

TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 2008

**APPROVED MINUTES OF THE
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING HELD**

**STATE OF MINNESOTA)
DODGE COUNTY)**

**COUNTY ADMINISTRATION OFFICE
MANTORVILLE, MN**

2008-05 C.O.W.

The Dodge County Commissioners met in Committee of the Whole March 25, 2008, in the Commissioner's Room at the Dodge County Courthouse Annex, Mantorville, MN, at 9:00 a.m. CDT. Klaus Alberts opened the meeting at 9:00 a.m. CDT. Meeting Convened

The Chair acknowledged those present:

Those Present

Members present:	Klaus Alberts	District #1
	Lyle Tjosaas	District #2
	David Erickson	District #3
	Don Gray	District #4
	David Hanson	District #5
Members absent:	None	
Also present:	Becky Lubahn	Deputy Clerk
	Annette Hodge	Court Administrator

Court Administrator Annette Hodge provided the Board with an update on the courts budget deficit. Courts Budget Update

Ms. Hodge reported that she planned to update the Board on what has been done so far, review time/cost savings measures put in place March 1st, 2008 and discuss the possibility of layoffs/bumping.

The Court Administrator stated that the Dodge County Court Administration Office has not been impacted by the Third Judicial District budget deficit yet, it was too soon to tell how the deficit will affect their office.

Ms. Hodge informed the Board that Third Judicial District employees were given the option of volunteering for an early incentive separation. Several employees decided to take this option and those vacated positions will not be filled. The Court Administrator commented that she was surprised at the offices that have had employees decide to take the early incentive separation option, they are districts with smaller offices.

The Court Administrator reported that in addition to the early incentive separation, management has asked non-union employees to take ten days off without pay between June 30, 2008 and July 1, 2009. The union employees were also asked to do to take the same amount of time off without pay during this timeframe.

Ms. Hodge stated that there will still be layoffs and noted that there is a layoff plan in place. The plan was developed after many meetings. Statistics and information collected from studies were reviewed to come up with a layoff plan.

The Court Administrator noted that the unions will be meeting with the Chief Judge of the District this week and that she will not know if she will have staff laid off or bumped until that happens.

Commissioner Alberts wanted to know how long positions will go unfilled.

Ms. Hodge commented that it is unknown how long any vacated positions will go unfilled. The Court Administrator reported that from the information she has for 2009 there will not be any changes/improvement in the budget deficit. Ms. Hodge expects the cost saving/time saving efforts to continue for another year. The Court Administrator noted that fiscal year 2010-2011 is not looking good either.

Commissioner Erickson commented that the person with the least seniority will likely be one of the first people to get bumped if needed.

Commissioner Gray wanted to know if the Court Administrator felt this was going to work when the work load is still there for her department.

Ms. Hodge informed the Board that in bad economic times, the work load tends to increase. Her office is likely to see more money related crimes and cases where people can't afford to pay their bills. Ms. Hodge noted that because of the budget deficit the Third Judicial District offices will all be working with less staff and possibly increased case filings.

Commissioner Erickson commented on the impact the decreased staffing levels will have on the court calendar and indicated that it will now take longer for the court cases to go to trial.

The Court Administrator stated that what this means to most counties is that there will be increased costs because things are taking longer to get done.

Ms. Hodge informed the Board that it is likely that state funded Drug Court offices will be eliminated to cut costs. Dodge County fortunately funds their own Drug Court, therefore this office will not be affected by any state cuts.

Commissioner Erickson wanted to know what comments the Court Administration Office has heard regarding the window closure on Friday mornings.

The Court Administrator reported that the public is under the assumption that because their window is closed Friday mornings that the employees do not work Friday morning. Ms. Hodge assured the Board that her office is still working during this time and that court is still going on while their window is closed. It is the state's opinion that the Court Administration offices need to close at some point in the week to catch up and possibly help other offices who have been affected by staff reduction.

Ms. Hodge informed the Board that on Friday morning phone calls to the main phone number go directly into voice mail. Employees can however still be reached by their individual phone extensions but are not available to take calls from the public.

The Court Administrator reported that so far the change is going smooth.

Commissioner Erickson wanted to know if closing the window one morning a week has been beneficial to the staff.

Ms. Hodge indicated that the window closure and time away from answering phones has been beneficial to the staff, they are able to get work done without constant interruptions. The Court Administrator reiterated that her office still has not felt the impact of the budget deficit yet. Ms. Hodge also reported that staff moral is good at this time.

Commissioner Erickson questioned how productive employees will be when they are asked to help out other Court Administration Offices. Each office will likely have their own procedures for processing paperwork and have different equipment.

The Court Administrator indicated that it will be an adjustment for everyone.

Commissioner Alberts wanted to know what the cost savings was.

Ms. Hodge informed Mr. Alberts that it was more of a time saving effort than a cost saving effort. Closing the window allows the staff time to get their work done or help other counties with their work load.

Commissioner discussed with Ms. Hodge the possibility of her overseeing the work of another Court Administration office as well as her own.

Commissioner Erickson wanted to know if there was a vacated Court Administrator position close to Dodge County if Ms. Hodge would have any input into whether or not she would be considered to oversee that office.

Ms. Hodge informed the Board that she would have a say in whether or not she was appointed to oversee another office and that those making the decision would take into consideration the location and qualifications of Court Administrators being considered.

The Court Administrator reported that due to the amount of time needed to conduct Justice of the Peace ceremonies that she would no longer be offering these services during business hours.

Ms. Hodge stated that she will continue to keep the Board informed as they go through this process.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 9:23 a.m. CST.

Meeting Adjourned

ATTEST:

KLAUS ALBERTS
CHAIR, COUNTY BOARD

BECKY LUBAHN
DEPUTY CLERK

DATED: