



NEBRASKA AUDITOR OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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March 21, 2022

Arlo Thayer, Chairperson
Village of Bladen
P.O. Box 37
Bladen, NE 68928

Dear Chairperson Thayer:

The Nebraska Auditor of Public Accounts (APA) has reviewed the audit waiver request received from the Village of Bladen (Village) for the fiscal year ending 2021. **That request has been approved.**

While performing, pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 84-304 (Supp. 2021), the preliminary examination necessary to determine whether the audit waiver should be allowed or further audit work would be required, 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. Lack of Dual Signatures

The APA obtained the bank statements for the Village's accounts from its fiscal year 2021 audit waiver request. From these statements, the APA noted that nine of the Village checks written during the examination period contained only one signature. An example of such checks is shown below.



State statute requires Village checks to be signed by both the Board Chairperson and the Village Clerk. Specifically, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 17-711 (Cum. Supp. 2020) provides the following:

All warrants drawn upon the city treasurer of a city of the second class or village treasurer must be signed by the mayor or chairperson of the village board of trustees and countersigned by the city clerk or village clerk, stating the particular fund to which the same is chargeable, the person to whom payable, and for what particular object. No money shall be otherwise paid than upon such warrants so drawn. Each warrant shall specify the amount included in the adopted budget statement for such fund upon which it is drawn and the amount already expended of such fund.

Good internal control and sound accounting practices require procedures to ensure that Village checks contain the statutorily required endorsements. Without such procedures, there is an increased risk of not only failure to comply with State statute but also the loss and/or misuse of Village funds.

We recommend the Board implement procedures to require dual signatures, from the Board Chairperson and the Village Clerk, on all Village checks, as required by law.

2. Lack of Claim Purpose

During our comparison of the Village's bank account details to claims approved by the Board, the APA observed meeting minutes dated September 13, 2021, and 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 13, 2021:

CLAIMS: Kory McCracken, \$50.00, R&M Disposal \$2053.50, Black Hills Energy \$347.80
Glenwood \$227.90, SCPPD \$1475.80, Timm's Service, fuel \$172.70, Timm's Service,
Supplies, \$9.36, Battery \$54.95, Water/Ice- \$ 1.85 Blue Hill Leader, \$8.55, One Call
Concepts \$5.00, Nebraska Public Health Lab \$503.00, Menards \$77.63, Amazon, Printer ink
\$ 164.23, Amazon, business envelopes \$48.44, Municipal Supply, Water Meters and
Antenna \$292.92, USDA Water Loan \$25849.00, Kelly Supply Sewer Hose \$76.23, Hastings
Outdoor Power \$471.11, USA Blue Book, Street Signs \$623.27, Wages \$2632.64,

Neb. Rev. Stat. § 19-1102 (Cum. Supp. 2020) 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 city clerk or village clerk in every city or village 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 city council or village board of trustees within thirty days after any meeting of the city council or village board of trustees. The publication shall be in a legal newspaper in or of general circulation in the city or village, 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.

A similar issue was identified by the APA in a prior review and was disclosed to the Village in the APA's letter dated March 1, 2021, which can be found on the APA's website. However, it does not appear this issue was corrected after the APA's notification.

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.

3. Payment of Unapproved Claims

During review, the APA noted that Village debit card transactions were not approved by the Village Board. According to the Village Clerk, the Village Board does not approve purchases made with the Village debit card unless they exceed \$1,000.

Neb. Rev. Stat. § 17-614(1) (Supp. 2021) sets out the proper method for the appropriation or payment of money by the Village, as follows:

All ordinances and resolutions or orders for the appropriation or payment of money shall require for their passage or adoption the concurrence of a majority of all members elected to the city council in a city of the second class or village board of trustees.

(Emphasis added.) Good internal control requires procedures to ensure that all claims are approved by the Board prior to payment and are adequately documented in the meeting minutes of the month in which they are approved. Without such procedures, there is an increased risk for the loss or misuse of Village funds.

We recommend the Board implement procedures to ensure all claims are approved by the Board prior to payment and are adequately documented in the meeting minutes of the month in which they are approved.

4. Improper Payment of Sales Tax

The APA noted that the Village made an improper payment of Nebraska sales taxes, totaling \$79, on the purchase of a new computer from Best Buy.

Per Neb. Rev. Stat. § 77-2704.15(1)(a) (Reissue 2018), purchases made by the State or its political subdivisions are exempt from sales tax, as follows:

Sales and use taxes shall not be imposed on the gross receipts from the sale, lease, or rental of and the storage, use, or other consumption in this state of purchases by the state, including public educational institutions recognized or established under the provisions of Chapter 85, or by any county, township, city, village

Good internal controls require procedures to ensure sales taxes are not paid on municipal purchases. Without such procedures, there is an increased risk for the loss of public funds.

We recommend the Village implement procedures to ensure sales taxes are not paid on municipal purchases.

5. Negative Bank Balance

During a review of the bank statements obtained from the Village’s audit waiver request, it was noted that the Village’s checking account had a negative balance for five days. The table below summarizes the negative account balances for those five days.

Balance Date	Amount
12/31/2020	\$ 400.41
1/4/2021	\$ 1,142.09
1/25/2021	\$ 2,527.03
1/26/2021	\$ 3,171.76
1/27/2021	\$ 3,657.39

Good internal controls and sound business practices require procedures to ensure sufficient funds are available in the Village’s bank accounts to pay claims.

Without such procedures, there is an increased risk for not only the loss, misuse, or theft of Village funds, but also the accumulation of overdraft fees.

We recommend the Village implement procedures to ensure sufficient funds are available in the Village's bank accounts to pay claims.

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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.

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, please contact **Dakota Christensen** at **402-499-8702** or **dakota.christensen@nebraska.gov**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Avery", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mark Avery, CPA
Assistant Deputy Auditor