

**SPECIAL VILLAGE BOARD MEETING  
DECEMBER 22, 2016**

The Village of Gowanda Board of Trustees Special meeting was called to order by Mayor Heather McKeever at 5:30 p.m. at the Municipal Hall. The pledge of allegiance was recited.

Present: Mayor Heather McKeever  
Trustee Carol Sheibley  
Trustee Aaron Markham  
Trustee Paul Zimmermann  
Trustee Wanda Koch

Village Employees: Village Clerk Kathy Mohawk, Officer-in-Charge Steve Raiport

Media Present: Phil Palen, Channel 22

Public Present: Janet Vogtli, Charity Sweda, Ralph Swanson, Norris Luther, Jen Gernatt, Sal DiCembre, Sam Castellano, Roberta Raiport, Michelle Kielar, Emily, Stacey and Thomas Raiport, Sue and Ron Barlow, Josh Bartholomew, Kris Booth

Mayor McKeever advised there would be no public participation this evening. She thanked everyone for coming.

Mayor McKeever: The purpose of tonight's meeting is that we have a resignation letter from the position of Officer-in-Charge from Steve Raiport, relinquishing just that position. That would be effective January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. I really wanted to do this in a way that people would have an understanding of the facts of the matter. If you would be okay, Steve, could you come to the table. If you want to just sit here, that's fine. I just wanted to say a couple things to get a better understanding of what the board's position is and then we can talk about this letter. We had a board meeting last week, a week ago Tuesday, and we all know about the task force position. The previous employee had resigned. The Board has been talking about getting a financial handle on everything with a 6-month review of our budget and we don't want to have to borrow any RAN and are trying to look at any unforeseen expenses that have started to come out and to try to think about a couple ways to make sure we are on target with our finances. For the police department, we did talk about, as a Board, the possibility of maybe not keeping the task force for the six months to make sure we have the proper training for our guys, to have the help that you need to make sure that we're up to par with everything in the department along with an attempt to stay within budget with the two full time, the task force and all these things. So we had talked about that. And just for the record, I talked with Tim Whitcomb before that meeting and asked him how important that was because the Board was considering maybe holding off for six months, having the opportunity with somebody leaving. He said it is very important and it is vital to keeping going what they're doing. He said he would be willing to come to us and share with us statistics and make sure we're all on the same page with that. He felt that we're true partners in this

effort. It was important for us to keep it. I also called some of the community members to get their take of where our community is with the task force to make sure it's worth the money and they all agreed. When we moved forward with that position on Tuesday, we had to look at figure other options at how we're going to look at this and we talked about . . . we had done a payroll audit so there was an update on where that was in our executive session, and we did talk about the fact that we found that you were making \$36.00 an hour and we just never really solidified that and now that we have 2 full time guys, the task force, code enforcement, all these things, maybe we could talk to you about this and see what's reasonable. As a Board we thought you would start at \$25.00 an hour because your guys make \$17.00 an hour, full time guys make \$19.00 an hour. That's equivalent to \$50,000 a year. That was our reasoning. We just wanted to talk about it. We have been working on the supervisor's contract for months now. These things are negotiating. We just wanted to talk about it. I asked Paul to come with me. I texted you while we were at the meeting to see if you could meet at 4:30. You said you could meet at 5:30. The reasoning is we have overtime, we have different things, unexpected costs, all these things. You know how I have been about wanting the guys trained and getting you help and your go-to guys and trying to get that. I did not record that; I did not tape it. We were just all talking. Paul was there, and I said to him, am I wrong? You were kind of "do whatever it takes." That's what Steve Raiport does. That's what you said.

Steve: I'm not going to argue with you. There's no sense in arguing with you.

Mayor: But that's what you said. And that was how we took it. That's how Steve is. I'll do whatever it takes. I want to keep my full time guys, I want to keep the task force, I want to keep doing what we're doing. We're doing good things. We laughed a little bit. Right? We came out of there. You gave us the updates. Good job, Steve. We were so happy. You did call me the next day and you left a message. You said to the regards, in the past we talked about \$30,000. And you don't know why it was changed to \$26,000. I got that message. It was a Thursday and I hadn't been able to get to the Board at all. It was nothing that was going to change overnight. It was just part of the discussion. I was going to say . . . I didn't even have a chance to tell the Board that you were okay with the \$25,000. As a matter of fact, that's where it ended. You didn't say anything to the Board and give us a chance to even talk about it. I had seen some things on Facebook. Everything went on Facebook and then by Tuesday we have this letter. We're all trying to wonder why. I knew the public would be here tonight and I didn't know how to explain how we feel about you and what you do for the community. The only thing I could do is think of what is factual. I looked at texts from Christmas in Gowanda and I talked to Stacey because you were Santa Claus and I knew you couldn't be answering you phone. I texted her and I said . . . "Hey, Stacey. Is Steve planning to be at the tree lighting or just stay as Santa? Either way, I just would have him say a few words if he plans to be there as Steve. She said he will be Steve at the tree lighting. I said As Steve I would like him to say a few words if he would like to. She said Yes, we're going to change and he'll be there. I said Awesome. I said "He doesn't want to say a few words? She said he will if you want him to. Tell him that would be great. He is my top first responder." I think most of the people here were there and saw Steve light that tree. Steve, earlier in that day I sent you this text. "It's days like this when I know we are here

in these positions for a reason. Thanks for helping make our community a great place to live. Today will be a great day (and night) ... a great long day. LOL. And then you said: "Just picked up Santa's ride. It's in the garage." And I thought that's what this town is all about. And that was two weeks ago. And that what I've been reading on Facebook. I've tried to figure out. I can't comprehend why, Steve, you didn't come to us and talk to us when you've always been open about your budget and why we have to have this special meeting to talk about this letter. So now I will give you a chance to talk.

Trustee Zimmermann: If I could just add three things first. Nobody wants to see you resign, Steve. That's the first thing. And the second thing, Heather contacted me Tuesday, I think, because I was out of town last night, and first of all this meeting was going to be a meeting with the three of us as a follow up to the last meeting but then it just kind of escalated to where it was, that's the second thing. And the third things, it you could cut out from the minutes that Steve was Santa Claus, please.

Steve Raiport: I really wanted less trouble, that my pay was being cut down to the start of January.

Mayor McKeever: I told you it wouldn't even start until January.

Steve Raiport: You told me that. I have had previous conversations, arguments with you boisterous conversations in the past

Mayor McKeever: Wait. I don't know when we've argued or had boisterous conversations in the past.

Steve Raiport: On November 1<sup>st</sup>, on the phone, we met the very next day in your office. My kids were in the car and we were on the speaker phone. When I asked if you had a problem with me, or personnel things. You know what I'm talking about. You were going around asking all my officers about my job performance. I caught wind of it and I called you on the phone and asked if there is a problem with me.

Mayor McKeever: And I said yes. And I wanted to talk with you.

Steve Raiport: So I was going back to that date. That sat in my mind: what was said to me, the remarks that were made to me about myself, the guys, and everything else. That still sat in my mind. Now with things going on behind my back and thinking about what went on with previous administrations, things that happened in the past. I don't need that. Who am I to ask about the pay decrease? I basically said okay, it is what it is. I'm not in a position to argue about it. It's not my decision, you know. To sit there are argue. It doesn't pay to argue. In the morning, I thought about it and it festered. You put more responsibilities on me. You threw code enforcement under me. All these extra duties. I put way too much time into this place. I work another full time job and dedicate my time here too. I don't see much of my family. I try to do as much as I can with my family. For the past almost three years, I've had the same pay. I know I was agreeing last year when Sean Campas was here to let him take the Sergeant's exam and take some of the

responsibilities off me. Then cut my pay down, to stay in the budget. You know, I've always been that way. I don't want to see increases. That's how I was with the fire company. I was given a budget. I work with it and I'll make it work. But Sean never took the exam so I continued on with the same price for the last three years, just more and more duties. When I left that meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> with you, and remembered the conversation we had the beginning of November, and heard other things that were being said by individuals in the community and my own guys, I just felt betrayed. For everything I've done, I'd do anything for this community, bend over backwards. There's nothing I wouldn't do for this place, I always have. I felt grateful for the support I do have in this community. I just felt betrayed. You're bringing in other people making a fantastic amount of money and it's basically a kick in the nuts to me. I just don't know how I can stay. I felt torn, you know, for the last couple weeks. I try to do the best I can with this job. I'm not perfect. I know there are some stuff I was lax, you know what I'm talking about because it was discussed in executive session. I have family too. I was dealing with my grandfather and stuff. My wife and I were the only ones that took care of him. I tried to juggle a full time job, this place, my grandfather, my own family. I was lax, I understand that, I take full responsibility for that. But I'm human too. When I first started this position, it was 24 years ago. I've been here for 24 years. I understand the finances of it. It's business, I understand. I took on the responsibilities of overseeing code enforcement. I told you from the get-go, I don't know a damn thing about it. I know Larry, he is doing an excellent job. My goal has always been to make this a great place to live again. It is a great place to live. But it takes all of us as a community to do that. I'm saying I'm great but I'm a hands-on guy. I'll take the bull by the horns and get it done. That's the way I've always been. I didn't care who I pissed off as long as it got done. That's the way I am. Like I said, I just felt ashamed when the prior OIC was making the same amount prior years to me. I did a lot for him and his department. When I was given that opportunity in 2014 to take over, it was a honor for me. I didn't look back. I just moved forward, changed the place around. I work with you as a Board, I support a lot of things your job is, and I still support some of your job but I don't really know . . .

Mayor McKeever: Steve, I feel where it was broken down . . . I wish you would have come to us and give us a chance to talk about it. I appreciate hearing your point of view. The social media and what is has done to the community, I couldn't talk behind that.

Steve Raiport: I have no control over that. And I try to stay away. I hate Facebook. I have social media. My frustration, it's my right to discuss it with people. It's my life. How they perceive it and what those people write . . .

Mayor McKeever: I just wanted to make it known that you don't have a letter from us about your pay, it's just the one conversation we were having.

Steve Raiport: Exactly. There's nothing in writing. The same thing last year when I agreed to take a \$5,000 pay cut to give it to Sean. It was never brought up at a Board meeting. In my eyes, I saw that as the right and fair and correct thing to do was to give

up some of my money to compensate Sean for taking those extra duties on. To increase a budget by \$5,000 doesn't sound like much but . . .

Mayor McKeever: When we even started to get a grasp that this stuff was happening on social media, we talked and were going to reach out to have you meet with us to have this exact same conversation but just not in this forum. Then we got this and it just changed it.

Trustee Sheibley: Steve, I would like you to rescind your letter of resignation. I don't think there's anyone seated here that wants you to resign. And I think you should strongly consider withdrawing this in front of this crowd tonight. And secondly, as far as your pay being cut, there's been no board action on that and at this point, I don't think there would be a Board member that would vote for it. So, I think we had a little bump in the road. It's the Christmas season. I think we need to move beyond it. We've always worked together. I think this Board has always, especially fire service and police service, we've funded for the safety of our community and if I sit here, I continue to do that. So I ask you please take your letter away.

Steve Raiport: The only thing I'd like to see done is, I guess, the rumor mill within the Village employees also be stopped.

Trustee Koch: What do you mean?

Steve Raiport: Things that have been said from different employees that have gotten back to me. That if I do stay, that it stops. I won't elaborate but there's a lot of stuff. I don't care what happens in highway. I don't care what happens in sewer. I would just like my name to stop being dragged through the mud by different employees. That's all I'm going to say. That's all I ask.

Mayor McKeever: Okay. I'm not aware of that.

Steve Raiport: That's all I ask. I'll leave it at that. I'm not going to go into detail. I'm not going to point fingers or nothing like that. That's all I ask. We get past this and move on. Put it behind us. Leave it at that. Move forward from this day on. That's all I ask.

Mayor McKeever: I would speak to the Board.

Trustee Markham: Steve, you and I had a long talk yesterday. I'm going to agree with Carol we don't want to see you go. And I agree if this did come to the Board, I don't think it would pass. I really don't.

Mayor McKeever: We talked about this all the time. I mentioned the task force. I mentioned that we were looking at every option. I make \$8,000. I don't do it for the money. I know you don't do it for the money. The reality here is that we just wanted you to talk to us and then I don't know where it went. I think we would agree to put this

behind us. I would ask that you rescind this and because we have never changed anything with your salary so there is no action that would need to be taken.

Steve Raiport: According to the Civil Service laws, I can only work 1040 hours.

Mayor McKeever: You can't work over 1040 hours.

Steve Raiport: What I was trying to say, we all know I work over 1040 hours. If I run out of hours in March, I can't work from March through June. I give back a lot of hours. I use my own vehicle, my own personal cell phone for things.

Mayor McKeever: Steve, the reason why this came about, is we have to make sure we are still following the civil service rules.

Steve Raiport: I know that. If something happens, I just come in. I get calls from people at all hours of the night with problems and complaints.

Mayor McKeever: Steve, that's why I read those texts because I truly feel that about you. And I hope you understand that's a reflection of how important you are to the community. And how I feel like we have a relationship, even a friendship. And you're right. I need to be your boss at times and keep accountable for different things. We hope after this you know you can communicate things to us and come right to us, and hope you know it's the whole board, too.

Steve Raiport: Right. I never had an issue with a board member. I know Carol and I have exchanged words every now and again in the past but we got over it. We would agree to disagree sometimes. I don't hold grudges but things always sit in the back of my mind. I don't forget things. We have to move forward. I'd love to still stay. I've been torn on this whole this this whole month.

Mayor McKeever: You're not the only one.

Steve Raiport: I mean, I don't sleep. I mean, ask my wife, my kids. I just sit at the table and just go over and over in my own mind, what to do. I love this place.

Mayor McKeever: We know you do, and that's why we ask that you please rescind this letter. Steve, will you please rescind this letter?

Steve Raiport: If we can move forward, no more hiccups?

Mayor McKeever: We all appreciate you and I'm happy we're moving forward. For the record, we want you to rescind your resignation.

Steve Raiport: I rescind my resignation.

Mayor McKeever: Thank you. And with that said, Steve, we do thank you for your continued service. We will move forward stronger. Thank everyone for coming tonight.

Motion 206-16. Motion by Trustee Markham, seconded by Trustee Koch to adjourn the special Village Board meeting at 6:00 p.m. Motion carried 5-0.

Mayor McKeever: And I hope everyone has a very Merry Christmas.

The next Village of Gowanda board meeting is January 10, 2017 at 6:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen V. Mohawk  
Village Clerk