid this in the future. The goal of this organization is to provide public service, and keep records, and run the jail and the courts. But we're here to provide service to the community and to be the depository of all the official records. So we have to do that right, it doesn't matter who the person is, or if the person was in there fifteen times before. I've experienced complaints coming to me via phone. I sat down with the supervisors involved, told them that this was an issue, gave them all the facts, it was resolved. It happens in all organizations. #6. Innovate: Give us an example of an idea you had to improve your organization's processes or procedures. Many people bring new ideas to change the environment that they work in, how long would you wait before implementing your changes in the County? Erdman – I think you have to do changes in a logical manner. They always say you have a honeymoon period. I don't think I'd have a honeymoon period here. I haven't said a word publicly in five weeks. I've been in the paper probably trashed quite a few times in five weeks. I don't necessarily read the paper, but I haven't said a word to anybody. So I don't think I'll have a honeymoon period. And when to institute changes, when they're appropriate, when they're obvious, when they need to be done. When we lost our building & grounds position, I started looking around the facility. I started noticing tree limbs hanging and piles of leaves blown up against the door. So I guess I instituted a change. I talked to the appropriate individual and said, we need to get this cleaned up, it just doesn't look good it's not giving us a positive image in the community and we should look as good as we can. It was taken care of. Ideas to increase our effectiveness – for being an academic organization we have an extremely inefficient mechanism for reporting data. Used to be called ears, now eyes and will evolve into something different in the future. A few years back, I became aware that the federal law changed for food service officials. All restaurants needed to have food safety trained individuals, appropriately trained. I became trained to train others within the state. It generated a lot of revenue for the Menominee County extension office. I think that anyone can see what the change should be, all of those changes should be incorporated at the appropriate time. There should be a mechanism for people to suggest those changes. #7. Tolerance for Stress: Given the fact that County Administrators are constantly confronted with problems and complaints from the public, why would you be interested in taking on this type of stress as a County Administrator? How do you handle the seemingly endless barrage of complaints and demands from all directions? Erdman – When I volunteered for this, I didn't volunteer because I wanted to do this, I volunteered because I cared about this county. I look at it in a lot different terms than many of the people on this board, or some of the people on this board. I see the entire county. I just think we needed some help. And that's why I applied to do it, and luckily my organization was willing to let me do that. Did we have stress; I'm looking at this lady who's not going to look up right now, because if she does...we experienced a lot of extremely stressful situations. Stress from just about every form internal and external to this organization. I don't have a problem with any of that, but it was very challenging. We were under the gun for continually meeting deadlines and doing that. We were told (a) how

incompetent I am, (b) how totally we can't accomplish this. This board has accomplished a lot in ten months. They did most of it early on, probably within the first seven months, but they accomplished a lot despite the gnashing of the teeth and everything like that. I'm saying it's the board. It's not just individuals, this is a team effort. I've been on many boards. It all comes down to votes. After the vote's taken, it's still a board decision. This board is where it is today because they were successful in getting it done. I was told multiple times you can't get a budget done, we have a budget. The state of MI didn't get their budget done on time, they didn't get their budget done in a balanced manner. My organization was one of the last line items that was possibly going to be taken out of the state budget. They didn't take us out, bottom line is they don't have funding to provide this for next year. So how do you run a budget and not have money to support it. You said I was going to get to ask a question, my question to this county board is... We're about six months away from the new budget cycle. How do you want to deal with the next budget cycle? Whoever's in this position, I want to know how you want to deal with that, because you're going to have to face it, there is not, to my knowledge a great supply of money sitting somewhere else. You're going to be facing a new contract for the Courthouse union. I'm getting to the stress part. We had stress. How do I deal with stress? I do the best I can every day from the moment I get up until I go to sleep. I spend a lot of time doing very physical things. I do my best thinking when I'm working in the woods, or driving a tractor, or doing something mundane which is totally physical. I have a family which I care a lot about. I like to eat, downside is you can't fit into the clothes that you wear. I deal with stress like everybody deals with stress. I go home, I have the ability to turn it off and walk away. I have a family that I dialogue a lot with. This job has stress, and it's a no win job, it's a lose lose job. If you do your job correctly you're going to have people unhappy with you. If you make the slightest mistake, you're going to have people unhappy with you. Then you have all those other people who really want your job or want to be controlling or something or other, I'm not trying to control anything, I don't have a side in this. I've told every one of you, I don't have a side in this. Now we don't have Bernie here, and I'm sorry he wasn't able to be here. But I told him from the very get go, you can't chose sides in this job and I still believe that's the case. Bernie told me, sooner or later you have to chose sides. I said no, you have to make the decisions. I can do what needs to be done, but you guys have to make the decisions. What do you want to do next, we got through this really difficult rough time. What do you want to do next? We're getting the jail fixed, we're getting BS&A.net up and going. Eventually you're going to approve the servers, two servers not one. What's next? If I were to be in this position, I don't want to go through it the way went through it. It was kind of like a trial by fire. I'd like to do it in a very logical methodical where it's smooth. Not everyone is going to be happy about all this. I don't know how you're going to pay for whatever you decide you want to do next. Unless you want to raise my taxes. If you read one of the editorials recently in the newspaper, it said the only answer is we've got to start raising taxes. We need to do things smarter and more efficiently. If you look at our expenses, it's pretty obvious where our major expenses are, how do we lessen those expenses or do things more efficiently so that we don't have to have those high expenses. If you look at my

budget over time it's been going down. I think my budget is somewhere around 87K, when I came (20 years ago) I think my budget was somewhere around 127K. We saved the County money by cutting a position in extension. #8. Analysis: At one time we have all thought we had successfully handled a problem only to find out we had really affected a symptom of a large problem. Can you give us an example of a time when you did this? Erdman: I have done over my career in multiple environments university research, fed. Gov. research, commercial industry, private businesses. I'm trying to think of ones that I really got wrong and I'm not coming up with anything, I'm sure I have. I don't have a real good example at the top of the list that I can say where I solved the problem ineffectively. Disciplining children that might be one. When you start out as a young parent, you don't know a lot about child rearing and I probably was stricter than I should have been. However, In hind sight, I guess if I could go back and have a do over, I would have tried to be more patient with young children who didn't get it even though I know their job is to test and find limits all the time, I think discipline is important, but I don't think you should over do it because you can just reach a point where they just rebel, and that's a sad thing. That's the only one that I can come up with at this point. #9. Create Success Conditions: Do you have a specific vision of either your role as County Administrator for the County of Menominee and/or a vision for Menominee County itself and if so, please describe this vision for us? Erdman: I'd like to see us get along and do our jobs, just our jobs; Not be politically nitpicking all the time, not being continually worried about, am I going to be fired, or is this person getting more than that person. When I went through the formulation of this budget. It utterly amazed me at the amount of energy and effort employees put into worrying about everything in the world. For the past six months I've know that my job with the extension was potentially going away. I could have done one thing, I could have sat around and worried and come up with new scenario or bitched, but I didn't, I just worked, I did my job and whatever is going to happen is going to happen. I think we should do our jobs here, I think the employees here when they go home should be able to go home and know that tomorrow's going to be an OK day for them. They did the best they can, and now they're home. My vision is I would like to see us just get along. I am not a confrontational type person. I would rather see us solve problems as opposed to just continually trash people. This county needs some work and I wish we could move and just do our work. I may be totally inept in the eyes of many people who are wondering why I am applying for this job. It's pretty clear to me that you try to put yourself around people who are competent. Could you just summarize or tell us why you think you should be the person considered for the Menominee County Administrator? Erdman: I don't know if I'm most qualified. I applied because I worked at it for five months. It's not a fun job, it really isn't; however I like challenges I like to be involved, I like to be active, I like to be proactive, I like to be a team builder vs a team dismantler. I like to solve problems. I applied for the position because I am an adult, I can do it, I applied for it. When I walk out of here, whatever this board decides they're going to decide, I'm not looking back. Erdman asks the board, what are your plans? Are you contemplating digging a big hole and starting over, or are you contemplating trying to improve certain areas? What do you want to accomplish next year is what I'm asking. I mean the next fiscal

budget. What would you like to do next? Anderson – Cut taxes. Peterson – From where we're at now and what's going to happen, we all realize that the state has taken that 1.6 billion dollar tarp funds to try to come up with a short term fix. Next year we won't have that opportunity, at least that amount of money. It seems really important at this juncture; that we start documenting all these possible changes, cut backs, whatever it is that comes from Lansing. We need to get an early start and track state funding at this point it sure appears that it won't be as great as it was this year. One thing that concerns me is the companies that can carry their tax losses forward. We probably won't have as much revenue, and it will affect the county. We kind of escaped the bullet this year, sure we had some cutbacks, but next year it could be more severe. Furlong: We're hiring an administrator, we are five people elected by popular vote to run a multi million dollar corporation. We're hiring an administrator to help guide us through the budget process, the human resources, the contract negotiations...in your educational experience, what do you offer as far as your experience or education as it relates to human resources, contract negotiations, to the budget process, formulating and implementing a budget. Erdman: I looked through the requirements for the bachelors degree. My bachelors degree was not in public administration or business administration, however my work experience has required that I do all of those other things. He goes on to explain what courses are required for a bachelors degree in public administration and explains he has those, mostly through life experiences. I have not had law, public policy or business courses, other than through my career. Furlong: In two minutes or less...can you describe if you were the administrator what your role would be as it pertains to the county board? Erdman: I work for you. The function of the County administrator is to work with the County board members. Regretfully you've been on one side and probably feel like you haven't gotten your choices sometimes. Furlong: First and foremost I'm not on any side, I'm a brand new board member and all I want to do is basically what's good for Menominee County as far as the administrator position, I've been pressing for this ever since we fired/sacked the last guy. What I'm looking for is what you feel as the County Administrator what your role is as it pertains to the interaction with the county board. Erdman: I have to interact with the county board, every one of the members, even the member that isn't here. I have to be able to communicate with the board effectively to resolve what the issues are. I also have to work for all of the employees that are here. I have to follow through with the all of those things listed in the job description. I would be an employee of five individuals and the employees, and the county. But it's to run this organization and to run it effectively, efficiently and on the right side of the economic scheme. Do you think the county administrator should have the appropriate experience and expertise to bring information to the county board for their decision or should the county administrator wait for the county board to bring the decisions to the administrator for implementation. The job is for the administrator to bring the opportunities to the county board members for their decision and then to implement whatever they decide to implement. Eichhorn: I only have one thing regarding the budget. We're going to be faced with some big cuts. Are you comfortable in putting together two different budgets, one to where we're going to have the funding that we'll need and one where we're not going to have the funding

or where you would propose the reductions will be made. Yes I would be comfortable in doing that. I understand that the county has to function. You have to work with the team members and find a solution. None of this is done by one person. The board members were involved in it, the administration team, the clerk's office, the treasurer's office, the dept. heads were involved in it, maybe it wasn't as smooth as it could have been, but can I do it, yes. Erdman thanks the board for giving him the opportunity. On his way out of the courtroom Erdman states, you should get the most qualified individual you can get.

**2. Building & Grounds/Parks Items:** None

**3. Miscellaneous Items:** Anderson, I'd like to ask James a question. In your statement in the newspaper that we weren't following our agreement, Furlong, what agreement? Anderson, The motion that you made at the meeting and I seconded, apparently you figured we weren't following that agreement. Furlong, I still don't know what agreement. Anderson, You made a comment in the newspaper. Furlong, just tell us what the comment was. Anderson, I don't have it here, but you said that we weren't going along looking for a manager and the qualifications. I seconded your motion and I strongly disagree what you said in the newspaper. I think we are going along with exactly what you said, bachelors degree minimum of five years. Furlong, I guess I need to look at the newspaper.

**4. Finance Items:** None

Eichhorn: We need to decide what we want to do here. We have an applicant and unfortunately we were only able to interview one. Where do you want to go from here board? Furlong: I would like to see us look at the other applications and bring in some more applicants. I don't think one interview gives us a wide range of qualified candidates. We received 19 applications one dropped out earlier, three of them just dropped out, there's still a few more out there that we can possibly take a look at. Eichhorn: Personally I believe we went through the process. We did everything accordingly, unfortunately these people chose for whatever reason to drop out, I think we had the best qualified people as a board that we could possibly put together. I believe we should offer the contract to Mike Erdman and I believe we should do it soon. Anderson, I'd like to make a recommendation to have a special meeting on Thursday to offer Mr. Erdman a contract because he's the only applicant that we had and I feel he's well qualified for the job. Peterson, I think we should have MI State police, Stephenson post do a background check and when that's complete we can continue with Garry's motion (recommendation). Eichhorn, that was something that James requested, that we have a background check for anyone we offer a contract to. Furlong, we're sticking with the timeline up to this meeting today. I haven't seen a contract yet to offer Mr. Erdman or any other candidate, do we have a contract that we've drawn up somewhere along the line? Eichhorn, we had directed Mr. Filoramo a while back to start putting something together. Furlong, Garry said we'll sign a contract on Thursday, and I haven't seen a contract Anderson, If I'd had finished talking, I would have said contingent on Filoramo being able to have a contract ready. Furlong, I would think we could all have the opportunity to see that contract and review and have input on the contract. I think we should stick with the timelines that our

chairman has established. Eichhorn, I don't disagree with James that is the schedule that we set up, it would be nice to expedite it, but we all agreed on the timeline. Anderson, I think we need to have a meeting to discuss the contract. Eichhorn, we'll have Filoramo draw up the contract. We'll get it out to all of you to see and get any changes back to me. Then we'll meet to make any final changes. The timeline said Nov. 20<sup>th</sup>, we would offer the contract to someone and we should stick to the timeline. All board members are in agreement.

**Public Comment:** None:

**Adjournment:** Moved by Comm. Peterson, supported by Comm. Anderson to adjourn this meeting at 1:23 pm. Motion carried, 4-0.