

Hiawatha City Commission addresses KOMA violation

(KNZA)--The Hiawatha City Commission Monday evening addressed the recent finding that several commission members had violated the Kansas Open Meetings Act, and approved a consent agreement.

An extensive investigation by the Brown County Attorney's Office, through the independent assistance of the Atchison Police Department, found that Mayor Bill Collins, Commissioner Brian Shefferd and Commissioner Evans Woelecke had violated the Open Meetings Act. All three voted to terminate former Police Chief John Defore at the commission's December 27 meeting without warning.

As part of the consent agreement, each commissioner must complete training regarding the requirements of the Kansas Opening Meetings Act and the city pay a \$500 civil penalty.

Former city commissioner Toni Hull told commissioners she does not want the taxpayers to have to foot any of the bill for KOMA violation and the subsequent investigation. Instead, she said she felt the mayor and two commissioners found in violation should pay the penalty. In addition, she voiced her concerns over the termination of Defore.

Following Hull's comments, Commissioner Shefferd said he would gladly donate the \$500 for the fine. Commissioner Woelecke, prior to the meeting's end, apologized for his part in the violation and said he would also help pay the fine.

Commissioner Becky Shamburg said while she would vote to approve the consent agreement, she does not appreciate having to take hours of training due to the actions of others. She also commented that since December the city has lost five vital employees. Shamburg said she thinks its time the commission takes a step back and looks in the mirror when trying to figure out why the city is losing important people. She added its not the commission's job to micro-manage city employees.

Prior to those comments from his fellow Commissioners, Shefferd said he had no statement to make during the Commissioner's comment section; however, following their statements, he shared website statistics showing that property crime has been disproportionately high in Hiawatha, defending his position that a change was needed in the Police Department.

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