

**JOINT MEETING
RICHLAND TOWNSHIP BOARD AND
RICHLAND VILLAGE COUNCIL
THURSDAY, APRIL 14, 2016
RICHLAND TOWNSHIP HALL**

The joint meeting convened at 7:00 P.M.

Those Township Board members present:

Supervisor Lysanne Harma
Trustee Jeannie Byrne
Trustee AJ Harma
Trustee Paul Foust

Clerk Desiree LaDuke
Trustee Dave Wendzel

Village Council members present:

President Dave Greve
PPT Gail Koporetz
Trustee Virginia Gross

Trustee Bob Prentice
Clerk Jacqueline Holewa

Treasurer Terry Edds
Trustee John Smith

Also present were Township Attorneys Roxanne Seeber and Seth Koches, and a full room of community members.

The meeting started with a statement from Roxanne Seeber:

Village residents (15% of registered electors of the village) filed a petition to “disincorporate” the village of Richland with the Richland Township Clerk. This is what the statute requires---15% of registered electors of the village, file with the Township Clerk. The Township Clerk’s responsibility was to determine the number of valid signatures and, if the 15% threshold was met, forward the matter to the County Clerk. The County Clerk, Tim Snow, places the question on the ballot. The law provides that if the village is disincorporated, the former territory of the village becomes part of the township. If passed, we are entering uncharted territory because disincorporation by vote has not yet occurred in the state of Michigan.

Upon receiving that petition, the Township Clerk has the legal obligation to confirm the signatures and prepare the statutory ballot language that will be placed on the May 3, 2016 ballot.¹ If the electors vote to disincorporate the Village of Richland, the Village dissolves and it will be absorbed into Richland Township.

This proposition will be voted on by the electors of Richland Township and the Village of Richland. 2/3 vote of the electors voting on this question must vote “yes” in order for this proposition to pass.² Otherwise, the proposition fails.

Byrne/A Harma moved to approve the agenda. **MOTION CARRIED**

A Harma/Byrne moved to approve the minutes from the March 10, 2016 joint meeting. **MOTION CARRIED**

¹ MCL 74.18a(4)

² MCL 74.18a(9)

CITIZEN COMMENT

During the initial citizen comment 9 people spoke on the following topics:

Ryan Dickerson asked what would the Village present to make things better so people would know how to vote one way or the other?

Sherri Snyder spoke in support of the police and Village. She urged residents to investigate the claims of the Reclaim Richland group stating that they don't have children in the schools or own businesses in the community. She said if the village were dissolved many jobs would be lost. The Township budget would need to be increased to absorb the many FOIA requests that the Township would now receive, increased legal fees and that the Township office should prepare for constant interruptions making it difficult to perform their job duties effectively.

Doug Jonas said that Reclaim Richland is an irresponsible group with no plan or precedent other than dissolving the village and urged residents to look into the claims made by the group. He said the 6:00 AM snow plowing in the village limits would go away as would the quick response time from a local police force. He thanked the Village Council for their hard work.

Robert Perks said that a complaint had been lodged with the State of Michigan's Bureau of Elections to investigate whether the Village Council was in violation of the Campaign Finance Act for using public funds to influence the outcome of the election. He would like to see an end to duplication of services.

Jamie Ricca works for the Village Police Dept. as their office manager. She stated that the Village Police have 3 full time officers, 2 part time officers and 3 reserve officers. She said there was no holding cell in the new police offices. For 2016 the department had made 25 drug arrests and stopped 25 drunk drivers. Since 2015 they have issued 100 warrants. She stated the people use M-89 and M-43 to bypass I-94 and 131 to transport drugs through our community. She commended the officers on the relationships that they are building with the school children of our community and volunteering their time towards different projects at the school. She said an average County response time is at least 15 minutes when the Village police could respond much more quickly.

Rob Brinkerhoff stated that he cannot understand why any Township resident would vote yes without a specific plan. There is no thorough plan presented. This vote has happened before and it was voted down. It's a bad idea for both sides.

Bruce Jackson would like to hear arguments for why we would vote for it.

Howard Briggs knew about the separate taxes when he moved to the Village over 20 years ago and is ok with paying them.

Tim VanderMeulen stated the Village Council is not needed. It is outdated and a vote yes would eliminate duplication of services. Tax collection, police and fire, planning and zoning and parks would be overseen by the Township and that the Township government has more effective leadership. This would simplify government. He said currently Village residents pay 30% more for a part time council and Township residents pay 30% less for a full time Board. Any services lost could be re-allocated by private sources.

NEW BUSINESS

President Pro Tem Gail Koporetz said that the Reclaim Richland group stated on their website that the Township said there would be a new Village specific committee and that they would make housecalls to all local businesses. Is this true? The answer was no.

She also asked if the Township had saved \$1,000,000 in the past year. The answer was no.

Trustee Dave Wendzel asked if the vote were to pass would the Township have to wait until October to decide if there would be any special assessment districts and also make decisions on retaining services. The answer was yes.

In terms of the roads the Village roads would become County roads as the County is in charge of all roads within the Township now.

Attorney Seeber said please don't assume that services will end. The Township can decide if they wish to retain services.

When the disincorporation council was not chosen this issue automatically went to a vote.

Trustee Jeannie Byrne asked if a list of Village assets had been provided. Treasurer Edds said that a list of assets had been emailed to Attorney Koches. Attorney Koches said he would pass that information on to the Township Board.

Council Member John Smith asked if the Village and Township had agreed to send out a flyer to inform of services that the Village provided. Supervisor Harma said that the Township was not sending out a flyer.

President Dave Greve said that no decisions could be made as to the possibility of "what-if" so as not to influence the outcome of the vote.

Trustee Harma asked for clarification that the Township can't do anything until the County Commission accepts the disincorporation by resolution in October.

Attorney Seeber indicated that the Township is still waiting on an Attorney General opinion in this matter. If the vote is in favor, between May and October, the Township Board would have a big job in front of them. We can gather information until that point.

The question was asked if the Township had received many inquiries into this matter. The answer was yes and so has the Village.

Trustee Harma asked that the information on the Village Law Act be added to the website.

CITIZEN COMMENT

27 residents spoke during this portion of citizen comment. The following points were made by these 27 people.

- Residents were urged to think a long time before giving up Village rights.

- Village already has many of the services that they could ask the Township for if the vote were to pass. That doesn't make sense.
- Crime affects the whole Township, maybe the police could expand to cover the whole area.
- Why are police traveling to other areas on grants, they should be here policing in our own community.
- The township is affected by what happens to the Village. Would hate to see anything happen to the Village. There are few answers to be had.
- If the vote were to pass, a special assessment district for leaf pick up, etc. is just a trade-off for services that Village residents are already paying for. If you don't understand what would happen with a yes vote – why would you vote for it?
- Services could be retained and there would be no duplication in government. The place where you live is made up of the people not the government.
- We are currently safely protected and have a great response from police. What would happen to our parades, wassailing, police coverage, ordinances, the Community Hall, the trash removal, zoning, and many other items? Who pays for it?
- Get the facts and make the best decision possible, not many answers to be had at this time.
- A disincorporation would be history-making. Illegal action has been taken by the Village Council and it has been going on a long time. Did not like the actions being taken in the Village so got involved.
- Would hate to see the Village go away, there are not enough facts, hopes everyone votes no.
- Village is always fully covered by police, any grants are maintained by off-duty officers.
- A close community is what attracted this resident. Supports the local police and government. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. We can't vote yes if we don't know all the facts.
- Firefighter works hand in hand with Village and County law enforcement. He loves seeing the officers in the schools and their good rapport with the community. Response times from the County are very long because the coverage just isn't there.
- Can see both sides of the fence. Wants the cops to stay and his children protected but needs the Village government to be there and get their job done. Also to do their job 100%.
- This is not about police or leaves but about the Village Council and their illegal actions. They will be investigated for violating the Campaign Finance Act. 30% of the time the Village police are out of their jurisdiction chasing suspects and fulfilling warrants.
- Urged people to get involved and be a part of the council. The council is doing the best they can. Spoke in favor of keeping the Village.
- Wanted to contribute to the Village Council but other residents made attending the Council meetings, miserable. Thanked the Council for the wonderful job they are doing.
- If it is about being unhappy with the Council – get involved and elect proper leaders for the Council.
- Loves the community. Make decisions based on fact and since there aren't many facts to be had suggests we vote no.
- The conflict comes from a small group of residents making it difficult for the Council to do their job. There is constant conflict and many complaints lodged against the Council from this small group.
- Made complaints about the acoustics at the Community Hall because she has a right to come to a meeting and be able to hear.
- The Council does not listen to its residents. How do you not know that you can't fire an elected official? This mistake put the Village in the hole by \$70,000. The police officers have their insurance paid in full. Thinks that the Village should incorporate with the Township.
- There are two sides to every story. The kids enjoy the police in the schools and the police help keep the community safe.

- Shocked at what she has seen at the Village Council meetings from the Village Clerk. The Village Clerk should have been reprimanded and fired. A small group is trying to wreck the community. Vote no and tell your neighbors.
- If this gets defeated, that group will bring it back again and again.
- Be a part of the solution to try to make things better, call out bad behavior when it's unacceptable, work to preserve what we have.
- The Township outnumbers the Village residents in a combined vote. The Township could override what the Village wants.
- Urged citizens to run for the elected positions on the Village Council if they are unhappy with their current representation.

TRUSTEE UPDATES

There were no Trustee updates given or announcements made.

Meeting adjourned at 8:49 PM.