

8-Dec-09

Rich Township's Responses to the Allegations Made in the November 25, 2009, ABC 7 News I-Team/Better Government Association 7 Segment about Township Government

Recently, ABC 7 aired stories critical of township government. Rich Township was one of a number of townships mentioned in the story. Financial and other figures based upon a superficial analysis of mandatory Township reporting were presented and erroneous or misleading conclusions were then made. The reports utilized the Rich Township Annual Financial Reports which are filed with the Illinois Comptrollers' office. Reporter Chuck Goudie and the ABC I-team made four major allegations concerning Rich Township:

1. *Only 5% of its budget is provided for temporary aid to the poor.* The report combined the **Town Fund expenditures** of \$4,049,322 and **General Assistance Fund expenditures** of \$380,552 for total expenditures of \$4,429,874; an unrealistic denominator to evaluate GA expenditures. They are both restricted purposes funds, in the main. Last year, fully 65% of General Assistance expenditures went to Prescriptions, Utilities, Shelter, Food, Transportation, and Emergency Assistance. Their report also failed to mention that GA recipients are "self-selected", that is, they come to us for help and 2) GA has a very strict set of eligibility criteria; everyone who applies will not be eligible. GA is mandated by law for those who receive no other benefits such as unemployment benefits, workmen compensation benefits, Social Security or Supplemental Social Security benefits. We currently have about 125 people, on average, receiving GA. Naturally, areas of affluence will have less of a GA eligible population, areas with more poverty will have more. The Town Fund is where the "non-mandated" programs reside including our award winning transportation program for seniors and the disabled, our food pantry, the Park Forest Senior Center, and more.

2. *Townships have excessive tax funds.* The Illinois Government Finance Officers Association recommends that units of government that are dependent on property taxes, such as townships, maintain enough funds to last until March of the following year. Rather than a 4-6 month cushion recommended by IGFOA, we have only maintained a one to two month cushion. Incidentally, Illinois courts have ruled that units of local government should not have cash-on-hand balances of more than twice their annual expenditures. In our case, our *allowable* limit would be approximately **\$8 million**. In addition, some of the line items cited may reflect *the value of capital assets, not cash* – based upon an accounting mandate called GASB 34, implemented a few years ago.

3. *Townships have no oversight.* Townships are the only unit of government to have a **mandated annual public meeting with popular participation** at which any citizen of the township can have the other citizens in the audience vote on policy and other matters. An annual audit is required by law to be conducted by an **outside CPA firm** which is filed with the State Treasurer and the County Clerk within six months of the end of the fiscal year and is available for public review. Their contention does a disservice to independent audit firms who would not put their reputations and business on the line for any client.

4. *The role of the Township Assessor.* Assessor Ranieri plays a vital role in the assessment process. Assessor's duties include maintaining and updating Township assessment information going to the Cook County Assessor; including zoning and Sidwell maps, assistance with homeowner exemptions, maintaining all important property records, sales transfer history, past real estate records. The Assessor answers assessment questions and the filing of appeals, provide residents with preparation of Certificate of Error documents and involved with property variances in municipalities. The **Cook County Assessor is ultimately responsible for Assessments**. Many however, are involved in the assessment process.

Rich Township has won Illinois Hometown awards for the Food Pantry, and awards for our Senior Center. PACE awarded our Transportation Department with an Innovation, Coordination and Enhancement grant from the RTA for GIS based route scheduling. Other awards includes PACE Driver of the Year, Township Officials of Illinois "2008 Supervisor of the Year", and many other honors.

Honest public servants and the Residents of the Township were done a disservice with these stories. They were staged, and snarky as far as representing this Township. Say what one will about other individuals or occurrences that they may have represented. It's time to clear the air and get the record straight regarding Rich Township. Ben Franklin once said, "Never argue with a man who buys his ink by the barrel". Sorry, Ben. You're wrong in this regard.

Sincerely,

Rich Township Board of Trustees