

RICHLAND COUNTY CHAPTER 980 COMMITTEE

January 22, 2020

A meeting of the Richland County Chapter 980 Committee was held at 8:30 a.m. on January 22, 2020 in the Main Conference Room of the Community Services Building, 221 West Seminary Street, Richland Center, Wisconsin.

Members Present: Tracy Thorsen, Mike Bindl, Lynn Newkirk, Benjamin Southwick, Mary Collins Johnsrud and Scott Timm.

Others Present: Meghan Rohn.

Approve Agenda and Posting: Motion by Benjamin Southwick, seconded by Scott Timm to approve the agenda and proper posting. Motion carried.

Approve August 6, 2019 Richland County Chapter 980 Committee Minutes: Tracy Thorsen declared the August 6, 2019 Richland County Chapter 980 Committee Minutes adopted.

Consideration of Housing Options for Impending Release of Sex Offender Richard Sugden: A court hearing taking place on January 14, 2020, resulted in the court ordering Richland County to identify another residential option for placement for Mr. Sugden, siting safety needs of the community associated with the placement established by Richland County located at the Balsley Lane address, and ordered placement be found within 60 days. As a result, The Richland County Chapter 980 Committee has been reconvened. Tracy Thorsen reported she has also gone forward and already started the process of placing rental advertisements in the local Shopping News and on the County's Website.

Scott Timm reviewed information he was able to obtain from the hearing. It was explained that it was the assessment of Judge Rood that a single mother living in such close proximity to Mr. Sugden compounded by the fact that it was determined a previous victim also lived within one mile of the property, equated to safety concerns to the community. Scott Timm noted the decision was not necessarily the result of the proximity to children. No direction was given by Judge Rood regarding how the County is to move forward with regards to this placement other than the 60-day requirement. Benjamin Southwick will obtain a copy of the order.

Discussion was held regarding the efforts made to identify the first location, and the difficulty doing so. It was noted this placement has now become much more public, which is sure to only make the process more challenging. Scott Timm added that he has spoken with the landlord of the property located on Balsley Lane, and noted they are receiving an overwhelming amount of negative feedback. Scott Timm noted there is typically a response from the community when these placements are made, however when there is backing from the court for the placement to occur people usually come to accept it and things return to normal. Now that the court has ruled against this placement, the dynamic with the community may be different. Discussion also was held regarding the large amount of incorrect information that was reported in the papers.

The initial visit made to the property by law enforcement was reviewed. It was discussed that the visit was brief and the report stated that the property did not violate any of the restrictions outlined within a half mile of the property. Discussion was held regarding inviting a member of the Sheriff's Department to sit on the committee. It was noted that this invitation was extended in the past. Motion by Benjamin Southwick, seconded by Scott Timm to invite Lieutenant Toby Johnson to attend the Richland County Chapter 980 Committee. Motion carried.

Efforts on how the committee can move forward in establishing a new placement were discussed. Benjamin Southwick explained he has spoken with a man by the name of Dan Berns who is aware of several vacant homes in rural settings that may meet the necessary requirements. Mr. Berns expressed that he may be interested in purchasing one of the homes and entering into a rental agreement depending on the terms. It was determined that Benjamin Southwick would follow up with Mr. Berns, request that he identify the properties, and Mr. Southwick would send the addresses to Lynn Newkirk for review.

Scott Timm reviewed some of the requirements of the of property and it will need to be ensured that GPS will work on whatever property is chosen. Given the recent decision by the court, the committee should also be aware of the proximity to adult females. Discussion was held regarding the reality that the property chosen will most likely need to be fairly isolated. Mike Bindle questioned if there were any restrictions regarding response time to the property and Scott Timm confirmed there were not and noted the only other official restrictions are that the house must be 1500 ft. from any school premises, child care facility, public park, place of worship, or youth center.

Lynn Newkirk questioned if any department in the County is currently doing mailings to property owners in which an advertisement could be included. There were not any known at this time, however this should be kept in mind should the opportunity arises in the future. Tracy Thorsen will send out an email to all local town clerks, as was done previously, letting them know of our search to see if they are aware of any potential properties. Discussion was also held regarding continuing to monitoring real-estate listings for properties for sale or for rent. Tracy Thorsen noted she will continue to check these listings and Scott Timm noted he would send her an updated list of vendors in the event that a potential property is identified.

Discussion was also held regarding a mobile home park in which Richland County has recently taken ownership of. It is believed the property currently has 4 or 5 occupied trailers and a vacant home on it, however it is the believe of Benjamin Southwick that these occupants would potentially be evicted at some point if the county chose to sell the property. If the County made the decision to not sell the property it could be used to house 980 individuals and the County would enter into a lease agreement. The property could then be sold if the need to house 980 individuals was no longer present. The Building and Grounds Committee would most likely need to be involved with the decision. It was determined that Benjamin Southwick would speak to the County Board Chair to determine how to further investigate this option.

Scott Timm emphasized that all of the Counties are facing similar struggles when attempting to find these types of placements. The Governor recently declined to sign legislation that would have removed the 1500 ft. restriction and, in essence, leave it to the discretion of the local community regarding where these individuals were placed. Discussion was held regarding the idea of giving local communities more flexibility with the location of these placements could potentially be helpful, for example while it may be closer to a house of worship, it may also be closer to a law enforcement agency. Scott Timm added that while this particular piece of legislation was not approved work is still being done to make revisions to the current legislation.

It was determined the next meeting will be held February 5th, 2020 at 8:30a.m. Benjamin Southwick and Scott Timm will need to attend via phone. If there is a development that warrants action sooner a meeting will be called.

Adjourn: Motion by Benjamin Southwick, seconded by Scott Timm to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Meghan Rohn

Confidential Administrative Secretary