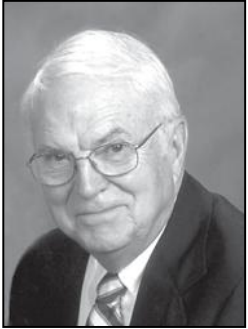


Central Lake Village President needs to step up to the job or resign

The Village of Central Lake has been abuzz in recent months over the actions, and non-actions, of its recently elected President, Walter Russell.

SIDE BAR



John Tarrant

Elected last November in a close race against then incumbent Village President, Larry Eckhardt, Russell's brief tenure has been highlighted by some unusual behavior on his part and has sparked angry calls for him to resign and threats to launch a recall campaign against him if he doesn't.

Nearly every village council meeting since he assumed council leader-

ship has been punctuated with angry outbursts from audience members launching complaints and accusations toward him. During a heated meeting in February, Russell was severely criticized by fellow board members for a village budget he presented that called for cuts in wages and benefits and had apparently been put together with no input from other members of the council.

At the village council meeting of Monday, April 11, a woman in the audience read a prepared statement that was critical of Russell and the Village Clerk chastised him for not showing up in the office often enough to resolve issues regarding village business. Russell appeared unfazed by the criticism.

Last Friday, events may have taken a pivotal turn with Village President Pro-Tem, Brian Patton, sending a letter to Russell as well as the other council members and village department heads, informing them of his "intent to resign from the Central Lake Village Council effective April 22, 2011." His reason for resigning, he wrote, has been the amount of time he has had to spend on village business matters that should have been attended to by Russell. He cited as an example that during the three days following the April 11 council meeting, he had to deal with 28 village issues at his place of business. These were "issues that should have been handled by the Village President," Patton wrote, adding that the

interference with his "business and personal life has reached its limit."

Patton's letter also verified the clerk's complaint about the village president not coming to the office enough, writing that Russell has "not been in the village office since January to talk face to face with our clerk." The letter also expressed the hope that Russell will either "step up and do the job or resign."

I called Russell to get his thoughts on Patton's resignation. He didn't directly acknowledge that he had received a letter but said he was "aware of one." He told me he "didn't know how to reply" to my request and then advised me that he will have to "refer the matter to the village's attorney," and can't discuss the matter until he knows more about what's going on.

According to County Clerk, Laura Sexton, a recall effort against an elected official cannot begin until that official has been in office for six months. That means that the earliest a recall effort could be launched in this case would be late May. Assuming the ensuing clarity hearing, petition drive and verification process all goes smoothly, it would more than likely be November before the matter could be put to the voters. Besides the actual expense of a recall election, which could cost a couple of thousand dollars, there's six more months of turmoil, stress, hard feelings and uncertainty for the Village of Central Lake and six more months of contentious public meetings.

It should be noted that Patton's resignation was not effective immediately. It is carefully worded as his "intent to resign" April 22. Those who long to return to the days not so long ago when the village council had strong leadership and worked together for the welfare of the village, can only hope that Patton reconsiders.

And, while they're hoping Patton will change his mind, they can also hope that Russell will change his, and resign. Or, step up and do the job as it should be done. He sought it, he was elected to it and he is being paid to do it. What will be unacceptable is for him to continue in the manner he is doing now, which will likely result in his recall.

What Central Lake needs now is leadership, not six more months of divisiveness.