Clerk VBH <clerk@barringtonhills-il.gov>

Local News

Robert Kosin <rkosin@barringtonhills-il.gov> **Sat, Oct 1, 2011 at 11:41 AM**
To: James Kelly <jpkelly@mkm-law.com>
Cc: Dolores Trandel <clerk@barringtonhills-il.gov>

Investigation finds no wrong doing by Barrington Hills village president

By Carolyn Rusin Chicago TribLocal reporter
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[PHOTO] Attorney James Kelly presents his findings to the village board on whether Village President Robert Abboud interfered with the busines of the Zoning Board of Appeals. (Carolyn Rusin/Tribune)

An investigation into claims the Barrington Hills village president interfered with the work of the Zoning Board of Appeals found no wrong doing.

"There was no impropriety or interference," said attorney James Kelly of Crystal Lake-based Matuszewich, Kelly & McKeever, LLP. Kelly was asked to investigate the matter, and he presented the village board with a report of his findings during a contentious meeting Monday night.

The claim centers around the removal of an attorney who was working with the ZBA on a controversial ordinance dealing with commercial horse boarding.

The investigation was launched on the request of former ZBA Chairman Jonathan Knight, who had accused Village President Robert Abboud of firing the attorney, Joseph von Meier, without any discussion.

Abboud has said he did not fire the attorney. The village still uses the attorney's firm. In a letter to the firm, however, Abboud expressed he had lost confidence in the attorney.

Kelly confirmed that, saying once the village president said he lost confidence in the attorney, the firm reassigned another attorney to represent the ZBA.

"The village president has power to appoint council for the village. Mr. Abboud and the Village Board have to have trust and confidence in that attorney," Kelly said.

Knight and several residents who turned out at the meeting said they felt the investigation was far from independent. They claim Kelly's firm has collected hundreds of thousands of dollars from past work with the village, and has represented Abboud on private matters, which Kelly did not deny.

Kelly answered questions from Knight and residents, including who he

interviewed as part of his investigation. In addition to Knight, Kelly said, he interviewed Abboud, Trustee Joe Messer, Village Administrator Bob Kosin and a member of his staff. He also interviewed a law professor with knowledge in zoning and corporate council, he said.

Trustee Skip Gianopulos questioned whether the attorney was the right person to conduct the investigation.

"An investigation is typically directed by a sub-body of a board," Gianopulos said, but added, "I was comfortable with the report knowing that Abboud acted within his scope of authority."

Messer felt the report accurately assessed the situation.

"I believe the investigation was thorough and complete," said Messer, explaining that Kelly analyzed the laws pertaining to zoning boards and rights of a village president. "He came to the proper conclusion."

The drama unfolded in March when the zoning board was expected to make a recommendation to the village board on whether to incorporate larger horse boarding operations to fit in with a Home Occupation Ordinance. The matter has drawn critics and lawsuits in a village that allows few businesses, and was a hot topic while candidates campaigned in the April election.

Von Meier was drafting an amendment to the zoning code that could allow commercial horse boarding as a restricted special use.

The report can soon be viewed on the village's website.

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http://www.barringtonhills-il.gov/agendas/Agenda_September_2011.html