

(Approved)IRVING TOWNSHIP BOARD SPECIAL MEETING 3425 WING RD HASTINGS, MI
49058 AUGUST 17,2020 6:30 PM

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance. In attendance were board members Sharon Olson, Lynnette Wingeier, Mike Buehler, Jamie Knight and Dean Bass. Also, in attendance were 16 members of the public.

Motion to approve the agenda by Jamie Knight. Second by Buehler. 4 members voted aye. Olson abstained.

Public comment:

Tim Ross- He didn't know where it was orchestrated from or if it was orchestrated but felt he received some harassment on the day of the election for legally campaigning at the poll. The county clerk was here and the County Commissioner. The Sheriff Dept had been here and confirmed he was in his rights. The Election Commission Web Page states that Municipalities MUST provide for candidates to campaign as long as they stay outside the 100 foot boundary. He was shocked that no other candidates were there at the poll at 6:45 am when he was setting up. He been involved in lots of campaigns, and participated in campaigns at the polls on election day and there were always people campaigning at the poll. There were comments about signs in the Right of Way. The county has an ordinance that speaks to signs that specifically exempts political signs. There is no ordinance in the county, state, or township against political signs. Everything he did was perfectly legal. He thinks it kind of strange that the board is considering changes to both the location of the November Poll and supervisor of the election when we have an elected supervisor of the elections. He does not recommend any changes be made except that people be made aware of the campaign rules that allow for campaigning outside the 100 foot boundary of the entrance to the poll and that anyone who wants to do that is allowed to do so without any type of harassment or issues.

Knight-said she received many calls about the campaigning, called the County Clerk and the Michigan Township Association and confirmed Ross was within his rights to campaign.

Anita Mannell- Clerk from Hastings Charter Township. They have never had anyone come and do what they did to Tim Ross. She would find that an insult to both the candidate and the Clerk and Poll workers that were at the Poll that they didn't know what they were doing and didn't know their jobs. They have had people come into the poll wearing shirts with campaign information on them and they make them turn them inside-out or they have them leave the premises. "What they did to you I consider harassment too" Speaking to Tim Ross. "and sending anyone out here to check on what she is doing I consider harassment too" referring to the Irving Township Clerk, Sharon Olson.

Adam Heikkela – In his own Township had been elected to Supervisor and recalled because he started paying attention to the way things were being done and has started standing up for individuals and things that are going unjustly. He agreed with Anita Mannell about the campaigning at the poll and observing the boundaries. He has personally campaigned for himself and others outside the polls on Election Day. Going forward you can always talk about those kinds of things so people are not offended if they have not seen that before. As far as the Clerk being removed from being in charge of the election, that is part of her statutory duties. It is futile to try to change that. It is a huge part of the duties of the clerk to get ready for the election and that is a ton of work being done in your township no matter what size your township is. The only way you remove an official is like they did for him by a recall and it's a little late for that at this point so this meeting is for naught. He suggested going forward some ways you can improve some things.

Knight-we are not trying to recall Sharon.

Heikkela- Right! It sounded like there was an attempt to get someone else to be in charge of the election and that is removing them from their Statutory duty which they were elected by the people to do. The ONLY way to do that would be by recall and that is the process.

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Colette Hatinger- She didn't understand why you are trying to change where the poll is for November and who is in charge of the poll. "Why, exactly do you want to move the poll?"

Knight- Safety

Hatinger- "but you put Thousands of dollars into the parking here for this election"

Knight- we did

Hatinger- " so you're going to waste all our taxpayers' dollars and move the poll anyway"

Knight- In 2016 we had people parking up Wood school Rd and crossing the road with 55mph traffic and this parking lot was full.

Rick Olson- But this parking lot didn't exist back then this has been done since then.

Knight- Yes, I'm sorry. But It's going to be dark when people come to the vote in the morning and in the evening. That is our concern and also with the pandemic and being able to social distance.

Hatinger- What part of the building are you using?

Knight- The Community Center.

Hatinger-"It's not Much bigger "

Lani Forbes- I asked about an assistant to help with the election because it was a very close race between the trustees and the Supervisor and because of some spoiled ballots, could not be recounted. The other reason she asked for the poll to be moved was due to what she considered an unsafe exit down the other stairs and people needing the ramp needing to come in and go out the same door. She thought maybe there would be better parking.

Olson- In 2016 we did not have 'No Reason' absentee voting. Anybody can vote absentee ballot so nobody has to come to the poll if they feel it is not safe for physical distancing or for parking and waiting at the poll. 100% of the voters can vote absentee if they wish to. We do make exceptions for people with disabilities to exit the way they came in so they can use the ramp. We were not overcrowded here. We did not have problems with the parking. The overflow parking was not used much at all only 3 or 4 cars at a time. We did invest that \$15,000 plus for that parking lot for this election. So I'm a little mystified why all of the sudden you want to move the election to Freeport.

Forbes- It was just a thought about making it safer and a little more accessible. People are concerned about voting absentee and planning on voting in person.

Olson- Freeport is the farthest distance North East in the Township. Also, the clerk has to be in their office on election day to register new voters who want to register and vote the same day. Often those are 18 year old, first time voters and they would have to come to the Hall first and then drive over to Freeport 6 miles away to wait to vote. There is the concern of discouraging those voters by making it more difficult.

Knight asked for the board discussion on the agenda.

Dean Bass- Thinks Freeport is safer due to traffic and accessibility to people with disabilities

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Mike Buehler- Agrees with Dean Bass that Freeport offers a large room with accessibility for disabilities and parking.

Hatinger asked what exit they were planning on using because there is one door to which.

Buehler- There are three exits.

Hatinger- So it's going to be cold and possibly snowing and you expect people with disabilities to go through the side lot versus just the exit.

Buehler- They could go out the door they came in.

Hatinger- Which is what they would be doing here.

Buehler- Right.

Hatinger- So it makes no difference.

Buehler- In the last big election here, he waited in line 2 and a half hours and with social distancing they would be to Buehler Rd at that point.

Hatinger- You are still going to be the same distance weather you are there or here. If you are using the exit as an excuse, you have the same issue there as you do here.

Buehler- One of the reason we brought this meeting so soon is so we can work this out. I guess Freeport is too much of an inconvenience, anyone can vote absentee and there is still time to get that done before the general election that will save them from having to go there.

David Wiechman- "Isn't that doable coming here? Anybody that didn't want to come here could just absentee vote?"

Rick Olson-"That's the whole point. It's been stated several times, Mike."

Wiechman- Once again, our taxpayer's dollars were spent to improve something for this event. Now you are saying 'your dollars don't matter, we want to move it' when really you are no safer there than you are here.

Knight- we have used that parking for other elections so it not a waste of taxpayers' dollars. It has been used.

Wiechman- so if you are going to use it again for other elections, why do you need to move it for this election.

Hatinger- they made the lot for this election.

Heikkela- I just don't think it's right for someone sitting on the board, not social distancing, not wearing masks, to use the excuse that the Covid pandemic is the reason you think you should make the change and it's a little awkward to me, that you're afraid for people but you are not afraid at all here.

Buehler- That was one of the concerns raised.

Ross- Is there any cost involved in moving to Freeport the equipment and workers.

~~Clerk~~ Olson-Everyone would need to be sent a notice of the temporary poll change. We have 2746 voters as of today. Between printing and postage about \$1.00 each.

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Hatinger- And you are still going to get people who don't get that post card and are going to show up here.

~~Clerk~~-Olson- Well, they don't read them.

Hatinger- Right! I'm still stuck on you built the parking lot for the election but you want to move it.

Lorraine Bush- so you can just go ahead and change where we vote? Is that what I'm hearing?

~~Clerk~~-Olson- the board does have the authority to tell me where the poll will be.

Rick Olson- The board needs to listen to the citizens.

Lorraine Bush- is disabled. The last time she voted, she drove by on Woodschool Rd. several times, it made it real easy. Because it's important for her to vote, she is going to vote. The last thing she wants is to have to remember where to vote. Does not want to have to drive to Freeport to see how long the wait is going to be. People with disabilities don't like change when they have already learned how to adapt to the challenges of one place. She is shocked by all of this and also for Tim and his wife and his family. That is not how we do business here. I'm sitting here in shock and I hope the Board will really think about this before they make these decisions and think about our community as well. Get everybody on board so that anybody who wants to run for office can participate. Nobody wants to do it wrong.

Kristen Cove- Everybody is out of order. This is the time for the board discussion and the public keeps interjecting. There used to be 2 polling locations with one in Freeport. In the last general election here people were waiting outside until 9:30 at night, it was cold and it started to drizzle yet people stood firm and voted. The thing about Freeport is there is more space. The Library is right there and the absentee voting board could be held there rather than the basement here. Certainly it is a board decision and I will support whatever the board decides but at the last meeting I did say have you ever considered moving this to the Community Center in Freeport.

Hatinger- I think the issue is our Clerk has to be here. So how are you letting her oversee the election if you move it to there?

Knight- She would still be overseeing the election. Her workers can call her with any questions and she can look up records on her computer.

Hatinger- one of the reasons the Freeport poll was closed and this one was kept open is because it did not have enough people and so it was moved to where it should be. Correct?

Knight- Correct, but as the community is growing

Hatinger-but we are still under the amount.

Knight- right now we are under the amount but not by much.

Lorrain Bush- can you separate it?

Knight- I don't think so at this point. Something that was talked about at the last meeting was making modifications to this building such as moving the offices and making the building more handicap accessible so that future elections can be held here. This would just be temporary for this election.

Hatinger- I think, personally, it's unnecessary but...

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~~Clerk~~-Olson- Speaking to the number of voters, as of today we have 2746 and more than 650 of those are absent voting and do not count toward the limit of 2999.

Hatinger- So we are a ways away from that?

~~Clerk~~-Olson- yes.

Mannell- they are looking at changing that limit to 5000.

~~Clerk~~Olson- yes, because of the no reason Absent voting proposal that was passed in 2018. The State Bureau of Elections keeps the clerks updated on changes that are coming and that went into the decision to consolidate the precincts with the requirement to replace the old equipment and the possibility of the State helping with only part of that cost. Also, there is proposed legislation right now to allow counties to purchase high speed tabulators through which you can process up to 12 precincts from different townships and they can count many more ballots at a time than the small tabulators we have here. There are just a lot of changes coming that clerks are made aware of and we are trying to plan for the future.

I have been talking to the board about making physical changes to this building for the last 2 years so I don't need to do things like put that piece of shelving up there so that I'm not immediately visible to voters as they enter the poll. I did not greet voters or approach voters coming into the poll. I didn't interject myself into the process as the election inspectors worked the poll. I only answered questions and assisted voters who asked for assistance. It is awkward that my desk is in the middle of the poll and I have asked for that to be addressed for some time.

Hatinger- Which if that had been addressed at the time the parking lot was addressed then we would be one step ahead.

Buehler- with the Absent voters not counting, what is the maximum number of voters you could have at the poll

~~Clerk~~ Olson-about 2000. In May, the state required 100% absent voting. So that is also a possibility.

Knight- So we could have 2000 show up currently with 100% of them voting. Do you know what the turnout has been?

~~Clerk~~Olson- In 2020 for the State Primary we had 35.82% voting; 71.03% for the 2016 General Election; 66.54% for the 2012 General Election.

Knight- In order to change a polling location, we have to do a resolution. So, I have typed one up. I will pass out a copy, read it publically.

Resolution was read.

Supervisor Knight asked if there was a member of the board willing to offer the resolution. No one offered the resolution.

Wingeier-Can we talk about this building? We need to make changes before the election. We have 2 month to do that. Can we move Sharon's and Lynnette's desk downstairs? We didn't think about people having to go out those steps and she does not think they are safe. Can we get a contractor and get a ramp made for that exit. My husband and I went over to the community center and measured the room and this room is almost as big as that room if we can get the

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desks out of that corner. Our election workers can park elsewhere and be transported in to save some parking spaces. So we need to be smarter about this location.

~~Clerk~~Olson- I appreciate that kind of support. I'm trying to take in what you are saying and picture how that will work. With the desks out of the way, that makes room for several more voting booths. The tabulator can handle a maximum of 200 an hour. One tabulator can handle the expected number of in-person votes. My workers upstairs did really well and I did not have any complaints of being tired. I have moved the more elderly Inspectors to the Absent Voter Counting Board where there is less pressure to hurry up and get to the next person. As I am learning myself as I age, I don't work faster under pressure, I work slower. And I understand the pressure of having people waiting in line wanting to hurry up.

Wingeier-Can I get 2 men and a truck to help get the desks moved downstairs? Can you give me a budget of say \$200?

Wingeier made the motion to have a \$200 budget to get the desks moved and she will take charge of it and get it done in time for the election. Roll Call vote: Wingeier, Bass, Knight, Buehler, Olson was all "Yes". Motion Passed.

~~Clerk~~Olson- Is there someplace to rent a ramp?

Lani Forbes offered to forward information on ramp rental from a company she has worked with to the supervisor.

Hatinger- but if you put one on there permanently it's done.

Heikkela- I would suggest that if you are going to do something permanent that you use a bid process. I understand that in the past that hasn't always been done. Any upgrades or changes that are being done, everyone should know about that and have the opportunity to put in for that. There are just certain bits of information that are required when you do a formal bid process details about what would be expected and the work desired.

~~Clerk~~Olson- Can we ask the road commission for hazard signal lights for Election Day?

Hatinger- can the fire department help with safety guards for parking?

Wingeier- said she will look into that.

Knight- our next meeting is Sept 9th at 6:30 pm. She moved for adjournment, seconded by Buehler. Meeting adjourned at 7:25pm.

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