**Overview – Outstanding Needs**

Scio Township has had a vacancy at the top of its administration for well over a year. The current Board of Trustees has been debating how best to fill that vacancy since we took office in November 2020 (see chronology below).

**More time, more experience:**

Some have argued that we need *more time* to thoroughly consider the question of the Township’s administration. As the chronology shows, the Board of Trustees has considered this question for many months. We have held multiple public meetings on administrative structure. Officers have done research and shared memoranda and given presentations. We conducted a survey to gather input from Township employees and appointees.

The Township has been experiencing the absence of a Township Administrator for almost 20 months. Several of us newly elected to the BOT in 2020 have served in Scio Township government for years. We have been thinking deeply about this problem because we have experienced it directly.

During public comments at the 4/27 BOT meeting, it was stated that those of us advocating for a township administrator should listen to those with *more experience*. If that commenter had done any research, they would know that the number of years of experience in Scio Township government are decisively on the side of those advocating for a township administrator. Likewise, the greater number of years of public service are with those who advocate for a township administrator. To claim otherwise is to misrepresent reality and dismiss many decades of public service.

This debate is *not* about taking more time to reach some elusive, unanimous agreement, nor is it about who has more experience in public service. It is a straightforward choice between two approaches to administration. The irony is that the two options are very similar.

**Similarities of the two models:**

* **Human Resources**: A part-time HR position is in both models.
* **Sustainability Development**: There is a full-time position in both models.
* **Deputy Treasurer**: This is a statutory position, dictated by law.
* **Out-sourced Information Technology**: This new contract is in both models.
* **A full-time Supervisor**: Compensation to reflect this reality is in both models. The reality is that the position of supervisor is not part-time. The current supervisor is consistently working 60+ hours per week on Township business.

The job descriptions and other supporting materials for the three new positions can serve for either of the two models. There are minor differences in the funds from which the positions are funded. The resolution adjusting the compensation for the supervisor is the same regardless of the model because the supervisor will continue to work full-time regardless.

**What are the significant differences?**

1) **Township Administrator** vs. **Administrative Services Manager**

2) **Centralized professional operations** vs. **Decentralized operations under elected officers**

**Personalization of a decision about administrative structure:**

These are fairly mundane differences: one type of upper-level administrative position or another, one set of reporting relationships or another. *The complicating factor is that some people are dissatisfied with prior township managers.* These negative memories animate this debate about administrative structures. Negative memories persist. They are much more influential than positive memories. However, we all need to rise above those bad memories, to move away from the personalization. This is about the future, not the past.

**Township Administrator – A Job Defined for Success**

What if the perceived problems with past township managers could be addressed, in part, by revising job descriptions? Even the best person won’t perform at their best if they are burdened with too many tasks. The township administrator model represents an effort to redistribute functions and responsibilities to respond to concerns about township managers who couldn’t follow through on commitments. The job should be defined so that a human can do it.

The *township administrator* will be focused on *internal* operations of the Township. They will be responsible for the working relationships of the parts of Scio Township government, the implementation of organizational policies, including the new initiative to update human resource procedures. They will be the one who makes sure that everything works as it should.

The *supervisor* will serve as the primary *external* contact, receiving inquiries and requests from the public, overseeing communications, and representing the township in discussions with outside, partner organizations such as the Washtenaw County Road Commission. The supervisor will focus on growth-oriented projects such as pedestrian pathways, public access to parks and nature preserves, road improvements, sustainability, and other initiatives to respond to the growing needs of Scio Township.

**Centralized, Professional Operations – Administration Designed for Success**

The centralized oversight of operations allows for efficient coordination of organization-wide initiatives such as performance evaluation. The township administrator’s singular focus on internal operations will provide greater attention to staff working relationships. The township administrator won’t be distracted by other functions that officers must balance (e.g. the supervisor’s responsibility to respond to external constituencies, or the clerk’s need to attend to the myriad statutory functions of that office).

**Checks and Balances**

Some have raised concerns about the need for checks and balances in Township government. This is an important concern, but it should be understood that the *Township Administrator Model* is a better one for maintaining checks and balances. Here is why:

The vital checks and balances are *financial*. By statute, the financial responsibilities are divided between the three officers:

* The treasurer is responsible for **revenues**
* The clerk is responsible for **payables and keeping records**
* The supervisor is responsible for **the budget and reports**

In May 2019, when the clerk was hired to serve the remainder of Nancy Hedberg’s term, she asked for $20K salary increase and for sole line authority over the finance staff. The basis for the clerk’s authority was her statutory responsibility for the payables and keeping the books.

However, placing the finance staff in a reporting relationship to the clerk alone created a problem with the checks and balances because it effectively meant that the supervisor relinquished his authority with regard to formulating the budget and reporting on it. The finance staff need to work for the supervisor as much as they need to work for the clerk.

Another problem with checks and balances was the reliance of the treasurer on other staff to provide her with support for her statutory responsibilities. With the pending turnover in the assessing department, this is no longer possible. The treasurer needs to have a deputy.

We are now in position to reestablish these important checks and balances by creating a deputy treasurer position reporting to the treasurer and finance staff reporting jointly to the clerk and supervisor.

**Expanded Support for Public Safety**

The clerk has expressed an interest in the public safety aspects of Township government. These functions reside in the Township’s Fire Department and through the Township’s contracted police services provided by the Washtenaw County Sheriff Department. While the clerk proposes to have line authority over these functions, that is only one way in which to influence those operations. This approach does not afford opportunity for others to be involved. Indeed, other trustees have expressed interest in this area of the Township’s services. As a more inclusive alternative, the Township could form a public safety advisory board on which the clerk and other interested trustees might serve along with other members of the community. That advisory board would be charged to work in support of the fire department and “to collaborate with the Sheriff to implement reforms to prevent crime, improve safety, and improve relationships between law enforcement and communities within the Township.”

**Chronology of Key Events in Scio Township Administration 2019-2021**

**September 2019** Township Manager Bryce Kelley takes medical leave prior to planned retirement. The BOT hires consultant and conducts search for township manager. Search fails to result in hire. Position of township manager remains vacant at start of new year.

**January 2020** The BOT approves salary increase for Supervisor Jack Knowles from $36K to $72K based on increased work load in absence of Township Manager. BOT temporarily assigns oversight of utilities to supervisor, and oversight of fire department to clerk.

**March 2020** COVID pandemic results in stay-at-home order and shift to virtual meetings.

**November 2020** Previous BOT votes to revert the supervisor’s salary back to $36K. The newly elected BOT takes office. Meets every week for six weeks in a row.

**December 2020** Special working session 12/15 devoted to *administrative structure*. Further discussions during special meeting on 12/28. Consensus on timeline and general process including plan to interview staff regarding their views.

**January 2020** At 1/6 management meeting staff oppose method for seeking employee input saying that many staff find it stressful to be interviewed by those who have authority over them. Decision is made to solicit staff input via a written, online survey. Survey is conducted and elicits a high response rate. Several key impressions from the questionnaire responses are 1) a generally positive sense of the Township’s government as a workplace, 2) an acknowledgement that the nature and breadth of the work has changed as the Township has grown and 3) strong concerns about leadership within the administration in the absence of a township manager.

**February 2020** Supervisor’s letter to BOT proposes redefined position of *Township Administrator*. Special working session held on *administrative structure* 2/16, survey results are discussed, township administrator position is discussed. Clerk requests time to offer a presentation of an *alternative to township administrator* at subsequent BOT meeting. Clerk makes presentation at BOT 2/23.

**March 2020** Supervisor places proposal to create township administrator position and conduct search for candidates on BOT agenda for 3/9. The BOT amends the motion to refer the question of the administration position along with other positions to a newly formed “administrative committee” with a 3/23 deadline for reporting back to the BOT. The committee fails to meet 3/23 BOT deadline. None of the positions are reflected in the 2021-22 budget.

**April 2020** After multiple meetings, the “administrative committee” reports to BOT on 4/13 that it will present two alternative models for discussion at the BOT meeting on 4/27. Some members of the public expressed concern that they were not provided the materials related to the two administrative models prior to the meeting 4/27 meeting. The supervisor decided to remove the report and related discussion from the agenda. The clerk made a motion for a detailed timeline for a specified bundle of materials related to each of the models to be published by 5/7 and placed on the BOT agenda for 5/11/21.

**May 2020** The Township begins its 20th month with a township manager vacancy.

**Conclusion**

Scio Township needs to fill the void in professional administrative leadership since the township manager position became vacant in September 2019. There are other staffing needs that must be addressed as well. There are problems with the checks and balances between the financial responsibilities assigned by statute to the treasurer, clerk and supervisor. The township administrator model offers solutions to all of these problems. The other model does not.