

## Observer Report

**City Council/Township Trustees**

**November 29, 2011**

**Observer:** Betty Hayford

**Aldermen present:** all

**Staff present:** Marty Lyons, Suzette Robinson, James Maiworm (Streets and San), Catherine Hurley, Grant Farrar

**Media present:** Evanston Now, Roundtable, Northwestern Daily

**Meeting began:** 7:05 pm

**Meeting ended:** 10:15

**Announcements:** The City Manager called on Suzette Robinson who introduced the new Director of Streets and Sanitation, James Maiworm.

**Citizen comment:** (Both Council and Township) 12 comments: 1 criticism of Council management of capital projects; 5 supporters of electricity aggregation and one skeptic; 1 questioning alleged saving from dissolving township, 2 citizens supporting township, Bonnie Wilson and 2 colleagues (from out of town township association) opposed to dissolving township.

**Discussion/action:** Council voted to recess and resume meeting as **Township** Trustees. The Trustees began by considering a Resolution calling for a referendum to determine whether Evanston Township shall be dissolved. After some discussion about whether the City Manager could participate, the Trustees voted to include him, and he made a presentation about how the city would absorb the main township functions of general assistance and assessment appeals. The city attorney had prepared an extensive memo about the legal process for dissolution. Rainey asked about the full array of "rights, duties...obligations and responsibilities" of the township. She never got a very concrete answer. The primary discussion was about the process of dissolution and whether the Council/Trustees had the right to initiate a binding referendum. City Counsel explained that different sections of the state constitution outlined different procedures; one would allow such a referendum, but other sections talked about "10% of voters in every township in Cook County." The City Clerk asserted the latter view, and it was suggested that such a referendum might result in a lawsuit. Alderman Grover said she was skeptical about this view and the likelihood of a lawsuit. Alderman Wilson spoke at length about the legal tangle and the expense and effort that would result from a lawsuit in such a murky situation. The City Manager said a referendum would be the first step in a multi-stage process, and would allow the city to go to the state legislature with a clear demonstration of what the citizens wanted.

Extensive discussion continued about the risks of a law suit, the need to move forward, and the importance of determining what Evanston citizens wanted. Alderman Holmes said her constituents were pleased with the services of the township and others reported their constituents had asked for

action in dissolving the township. Some testiness was apparent in criticism of aldermen who were “too afraid” of the threat of a suit, and reciprocally, of those who were ready to move forward recklessly. Alderman Holmes said if there was criticism of township operations, Council should work harder to resolve the concerns and improve performance.

Wilson moved, Wynne seconded, to request the legislature to provide a clear direction on the process of dissolving a coterminous township, and amend the constitution if necessary. He argued a referendum would be futile if it only led to a lawsuit. Burrus and others replied that the legislature was unlikely to act and the city should move forward. The motion passed, 6-3, with Burrus, Braithwaite and Tendam voting no.

Grover moved for a binding referendum as outlined in the memo, and the motion was seconded. The motion failed, 4-5, with Rainey, Braithwaite, Wynne, Wilson and Holmes voting no. Grover then moved for an advisory referendum as outlined in the memo. Rainey seconded. The motion passed, 5 – 4, with Braithwaite, Wynne, Wilson and Holmes voting no.

The city manager agreed to return with a revised ordinance for an advisory referendum for the meeting of December 12; eventually it was agreed to return to the issue on December 5. (This was because of the need to initiate the referendum process 90 days before the March 19 election.)

At 9:30, the township trustees adjourned, and **city council** meeting resumed. The first item was an ordinance prepared by staff providing for a referendum authorizing the city to arrange for community choice electrical aggregation. Catherine Hurley, Sustainability coordinator, led a presentation explaining how electricity aggregation could save money for residential and small business units. She explained that this is a new option that many towns are pursuing and all have resulted in savings. There were several questions, and the motion was approved for introduction, 9-0. Grover moved to suspend the rules (passes), and moved for action, which passed, 9-0.

The city manager presented the question of designating 4 of the 13 city council FY2012 goals as priorities, in order to focus more time and attention of them. A survey had indicated that economic development was a priority for all aldermen. Four other goals had substantial support: efficient and effective services, safety, an effective capital project program, and youth services. Alderman Holmes moved that all five be designated “priority.” Alderman Burrus pointed out effective capital projects and efficient and effective services were closely aligned. The motion passed, 9-0.

And the meeting adjourned.