

Township residents take issue with recent newsletter

Thursday, May 19, 2005

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ThisWeek Staff Writer

Some Prairie Township residents took issue with a recent Trustee Talk article written by trustee Joe Wharton. It appears in the most recent issue of the township newsletter.

Resident Neil Distelhorst, among others, approached the board about the contents of the newsletter at the May 12 board meeting.

"I was and still am extremely upset by the Trustee Talk article written by Mr. Wharton," Distelhorst said.

Distelhorst referred to the portion of the article that states, "Either we see ourselves as a community and unite, or as individual pockets of self-interest and continue to be second-class citizens."

"I read this literally that the residents of Prairie Township are second-class citizens and unless we do what he thinks best for us we will remain that way," Distelhorst said.

Distelhorst also pointed out that the third paragraph of the article is an attack on township employees.

"I wasn't aware until Mr. Wharton was elected we had a second-class, underdeveloped township government," Distelhorst said. "In his words, the basic services we got were snow plowing by the road department ... he also states we had 'questionable fire protection.' I'm sure our firefighters have learned how to better protect us since he was elected."

Distelhorst also stated that the article accuses the zoning department of selective enforcement.

"In my years as a member of the BZA, I never heard of anything like this," he said.

The article then goes on to state that large, unbid contracts were awarded without competitive bidding as required by law. Distelhorst pointed out that there have been several contracts recently approved by trustees that haven't gone up for bid.

The most recent includes the contract with the law firm Vorys Sater Seymour and Pease LLP for thousands of dollars, an engineering company for a study of land off of O'Harra Road, and a contract for its appraisal.

"The township has received a report from (the engineering firm), but no report has ever been given to the residents as to exactly what Vorys Sater Seymour and Pease has been doing to be paid over \$180,000 in the last two years," Distelhorst said. "I think such a report would be of great interest to the residents."

Distelhorst said Wharton also failed to state in his article that four years prior to his election, the township general fund increased over \$3.4-million, while in the three years since he has taken office, the fund has declined almost \$3.3-million.

"If spending continues in this manner, I believe the township will be asking for a tax levy to support township government in just a very few years," he said.

Former trustee Judy Stalter said she took offense to the article, defending her tenure as trustee. She said trustees didn't have to spend millions to provide service to residents.

"We did a good job," she said. "Our road department and fire department were excellent."

Greg Hart, whose father served as trustee with Stalter, said his father had a lot of pride in the community. He said he, too, didn't appreciate the article.

"Joe and (trustee) Teresa (Keller) are trying to make this a mini-city," Hart said. "The morale must be terrible for the employees."

Trustee Doug Stormont told residents who attended the meeting that neither he, or township administrator Tracy Hatmaker saw Wharton's article before it was published.

"Me and Tracy didn't see it until it went into print," Stormont said. "I had no knowledge about it."

After the meeting, Joe Wharton said he doesn't read the articles of the other two trustees prior to publication. Wharton said Distelhorst pulled statements out of the article and took them out of context.

"What I tried to do, is show where the township has been and where we're going," Wharton said.

As for money being spent on the law firm Vorys Sater Seymour and Pease, township administrator Tracy Hatmaker said the law firm is working on the township's behalf to obtain sewer and water services, including matters related to real estate.

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