

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ELECTORS OF THE  
TOWN OF CUNNINGHAM  
Tuesday, April 9, 2019

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The Annual Meeting of the Town of Cunningham was held at 6:00 p.m. April 9, 2019, in the Urbana City Council Chambers, 400 S. Vine Street, Urbana, IL.

**1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 6:06 p.m. by Cunningham Town Clerk, Charles A. Smyth. **Elected Officials present:** Danielle Chynoweth, Supervisor, Assessor Wayne Williams. **Staff present:** Cunningham Town Clerk, Charles A. Smyth. **Electors present:** Diane Marlin, Tomas Delgado, A-Hakeem Salaam, Tracy Satterthwaite, Allan Axelrod, Jeannie Covert, Khiren Johnson, John Marlin, Melissa Stone, Bill Brown, Esther Patt, Cope Cumpston, David Smith, Traci Barkley, Jared Miller, Jason Milton, and James Corben. **Other members of the public present:** Tanmaysingh Ragput, Willie Barry, Juva Barry, Emily Rodriquez, Sage Johnson, Carl Hardman, Jena Manning.

**2. Approval of the Minutes**

Town Clerk Smyth called for the approval of the minutes of the April 10, 2018 Annual Town Meeting. Elector Miller moved approval and Elector Williams seconded. With no corrections noted, the minutes were approved by unanimous voice vote.

**3. Election of Moderator**

Town Clerk Smyth called for the election of a moderator from among the electors. Elector Williams nominated Tomas Delgado for Moderator, seconded by Elector Patt. No other nominations followed. Elector Delgado accepted the nomination and the motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

**4. Oath of Moderator**

Moderator Delgado was sworn in by Town Clerk Smyth.

**5. Public Participation**

Moderator Delgado opened the floor for public participation. There was none.

**6. Annual Financial Statement (FY 2017-18) and Long Term Financial Planning for the Township**

Moderator Delgado recognized Supervisor Chynoweth. Supervisor Chynoweth presented a report of statistics and financial history of Cunningham Township. She invited the public to help themselves to food and refreshment provided indicating that she would introduce staff as she spoke. She provided a brief description of Township government, the context of the meeting, and noted that Cunningham Township was created in 1928 specifically for the City of Urbana. It has two functions: to serve as the last safety net for the poorest of the poor, and to provide independent and fair property tax assessment. She provided the Township Office address across from the Urbana Free Library.

She presented the current status of the General Assistance Fund stating that the financial reports, audits, and budgets are available in the offices of the Supervisor and Clerk's office and copies of some materials were present in the back of the room.

Supervisor Chynoweth proceeded to describe spending tax monies to address the roots of poverty: employment, distribution, and discrimination, noting that Urbana has a human rights officer to monitor issues of discrimination. She then provided statistics comparing poverty in comparable communities including Champaign noting various similarities and differences with only West Lafayette poorer at 41% vs 34% in Urbana. Urbana has more children in poverty than W. Lafayette. She attributed part of the issue to housing rental costs and explained how people can be Rent Burdened. She also provided local versus national eviction rates.

Supervisor Chynoweth noted that both cities have eviction prevention programs along with county so success of the program can be followed. This centralized intake for the homeless had 2800 calls this past year with 250 households assessed. There is a spike in homelessness locally and the shelter occupancy rate has gone up recently with 650 children now registered as homeless. There is no same day shelter for women with children

She described the office's response to poverty with 5 FTE staff equivalents in the office. She introduced staff, volunteers, and interns, some of them present. She proceeded to list and describe the programs offered and note needs not being addressed: General Assistance, Homeless Assistance, Social Service Grants. She defined General Assistance and provided caseload statistics for the past 20 years noting the variation. The office is aiming for 100-110 cases monthly.

Homeless Assistance was described, participation requirements listed, and has been provided for 16 program months so far. They are looking to combine across programs at county level. Statistics were provided and it was noted that they are over budget to date.

Social Service Grants, in conjunction with the City of Urbana are grants to non-profits serving low income residents in Urbana. This year, 21 agencies are receiving support. A new round of grants will occur with the budget process.

Supervisor Chynoweth described other programs provided by the office including advocacy, SOAR, a Shelter Design Team, an Internship and Volunteer program, as well as the Township Garden, Greens on Green. The garden is used to grow produce and give it away. They receive starts from Sola Gratia Farm and acknowledged them and Blue Moon Farm for assistance.

Supervisor Chynoweth described the tax monies received via levy (\$1,139,309) stating that we have a big impact for this small amount. The total income is \$1.23M taking into account social security reimbursement, interest, and angel donors). She pointed out the financial issues ahead listing 7 issues and speaking to each. These include past reduction of levy, GA assistance greater than the levy, tax caps, homeless assistance, Homeless assistance outpacing budget, Social Service funding, and past surplus/savings allows space to plan for the future. She described ways they are looking to save on expenses. Questions and discussion followed.

Emily Rodriguez asked about the poverty statistics and whether those include the University of Illinois. Supervisor Chynoweth described how the numbers were adjusted by removing 18-25 year olds in calculations and she further explained the table in the report.

Susan Parenti addressed the extent of poverty described in the reported. She noted a sense in Urbana is that we are not a poor community and wondered about what that leads to and how to address this fact? Ms. Chynoweth provided a description of the community and her opinion on roots of the problem, needed economic development, needed social services, and housing issues. She noted that nationally only 1 in 3 getting housing subsidy.

Esther Patt spoke to encourage people to reframe the discussion of poverty stating that the challenge is to address lifting the poor out of poverty. She noted that less than 1 out 5 get housing subsidies. She also noted that in our community affordable housing is for households with income of \$30K and over. Those with really low incomes receive a voucher from Housing Authority and what we need are rent subsidies.

Jeannie Covert introduced herself as a landlord and asked that if landlords are to be part of the process of addressing issues raised and if so, how will those landlords be reached. Ms. Chynoweth said that she is speaking with the associations and agencies and that outreach to landlords starting up. She also noted that the Township Office is working with the Tenant Union's low cost housing lists, watching rental lists, and working with individual landlords daily. Ms. Covert wondered how many landlords out there really know the need. Ms. Chynoweth also noted working with the Housing Authority and would like to have a Housing Summit to look at data.

Sage Johnson compared GA caseload to inflation rates. Supervisor Chynoweth further described the caseload graph as cases GA since Fiscal Year 97 and noted a need to have wages keep up with inflation. Allen Axelrod noted that as someone who has had 3 neighbors move out due to affordability issues has seen firsthand how effective the Township Office is at helping. He further stated that we need to protect those in precarious positions.

Assessor Wayne Williams provided a description and update on the Assessor's Office. He defined the office noting the duty to assess property accurately and fairly. He described 3 approaches to determining value and how the result should hit 33.3% of market value. He noted that the office is currently achieving 32.91%. Mr. Williams described the Coefficient of Dispersion as used in the Assessor's office noting that it is currently at 19.47% but guidelines are 15% (overall). He further distinguished between commercial and residential noting that residential is at 15.14% but commercial is 24.15% so this is needing to be fixed over time. He finished his presentation noting updated technology, that they are looking at factoring commercial properties, and that long term, they will need to change the way we value properties. He introduced several staff members and noted pamphlets available at the back of the room.

## **7. Time and Place of the Next Annual Town Meeting**

Moderator Delgado proposed that the time and place of the next annual Town Meeting be tentatively set for April 14, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. in the Urbana City Council Chambers. Clerk Smyth noted that by law the Annual Meeting could begin no earlier than 6pm and that 7pm would be allowable. Elector Patt moved to accept the date of April 14, 2020 and time of 6 pm, seconded by Elector Williams. The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote. The tentative date will be presented to the Board of Trustees for final approval.

## **8. Adjournment**

With no further business, the Annual Town Meeting was adjourned by Moderator Delgado at 7:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles A. Smyth  
Cunningham Town Clerk

**Approved:** April 13, 2021

This meeting was video recorded: <https://www.urbanaininois.us/node/7913>