

**Legislative Committee**

**December 6, 2023**

**11:00 a.m.**

Attendees

Committee: Allen Hinkley, Art Merrill, Lisa Driscoll, Patti Valente, Tina Molé

Absent: Mark Tuthill, Shawn Smith

Staff: Maria Kelso, Haley Gransbury, Judith Garrison, Joe Ermeti, Penny Bishop, Amy Merklen, Carrara Knoetgen

Mr. Hinkley called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. Upon a motion by Mr. Merrill, seconded by Mrs. Driscoll, the draft minutes of the November 1 committee meetings were approved.

Deputy County Clerk Haley Gransbury summarized the monthly revenue report. In reply to Ms. Molé regarding the Margaretville DMV office, Mrs. Gransbury said everything is working out great. She indicated the Delhi DMV office is down one employee but they have someone who will be starting soon.

Elections Commissioner Maria Kelso commented that the November 28 Department Head meeting was very informative. She reported on the new Early Vote by Mail state law, which is different from absentee voting, however, the county has to pay for all of the postage. Ms. Kelso announced they received extensions for two grants: tier grant for a total of \$93,470.89 and postage grant totaling \$35,990. She noted the tier grant application was intended to cover the cost of 5 voting machines but it will cover the cost of 4½ machines. In all, 30 new machines are needed. Ms. Kelso informed the committee that they were required to perform 3 recounts from the general elections in Davenport, Meredith, and Sidney. They must do a recount any time results are within 20 votes. She noted all the recounts were spot on. She announced they would be attending the state BOE Conference in Albany January 16-19 with hopes to get a lot more information on new election law. Ms. Kelso stated a resolution would be needed to reappoint her as Commissioner effective January 1, 2024, per the Republican Party Certification. A resolution to accept the tier grant funds would be presented in 2024. Ms. Garrison indicated the Early Vote by Mail state law is being contested. Ms. Kelso explained that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the absentee ballot law was changed to 'no excuse' but was reverted back to needing a valid excuse. And now, rather than amend the absentee ballot law, the state made this new Early Vote by Mail law which would cover all elections in the span of one year.

Public Defender Joe Ermeti reported that his office is down by one attorney, and that is putting a lot of stress on the staff in his office. In reply to Mr. Merrill regarding prospects, Mr. Ermeti said he had contacted someone who may be interested in working part time. Coverage is an issue right now. There are not enough attorneys throughout the counties to cover everything. He noted on-calls have dramatically increased. In reply to Ms. Molé regarding the on-call pay of \$114, Mr. Ermeti said the on-call pay is not enough but they are still providing the service. He stated the CAP being held at the jail is going very well. The Sheriff's Office has gone out of their way and made it very accommodating for everyone. He noted the judges are doing fantastic. Concurring with Ms. Molé, he said it makes no logical sense to pay 18B attorneys \$158 per hour and on-call CAP attorneys \$114 per hour. He surmised that unless an attorney wishes to be part of the state retirement system or needs medical insurance, there is no incentive for them to work in a municipal office.

Clerk of the Board Penny Bishop gave out a tentative schedule for the 2024 Board of Supervisors meetings. Meeting are generally held the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month with the exception of the Organizational meeting and the week of Thanksgiving. The schedule was approved to be presented to the Board at the December 13 Board of Supervisors meeting.

Upon a motion by Mr. Merrill, seconded by Mrs. Driscoll, and unanimously carried, the Committee entered into an executive session to discuss personnel matters of a particular employee in addition to pending litigation.

Committee reconvened in regular session.

Mr. Merrill made a motion to approve the Public Defender's Office request to upgrade an individual employee's title and to create a part-time assistant public defender position. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Driscoll and unanimously approved.

Mrs. Valente made a motion to designate the Mountain Eagle as the official newspaper of the Democratic Party. The motion was seconded by Mr. Merrill and unanimously approved.

Mr. Merrill made a motion to designate the Hancock Herald as the official newspaper of the Republican Party. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Driscoll and unanimously approved.

Ms. Merklen discussed changes in the weighted vote counts due to the latest Census count. She had distributed the Weighted Vote Recalculation Report to the supervisors earlier in the year and would be recommending the new votes for Board approval in January. Mrs. Bishop noted a local law is required to change the votes. The local law and a resolution to set the public hearing will be presented at the January 24 Board meeting.

Upon a motion, the meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m.