9:00 A.M. OR IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE LAW & GOVERNMENT/LIQUOR COMMITTEE

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Member Tom Wilbeck led the County Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. INTRODUCTORY ROLL CALL

Meeting called to order at: 9:02 AM by Chairman Jack D Franks.

ABSENT: Christensen, Skala, Yensen

Nineteen members were present, with Jim Kearns attending remotely.

John Jung entered the room at 9:04 a.m., shortly after attendance was taken, bringing the number to 20. Absent were Paula Yensen, Suzanne Ness, Chris Christensen and Mike Skala.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

Woodstock resident Wendy Piersall spoke during Public Comment and read a statement on behalf of Yensen, who supports eliminating mileage and insurance benefits for County Board members, especially because part-time county employees do not qualify for insurance benefits.

5. NEW BUSINESS

1. Continued Discussion on County Board Member Health Insurance and Mileage Reimbursement

Chairman Jack Franks told the board that mileage will be discussed first, followed by insurance, and opens the floor to discussion.

Michael Vijuk told members that mileage reimbursement is likely a holdover from the old days when County Board members were paid a per diem rather than a salary, and said board members should not receive mileage for commuting to regular meetings when county employees do not receive mileage for commuting to work. Kelli Wegener agreed, and said the County Board, which has asked every other department to cut expenses, must now be role models and lead by example.

Wilbeck said the $17,000 a year budgeted for mileage is minimal, is proper because board members do not have on-site offices, and called the motives behind the move disingenuous. Pam Althoff asked whether the ban applies to out-of-county functions, and Wegener answered the ban only applies to regular meetings.
Carolyn Schofield, who serves on two regular and three ad-hoc committees, plus the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, said that the County Board has to have a larger conversation on compensation, and Lori Parrish agreed. Robert Nowak and John Reinert spoke against eliminating mileage. Joe Gottemoller argued that being a County Board member is not a part-time job, and that the matter should return to committee because changing compensation “piecemeal” is the wrong way to do it.

Suzanne Ness arrived to the meeting at 9:40.

Wheeler concurred that County Board members are full-time, that it’s getting harder to find good people to run, and that members’ workloads will increase further in 2022 when the size of the board decreases to 18 members. Kay Bates, who said she stopped taking the insurance back in November, said she will be voting in favor of both resolutions, but wants an ad-hoc committee convened to review County Board compensation in total.

The board began discussing the insurance elimination resolution at 9:50 a.m. Vijuk said that County Board members are part-time legislators, and that most people on boards, commissions, and elected to other units of government receive no compensation at all. He supports allowing part-time county employees to be allowed to obtain insurance if County Board members do. Wegener said many of her constituents get angry when they learn that board members get health insurance. She said County Board members ran for office to make a difference, and not for benefits, and added that the $500,000 could be better spent on services.

Wilbeck said County Board pay hasn’t increased in seven years, and that adequate compensation is needed to attract and keep good people. He called it disingenuous that some of the people calling for the elimination of the perks receive public sector pensions. Jeff Thorsen agreed with previous speakers that being a County Board member is not a part-time job, and said he is “on the bubble” regarding his vote, and said that County Board members are compensated on the low end of the scale.

Mary McCann agreed with previous speakers against the resolutions, and said she was unimpressed with Vijuk’s and Wegener’s arguments, pointing out that both have served for only about a year and don’t have the perspective that longer-serving members have. Chairman Franks criticized the statement as insulting, and pointed out that new people bring new ideas.

Ness said that board members are not employees but elected leaders, and that the real discussion needs to take place with the people who elected them. She said she hoped that things don’t become personal for members who take the insurance, and noted that people’s life circumstances can change.

Parrish praised the board for having a good conversation and a professional meeting, and hoped the question would not devolve into a partisan political issue.

Chairman Franks said that County Board compensation with insurance and mileage is near the top compared to other counties on a per-capita basis of how many people each member represents, and that further reducing the County Board’s size should be part of any conversation regarding future compensation.

Nowak said the salaries of all county elected officials need to be examined at once, and said he ran for office not because of the benefits, but because he loves McHenry County. Wegener closed by saying she was offended by McCann’s comment that she was too new, and said it was inappropriate for some members to bring up the fact that one supporter has a public pension, arguing it has no bearing on the issue of County Board compensation.

Chairman Franks said both resolutions would go back to committee.
6. OTHER
None.

7. EXECUTIVE SESSION
None.

8. MOTION TO ADJOURN
The meeting adjourned at 11:06 a.m., with Parrish moving and Thorsen seconding.

Full Comments on the above agenda items are included in the audio recording of this meeting, which can be found on the McHenry County Meeting Portal.