October 7, 2019

Chris Hopkins, Chairperson
Village of Heartwell
P.O. Box 67
Heartwell, NE 68945

Dear Chairperson Hopkins:

As you know, the Nebraska Auditor of Public Accounts (APA) has approved the fiscal year 2018 audit waiver for the Village of Heartwell (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.

**Comments and Recommendations**

1. **Possible Conflict of Interest**

The APA received Village Board (Board) meeting minutes and the accompanying claims listing for September 4, 2018. From this listing, the APA identified a potential conflict of interest involving the actions of Board members Jim and Loretta Jurgensmier.

According to the meeting minutes, these individuals appear to have failed to abstain from voting on the following claim:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim Date</th>
<th>Name/Vendor</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Check Memo</th>
<th>Check #</th>
<th>Cleared Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/4/2018</td>
<td>Jim Jurgensmier</td>
<td>$ 90.00</td>
<td>Mowing</td>
<td>2654</td>
<td>9/7/2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An excerpt from the September 4, 2018, Board minutes is provided below:

*The monthly bills were reviewed. Lori Wittwer moved to pay the monthly bills, and Loretta Jurgensmier seconded the motion. Voting aye: Lori Wittwer, Loretta Jurgensmier, Diana Podewitz, and Jim Jurgensmier.*

The apparent failure of Board members Jim and Loretta Jurgensmier 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:

*An 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.

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 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 September 4, 2018:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Vendor</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chris Kuehn</td>
<td></td>
<td>$ 75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry Reichstein</td>
<td></td>
<td>$ 75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Power District</td>
<td></td>
<td>$ 414.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Hills Energy</td>
<td></td>
<td>$ 34.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husker Waste Systems</td>
<td></td>
<td>$ 516.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMC</td>
<td></td>
<td>$ 371.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minden Courier</td>
<td></td>
<td>$ 61.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paeson Crews</td>
<td></td>
<td>$ 45.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana Cole</td>
<td></td>
<td>$ 845.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Jurgensmier</td>
<td></td>
<td>$ 90.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$ 2,527.88</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

* * * * * *

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. The Village declined to respond.

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,

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

cc: Chris Kuehn, Village Clerk
    Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission