

MINUTES
**AD-HOC COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT
TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESSIBILITY**
March 3rd, 2009

Committee Members Present:

Jeff Redick, Don Puchalski, John Curran, Grant Eckhoff, Jim Zay, Tony Michelassi

Other County Board Members Present:

Brien Sheahan, Paul Fichtner

Staff Present:

Jason Gerwig – County Board Office, Caroline Roth – County Board Office, Fred Backfield – Finance, Tyrone Tipitino – Finance, Joan Morange – Procurement, Lynn Wood – Finance, Debbie Rudolf – Finance, Cara Perrone – HR, Lori Kramer – HR, Craig Dovel – SOA, Bob Grogan – County Auditor, Phil Smith – Community Services, Debbie Hanson – I.T., Rhonda Warren – I.T., Frank Orlow – I.T., Kathy Selcke – County Board Office

Others Present:

Jean Kaczmarek – Illinois Ballot Integrity Project – DuPage Chapter, Daniel Richardson – Citizen Advocacy Center, Terry Pastika – Citizen Advocacy Center, Jim Kimberly – Chicago Tribune, Jake Griffin – Daily Herald

Chairman Redick called the meeting to order at 9:06 AM.

Chairman Redick requested a motion to approve the February 24, 2009 minutes, motioned by Member Eckhoff, seconded by Member Zay. All ayes, motion passed.

Jean Kaczmarek gave public comment regarding the Ethics Commission. Ms. Kaczmarek said she realizes that every government entity within the state must have an ethics ordinance and commission, and she feels not all of them comply with the law. Ms. Kaczmarek said if they are forced to comply, she is not convinced that an ethically challenged entity would offer a meaningful ordinance or appoint truly independent commissioners. Ms. Kaczmarek said including appointees under the ethics ordinance is one more way to hold accountable government entities that rely on funding approved by the County Board. Ms. Kaczmarek said she agrees with Member Zay's comment from a previous meeting that the County Board receives blame for problems that occur within other government entities not under the Board's jurisdiction. Ms. Kaczmarek said this

happens because citizens fail to understand how they can be in charge of funding a government entity without having enforcement power of how that money is being spent. Ms. Kaczmarek said citizens should demand that any tax dollars be spent in a manner that is honorable, transparent, ethical, accountable, and legal.

Ms. Kaczmarek went on to say that she feels the 30 day deadline following an ethics complaint is unreasonable. Ms. Kaczmarek said it could take longer than 30 days to fully understand there is a problem and that it also takes time to collect all required documentation, including any necessary FOIA requests. Ms. Kaczmarek asked that people please consider filing an ethics complaint anonymously, adding that it takes courage to file a complaint, especially when a job is at stake. Ms. Kaczmarek asked that the County Board consider simplifying the procedure for filing a complaint, such as providing a form to fill out rather than making the complainant feel like they must hire an attorney. Ms. Kaczmarek then asked the committee to review the role of the Investigator General of the Ethics Commission, saying he or she investigates the complaint and makes recommendations to the commission, and can greatly influence the commission with his or her opinion. Ms. Kaczmarek suggested that, since the Investigator General is essentially the decision-maker, perhaps the role should be given to a multi-partisan team rather than an individual. Ms. Kaczmarek said present procedure allows the person filing the complaint to only have direct contact with the Investigator General with no chance to rebut fighting, adding that the complainant should have the opportunity to speak before the Ethics Commission itself. Ms. Kaczmarek said she thinks the Investigator General should report all investigations conducted to the County Board as well as the public, including those which were unfounded. Ms. Kaczmarek said she filed a complaint with the Ethics Commission about two years ago and is willing to answer any questions the Transparency Committee might have.

With no further public comment, Chairman Redick said he is in the process with staff of preparing the committee's preliminary draft report, adding that the purpose of the current meeting was to allow committee members the opportunity to provide additional input and thoughts as they move into the preliminary report process. Member Puchalski asked if the preliminary report will have a rough draft that is given to committee members for review. Chairman Redick said he expects to have something to members by Friday of this week. Member Puchalski said the excess of information given to the committee seems to show that people want to have information available and noticed as well as the opportunity to participate in the process. Member Puchalski discussed the possibility of having special sessions or a certain time frame for public input on the budget. Member Puchalski said that is his main goal for the Transparency Committee. Member Puchalski said he thinks the process for the budget needs to be changed and it needs a simplified and short overview.

Member Zay presented a handout to the committee detailing his recommendations to include in the preliminary report. (Please see attached.)

Chairman Redick said there is some information available on the website that citizens have come in and asked for, suggesting that such information needs to be better communicated and organized for citizens.

Member Curran said he would like to see an affirmative statement in Personnel rules for whistleblower protection, which would encourage people to come forward with any seen wrongdoings. Member Curran read draft language that he wrote for such a statement. Chairman Redick said it is difficult on the website to find out how to make a complaint as well as to find a copy of the County's ethics ordinance. Chairman Redick said that issue will be made part of the committee report and that he will likely make a recommendation to add a portion to the website to make it easier to make a complaint.

Member Curran said he would also like to see in the report, depending on software and cost, a suggestion to give the ability to citizens to track an ordinance from its introduction into any one committee through its final conclusion. Member Curran stated that the Illinois General Assembly's website currently has this ability for citizens and that DuPage County could use it as a model.

Member Eckhoff said scheduling budget hearings for the committees and for the County Board as a whole would give the public more of an opportunity for input. Member Eckhoff said he thinks everything done at the County should be on the Web, but the problem seems to be how to do so in a way that is accessible and easily understandable to the public. Chairman Redick said there has been a lot of discussion in the past month related to that information and it is a recommendation that can be made to the parent committees, adding that Web issues are something Technology Committee will need to embrace. Member Eckhoff said it seems to him that the County Board as a whole should create a policy which would then give direction to committees. Chairman Redick said he thinks it would be in the best interested of the County Board to formalize the acceptance and adoption of a general policy in favor of transparency, as well as to try and retain the goals of the report adopted by the Transparency Committee.

Member Michelassi said he concurs with everything that the committee members have said. Member Michelassi said he thinks accessibility of County services needs to be addressed, adding that low-cost advertisement of such services should be provided to the public. Member Michelassi then said that the County contract bidding process should be examined in detailed by the Transparency Committee. Member Michelassi also suggested that there be a more stringent procurement ordinance, adding it would be a positive step for the County.

Member Eckhoff asked what authority the County Board has to put economic disclosure statements on documents of other countywide elected officials. Member Eckhoff also asked if such disclosures are available on the Web, or if the County Clerk needs to make it available. Chairman Redick said it is public document once filed. Member Eckhoff said that is something the committee should look at, since the public may be interested in it.

Member Michelassi said he agrees with Member Puchalski regarding the budget and the creation of a summary. Member Michelassi said, however, that the transparency of the budget documents should not be limited by creating a summary. Chairman Redick said that issue should go through the Finance Committee as it is presented.

With no old or new business, Chairman Redick requested a motioned to adjourn at 9:30 AM, motioned by Member Zay, seconded by Member Eckhoff. All Ayes, motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sarah Daly

Date: March 2, 2009
To: Transparency Committee Members
From: Jim Zay
Re: Recommendations

During the past several weeks we have had input from numerous elected officials, groups and individuals regarding suggestions for the County. My main concern has been the Budget and how this process can be more organized and open for the public to have access and understand the budget.

First a formal schedule for input into the Budget needs to be formulated. All Committee Chairman need to set a date in September to have a special budget meeting, so the public can have input. Those need to be completed in September. In October Finance Committee should have Budget hearings again to have further input. Member Curran had suggested public meetings in the districts for more input, which is a great idea and should be worked out with the district members on the locations and times.

By November all meetings should be concluded and the Budget should go to the Board for final approval.

My second suggestion is for better coverage of the County Board meetings. A meeting should be made with Comcast for better technical support and to have the meetings aired in more communities. The idea of live streaming of meetings can be worked out, as long as it is cost effective.