

# Minutes – Shields Township Board of Trustees

STATE OF ILLINOIS, )  
Lake County, ) } SS.  
Town of Shields )

THE TOWN BOARD OF SHIELDS TOWNSHIP met at the Shields Township Office for a Special Meeting on November 9, 2010 at 4 p.m. to discuss the functions and services of the Shields Township Supervisor's office and the personnel and costs required to provide them.

PRESENT: <u>Gale Strenger Wayne</u>	Supervisor
<u>David Barkhausen</u>	Town Clerk
<u>Lynn Baehr</u>	Town Trustee
<u>Cele Bull</u>	Town Trustee
<u>Laura Carney</u>	Town Trustee
<u>Mary Woodson</u>	Town Trustee

## I. Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call

Supervisor Strenger Wayne called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. A roll call was taken, and all Board members were present, other than Trustee Baehr who arrived during the discussion of the first item below.

## II. Pledge of Allegiance

Supervisor Strenger Wayne led the Pledge of Allegiance

## III. Discussion of Shields Township Supervisor's Office Functions and Services

Supervisor Strenger Wayne said she had cancelled plans to attend the annual Township Officials of Illinois conference in Springfield as the result of the call of this special meeting. She said that the meeting had been called by trustees and asked what questions they had about the matters on the agenda.

### A. North Chicago Taxi Subsidy Program and Its Manner of Administration

Trustee Woodson requested an explanation of how the program is administered. At the request of Supervisor Strenger Wayne, Program Coordinator Kathy French explained its method of administration as follows. North Chicago residents age 62 and older or if disabled are eligible to receive vouchers worth \$2 each that can be used to help pay for taxi rides. Initially, the users come to the office to establish their identity and eligibility. They are given twenty-two \$2 tickets every two months. Once initial eligibility is established, the vouchers are mailed every two months. The two taxi companies (JB Taxi and Metro Taxi (formerly I-Ride)) are the participating taxi companies. It is thought that most participants use the vouchers to go to the doctor or grocery shopping. There are about 132 participants in the program at this point. If they cease to use the vouchers, they are taken off the list of those eligible. The taxi companies bring in the vouchers that the program participants use to obtain discounted rides, the vouchers for each company are totaled, and the companies are paid \$2 for each one of them.

There were some questions and some discussion of the time involved in administering the program. At one point, Ms. French said it took about 15-20 hours per month of her time, but later she said that would be every two months.

In response to other questions, Ms. French said there was no way of knowing just how the vouchers are used. She said many of the participants, but not all of them, use all their vouchers. She does not know how many are over age 62 and how many are disabled. (Trustee Baehr arrived at this point). Ms. French said that the program was in existence when she began to work for the Township in 2006, and Office Manager Arona Landsman said it has been in existence for the 18 years that she has been with the Township and that the program came about as a response to the transportation assistance provided by the Township to the Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Senior Center with the thought that some similar program should be established for North Chicago Shields Township residents.

Supervisor Strenger Wayne suggested the possibility of a "time and motion" study to determine how staff time is used. Trustee Carney said that she just wanted a general idea of staff time spent on various non-mandated activities and noted that there are staff costs associated with townships taking on various non-mandated programs. Supervisor Strenger Wayne noted the nature of the fixed costs of operating the supervisor's office that would be incurred in any event.

## **B. Passport Issuance**

Trustee Carney asked Kathy French about the passport issuance process. Ms. French then explained that she takes the necessary information from the passport applicants and sends it to the passport agency. Passports cost \$110 for adults and \$80 for children, and there is a \$25 administration/execution fee set by the Federal government that is given to the processing agency such as Shields Township. Supervisor Strenger Wayne said passport issuance activity is important because the administrative fees generated provide money with which to buy items for the food pantry, thus avoiding the need to use tax dollars for this purpose. Trustee Bull pointed out that both the Lake Forest and Waukegan post offices issue passports. In response to a question from Trustee Carney of the time involved with this activity, Ms. French said it is seasonal and that there is occasional off-site activity in processing passports, such as at Lake Forest High School for school trips and a recent visit to the Chicago Bears facility in preparation for a game that they played in Canada. In response to a question from Trustee Woodson about the time involved in processing an individual passport, Ms. French said that if all the documentation is in order, it only takes about five minutes.

## **C. Metra Discount Pass Issuance**

Kathy French explained that Metra discount and free-ride passes are issued to those over age 65, the disabled, and to those who qualify for the property tax circuit breaker program. About 100 of these passes are issued by the Township each year to those who come to the office, present a government-issued identification card, complete an application, and pay an application fee. In response to a question from Trustee Carney about other locations providing this service, Ms. French said it is offered at the train stations downtown, the PACE office in Waukegan and by certain other neighboring townships. She said the activity requires less time than processing passport applications.

## **D. Food Pantry**

Trustee Carney expressed the concern that the Township's food pantry location is not readily accessible to those most in need of food pantry assistance, based on the assumption that the greatest need within Shields Township is in North Chicago. Noting the lack of access by public transportation, she observed that it is unlikely that those in need of food have the transportation to get to the Township office and expressed an interest in having a viable and accessible food pantry for the Shields Township residents in North Chicago. She suggested that the office staff try to keep track of the areas from which food pantry patrons are coming. Trustee Woodson also said that the food pantry needs to be in a central location where the greatest need exists. She observed that the office location is kind of hidden, and very few people know where it is. Trustees Carney and Woodson both pointed out that the hours and space of existing food pantries in North Chicago are extremely limited. Trustee Bull noted that the Township is very fortunate to have the volunteers who help out with the food pantry, but suggested a focus on better serving the whole township. Trustee Bull also asked Kathy French about her time spent assisting on food pantry matters, which Ms. French said is maybe a couple of hours per week. She places the orders for food and sometimes helps out in the food pantry depending on the availability of volunteers. Trustee Baehr noted that there have been several meetings with food pantry operators in Lake County, trying to figure out who does what and how and where the Township's efforts might best be focused. Supervisor Strenger Wayne said the Township's office is in a central location within the Township and that the food pantry had served about 1,300 people in the last year. Trustee Woodson asked how many of those were from North Chicago, and Supervisor Strenger Wayne replied that she didn't know but said they are from the Township. Supervisor Strenger Wayne suggested that the Township could buy a trailer of frozen food for \$650 and provide a mobile food pantry in North Chicago. Trustee Baehr noted the availability of two Lake Forest, church-based food pantries and said she agreed with having a food pantry in the area of greatest need. Supervisor Strenger Wayne said the Township is committed to the space it has rented, including that in which the food pantry items are stored, for 10-20 additional years. Trustee Carney noted that, in a prior conversation, Kathy French had specified a much larger amount of her time as being taken up with activities related to the food pantry, and Ms. French said that somewhat less of her time is now required since the food pantry is now only serving residents of Shields Township. In response to a question from Trustee Bull about how volunteers are used, Ms. French said they sort the food items and pack bags for the patrons, but they do not deal with those who come in for assistance. She said the food pantry hours are from 8:30 to 4 on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Trustee Baehr asked if more staff time is required than the two hours per week that had been mentioned if the food pantry is open eleven hours per week. She also asked if there was a concern that volunteers would not help if the food pantry is located somewhere else. Supervisor Strenger Wayne said the closing of an existing food pantry is discouraged given the overall need for food pantry services. Trustee Baehr said she wants to serve the most people in the most efficient way. Supervisor Strenger Wayne again suggested the consideration of additional assistance with support from a mobile food pantry.

## **E. Emergency Assistance**

Supervisor Strenger Wayne said that while Emergency Assistance is not a mandated service, it relates to General Assistance. Township Attorney Richard Cowen said it falls under the supervisor's discretion if it is offered. Trustee Bull asked about those entities and agencies that the Township considers "partners" such as Catholic Charities, Salvation Army and the extent to which they do or could offer emergency

forms of assistance. Supervisor Strenger Wayne explained that if one's income is too high to qualify for General Assistance, Emergency Assistance may be available on a once every 18-month basis to help pay for such items as rent, mortgage assistance, or utility bills. General guidelines for General and Emergency Assistance eligibility were explained by Township Caseworker, Devon Nelson. Emergency Assistance is limited to \$400 for one person with possible additional increments of \$50 based on family size. Trustee Carney asked about the number of people receiving such assistance and said it is difficult to tell what bills each month are associated with various program activities. Office Manager Arona Landsman said these expenses are shown separately in the General Assistance Fund reports. Trustee Carney said it would be helpful to see a monthly report for the number of Emergency Assistance recipients as well as the total amount spent.

## **F. Office Management**

Trustee Bull suggested exploring the possibility of outsourcing payroll, bill paying, and accounting functions. With some limited additional discussion on this matter, Supervisor Strenger Wayne asked Trustee Bull if she would be willing to investigate the matter, and Trustee Bull said she would do so.

At the conclusion of the discussion of the above matters and prior to public comments, Supervisor Strenger Wayne read the following prepared statement and asked that it be included in full in the minutes:

*"I understand the public demands fiscal integrity and responsibility. I couldn't agree more-it's the platform I ran on.*

*The fact is, Shields Township is statutorily required to exist and to administer certain services. In order to fulfill those mandated services, essential resources such as a place to operate, equipment and manpower are required. In my role as the administrator of the township I realized that as with any service business we are dealing with considerable fixed costs. My goal became to determine how to best leverage those costs to the benefit of the taxpayer. With my background in business management I instituted a best business practice review of the services offered by Shields Township and the manpower required to administer those services.*

*Through this study it became apparent that there was a need for more transparency in how we reported dollars spent, a need to update technology and records keeping, a need to improve outreach with the community, and a need to better understand certain unfunded mandates.*

*With these requirements in mind over the past 18 months I:*

- *Re-tooled our website to be user-friendly, provide complete disclosure and access to financial documents, offer links to our community partners and reduce publication costs by sending out fewer newsletters.*
- *Instituted business procedures to more accurately measure office expenditures*
- *Audited fixed costs & the expense of unfunded mandates*
- *Required a job description for my staff members*
- *Expanded office hours without increasing costs*
- *Expanded our presence into North Chicago*

*AND -- We are in the process of both reformatting the budget to be more easily read and adopt a new accounting program*

*I've worked to keep the Board informed as these improved business practices have been implemented.*

*Further I have promoted the Phoenix Rising Foundation, the 501C 3 arm of the township. The funds donated to the foundation are primarily designated to provide for charitable, educational purposes. When I became Supervisor there was very little use of this foundation and very few funds. Today we have at our disposal more than \$10,000 to use for charitable purposes.*

*Another business concern we studied involves General Assistance which is statutorily required under state law. Unlike most townships in the county, Shields Township does not levy for General Assistance because its levy was suspended by a well intentioned board many years ago. Perhaps they could not know the unintended consequences that have since occurred. The lack of a GA levy creates financial consequences to the Township which must be taken in to consideration in its business model. We are challenged by the balance between executing the unfunded mandate and protecting taxpayer money -- all the while being prudent in our management of reserve funds so as not to become insolvent.*

*At first blush, the cost-to-benefit ratio for GA concerned me. The Township is limited by General Assistance Guidelines and will only grant assistance to those individuals who meet the very narrow*

*guidelines set down by regulations. How could this possibly be worth the costs involved? What I have come to understand with the help of our highly respected Case Manager, DeVon Nelson, is that her job doesn't stop at a grant being issued or denied. It's simplistic and misleading to measure General Assistance only by the dollars granted. I've come to appreciate that the challenging part of the job comes from shepherding clients through the ever-changing social services network in an effort to satisfy the clients' needs. Through the on-going accountability process, with which all clients must comply, and with the many hours of research as well as just plain required reporting, the role of Case Manager is truly a full time job.*

*So who are these people in need? You would be surprised by the demographics of need; I know I was. My first week on the job, the very first two General Assistance clients I met with were classmates at LFHS. I was stunned. It made all too real to me the very fine line between privilege and desperation.*

*One client was just down on their luck. The other was plagued by medical problems. Both of them initially received Emergency Assistance, which is a nominal stipend, as well as other supportive assistance to tide them over until the arduous vetting process for General Assistance could be completed. In these two instances, each of them qualified for GA. But in the meantime their concerns were met because we were able to offer them other resources including the food pantry and act as a bridge to help them connect with other services in the social welfare system. Before connecting with the township, they both had fallen through the cracks.*

*You here among us who are on the front line of combating hardship know best the ever-increasing need in our community...not to mention the changing face of those who seek assistance. We're seeing people in trouble and they are our neighbors...doctors, executives, real estate brokers, soccer moms, factory workers, waitresses and the homeless. In fact Dr. Harry Griffith, superintendent of Lake Forest schools, recently cited the fact that there are 100 students at Lake Forest High School living in poverty. They are our neighbors and our children.*

*Yes, a funny thing has happened to me on my journey as your township supervisor. I have traveled past the arena of campaign rhetoric to arrive at an understanding of the simple yet profound role of township government. I have realized how essential it is to make residents aware of township and the services it offers, whether that service is the convenience of a local passport agency or a issuing a grant so that someone in need can heat their home. The hours to implement these programs are small yet the benefits are great. And, I am convinced that we offer valued services in a competent and efficient manner.*

*I think one of the worst positions an elected official can take is an intractable one. I know that better now than before. I am afraid that different philosophies on the extent of township services are tugging at the very safety net we are intended to be. After all, every dollar collected as a service fee for passports, by an in-place staff, funds our food pantry. From a business standpoint, that's a win-win proposition all around. From a social point of view this win-win proposition has fed more than 20,000 people since it inception and engaged our communities in shared caring, responsibility and good works.*

*Are all our services worth keeping? I argue, yes, without a doubt. I think we're asking the wrong questions. I submit we ask "How can we do better without burdening the taxpayer?" But I am only one vote...the trustees are four.*

*Thank you for your time. It is now time for PUBLIC COMMENT.*

#### **IV. Public Comments – Agenda Items**

Jimmy Baldwin from North Chicago, the owner of J.B. Taxi Cab program, said he takes nine North Chicago seniors for dialysis treatment outside of North Chicago. He takes them to their appointments even when they do not have vouchers. He also said that he cuts their fares in half when they need to go to the grocery store in Waukegan. He says this is the only Shields Township program he sees that benefits the residents of North Chicago and that he brings people to the Shields Township food pantry.

Cheri Richardson from Lake Bluff, the Executive Director of Mother's Trust, said that Shields Township is a major partner of Mother's Trust. She noted that no organization can address the needs of those they serve by itself. They often receive calls from the Township and attempt to provide help in a variety of ways. She said she wants very much for the partnership with Shields Township to continue.

Kelly Wicketts, an employee of the assessor's office, said she had been there for 21 years and commented that the supervisor's office personnel have worked hard to build up the services that the Township offers, and that Supervisor Strenger Wayne is leading these efforts.

Mary Gram from Knollwood said that her daughter and son-in-law are both church pastors who work with food pantries, noted that just 30 percent of Lake County residents are church members, and suggested that many people who use or need the help of a food pantry may prefer not to go to those that are church-based.

Christine Chakoian of Lake Forest, the head pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest, expressed her gratitude for all involved in public service. She said she wanted to make a case for the role of the Township as an important “thread in the social safety net” and that, from her perspective, she has never seen conditions as difficult as they are currently. She said her own church is writing checks for emergency medical care and mortgage assistance.

Lillie Dentsen from North Chicago said she maintains her health by walking and often goes to an indoor walking facility on Grand Avenue in Waukegan. She does not want to have to pay to maintain her health.

Russ Armstrong from Knollwood, a Shields Township food pantry volunteer, said his son was part of a Cub Scout drive for the food pantry and that it would be very short-sighted to think of moving the food pantry.

Dan Rogers from Knollwood voiced his great anger at the discussion that had taken place and asked the trustees why they had chosen to run for the offices that they hold in the first place. He was then advised by Township attorney Richard Cowen that this was just a time for comments and not questions from members of the public. He explained how, as a previous Township trustee, he had been convinced to provide Township financial assistance to social service agencies after originally opposing this step. He noted that Shields Township takes up the smallest share of the property tax bill.

Gloria Cabri from Knollwood said she was glad to help her neighbors and to see the Township doing so.

Laura Hamel from Knollwood observed that the staff members of the Township are multi-tasking. She suggested that it would be costly and unproductive to figure out how much time each staff member is spending on various activities.

#### **V. Executive Session**

A motion by Trustee Carney, seconded by Trustee Bull, to go into Executive Session to discuss specific personnel was approved 4-1 on a roll call vote with Supervisor Strenger Wayne voting no.

#### **VI. Adjournment**

A motion to adjourn by Trustee Bull, seconded by Trustee Baehr. was approved on a voice vote at 6:43 p.m.

Attest

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David N. Barkhausen, Town Clerk