



## NEBRASKA AUDITOR OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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September 12, 2019

Robert Janssen, Chairperson  
Village of Crookston  
P.O. Box 77  
Crookston, NE 69212

Dear Chairperson Janssen:

As you know, the Nebraska Auditor of Public Accounts (APA) has approved the fiscal year 2018 audit waiver for the Village of Crookston (Village). However, while performing our review to determine whether to approve the audit waiver, the APA noted certain internal control or compliance matters, or other operational issues, within the Village. The following information is intended to improve internal controls or result in other operational efficiencies.

### **Comment and Recommendation**

#### **1. Possible Conflict of Interest**

The APA received Village Board (Board) meeting minutes and the accompanying claims listing for July 10, 2018. From this listing, the APA identified a potential conflict of interest involving the actions of Board members Richard and Linda Quick.

According to the meeting minutes, Mr. and Ms. Quick failed to abstain from voting on the following claim:

Claim Date	Name/Vendor	Description	Amount	Check #	Cleared Date
7/10/2018	L. Quick	mowing	\$ 350.00	3166	7/12/2018

An excerpt from the July 10, 2018, Board minutes is provided below:

*The treasurer's report revealed claims in the amount of \$1482.07. Motion to accept the report and pay claims made by Richard, seconded by Linda. Motion carried. Phyllis abstained.*

The minutes do contain language listing Board members with interest in claims for services rendered, yet not all members listed abstained from voting, as shown below:

*Bob Janssen, Linda Quick, and Phyllis Daniels have interest in and receive reimbursement for services rendered.*

The apparent failure of Board members Richard and Linda Quick to abstain from voting on the motion above gives rise to concerns regarding possible violations of the Nebraska Political Accountability and Disclosure Act (Act), which is set out at Neb. Rev. Stat. § 49-1401 (Cum. Supp. 2018) et seq.

To start, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 49-14,101.01(1) (Reissue 2010) states the following:

*A public official or public employee shall not use or authorize the use of his or her public office or any confidential information received through the holding of a public office to obtain financial gain, other than compensation provided by law, for himself or herself, a member of his or her immediate family, or a business with which the individual is associated.*

The penalty for violating the above-cited conflict of interest statute is set out in subsection (7) thereof, as follows:

*[A]ny person violating this section shall be guilty of a Class III misdemeanor, except that no vote by any member of the Legislature shall subject such member to any criminal sanction under this section.*

Furthermore, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 49-1499.03(2) (Reissue 2010) provides the following:

*(a) Any person holding an elective office of a city or village not designated in section 49-1493 and any person holding an elective office of a school district who would be required to take any action or make any decision in the discharge of his or her official duties that may cause financial benefit or detriment to him or her, a member of his or her immediate family, or a business with which he or she is associated, which is distinguishable from the effects of such action on the public generally or a broad segment of the public, shall take the following actions as soon as he or she is aware of such potential conflict or should reasonably be aware of such potential conflict, whichever is sooner:*

*(i) Prepare a written statement describing the matter requiring action or decision and the nature of the potential conflict;*

*(ii) Deliver a copy of the statement to the person in charge of keeping records for the city, village, or school district who shall enter the statement onto the public records of the city, village, or school district; and*

*(iii) Abstain from participating or voting on the matter in which the person holding elective office has a conflict of interest.*

*(b) The person holding elective office may apply to the commission for an opinion as to whether the person has a conflict of interest.*

(Emphasis added.) Good internal control requires procedures to ensure compliance with the applicable provisions of the Act.

Without such procedures, there is an increased risk for both statutory violations and the loss of Village funds.

We recommend the Board implement procedures to ensure compliance with the applicable provisions of the Act. Because the issue addressed herein constitutes a possible violation of the Act, we are forwarding this information to the Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission.

*Village Response: The board will make sure that no trustee makes a motion or seconds a motion to pay bills in which that individual is receiving payment for services rendered. Also making sure that those receiving payment abstain from voting.*

## **2. Lack of Claim Purpose**

During our comparison of the Village's bank account details to claims approved by the Board, the APA noted that a majority of the claims listed in the Board's official proceedings lacked descriptions of their respective purposes.

The following is an example of the approved claims listing provided by the Village for December 12, 2017:

Name	Description	Amount
D. Fay	labor	\$ 66.00
HUB Int'l	Ins	\$ 1,528.00
J. Stokely		\$ 341.80
KBR St. Lts.		\$ 357.27
KBR	elec.	\$ 271.15
Kman Elec. & Const.		\$ 154.13
L. Quick		\$ 390.00
Midland News		\$ 35.02
NE Public Health Env. Lab		\$ 15.00
P. Daniels		\$ 390.00
R. Quick		\$ 390.00
P. Daniels	tres.	\$ 300.00
R. Janssen		\$ 360.00
S. Schuman		\$ 360.00
S. Schuman		\$ 40.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$ 4,998.37</b>

Neb. Rev. Stat. § 19-1102 (Cum. Supp. 2018) requires publication of the Board's official proceedings, which must include, among other things, the purpose of each claim allowed, as follows:

*It shall be the duty of each village or city clerk in every village or city having a population of not more than one hundred thousand inhabitants as determined by the most recent federal decennial census or the most recent revised certified count by the United States Bureau of the Census to prepare and publish the official proceedings of the village or city board, council, or commission within thirty days after any meeting of the board, council, or commission. The publication shall be in a newspaper in or of general circulation in the village or city, shall set forth a statement of the proceedings of the meeting, and shall also include the amount of each claim allowed, the purpose of the claim, and the name of the claimant, except that the aggregate amount of all payroll claims may be included as one item. Between July 15 and August 15 of each year, the employee job titles and the current annual, monthly, or hourly salaries corresponding to such job titles shall be published. Each job title published shall be descriptive and indicative of the duties and functions of the position. The charge for the publication shall not exceed the rates provided for in section 23-122.*

(Emphasis added.) Good internal control and sound accounting practices require procedures to ensure that the Board's official proceedings describe the purpose of each claim allowed.

Without such procedures, there is an increased risk of not only failure to comply with statutory publication requirements but also a lack of transparency regarding the nature of public expenditures.

We recommend the Board implement procedures to ensure the purpose of each claim allowed is included in the Board's official proceedings and published in accordance with State statute.

*Village Response: To prevent further questions and improve reporting we will be more specific in designating the purpose of each claim for which each business or person is receiving payment for services rendered.*

\* \* \* \* \*

The preliminary planning work that resulted in this letter was designed primarily on a test basis and, therefore, may not bring to light all existing weaknesses in the Village's policies or procedures. Nevertheless, our objective is to use the knowledge gained during the performance of that preliminary planning work to make comments and suggestions that we hope will prove useful to the Village.

Draft copies of this letter were furnished to the Village to provide its management with an opportunity to review and to respond to the comments and recommendations contained herein. Any formal responses received have been incorporated into this letter. Such responses have been objectively evaluated and recognized, as appropriate, in the letter. Any response indicating that corrective action has been taken was not verified at this time.

This communication is intended solely for the information and use of the Village and its management. It is not intended to be, and should not be, used by anyone other than those specified parties. However, this letter is a matter of public record, and its distribution is not limited.

If you have any questions regarding the above information, please contact our office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Avery".

Mary Avery  
Special Audits and Finance Manager  
Phone (402) 471-3686  
mary.avery@nebraska.gov

cc: Shirley Schuman, Village Clerk  
Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission