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Recall targets resign

Grosse Pointe Shores

by Brad Lindberg

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Two of four councilmen being recalled in Grosse Pointe Shores have resigned.

The mayor, also being recalled, wants the remaining council members and himself to agree by the next council meeting, March 16, on replacements to serve out the vacated terms ending November 2011.

Resignations at the Feb. 16 city council meeting by Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Brian Hunt and Councilman Fred Minturn came a week after Wayne County election officials certified petitions for a May 4 recall election.

Recall targets had until Thursday, Feb. 18, to challenge the certification.

Hunt, a dentist and 10-year veteran of the council, did not attend the council meeting. He resigned by letter. He wrote that he'd decided months ago that the February 2009 election, which included rechartering the village as a city, would be his last.

"I wanted to assist with the transition to a city," he wrote.

He cited rancor and the recall drive as contributing to his decision to step down.

"There is a group of residents that want to take Grosse Pointe Shores in a direction that I, with good conscious, cannot take it," Hunt wrote. "I urge residents to ... end the acrimony and distortions that are hurting the image of Grosse Pointe Shores. You may have an issue with the council, but the method you are choosing to resolve it damages the image of our city."

Minturn, an auto industry executive and councilman since 2002, said his resignation was in the best interests of himself and the city.

"I should be spending more time with my family as we battle cancer," he said. "This is right for Grosse Pointe Shores if it helps calm the strife that has divided our village this past year."

Minturn said he's not resigning as a trustee of the Grosse Pointe Board of Education.

Recall organizer Dr. Robert Lee, a cardiovascular surgeon, saw the resignations as calculated to circumvent the recall.

"By resigning now, they're giving their cronies on the council the opportunity to appoint somebody for the full duration of their term," Lee said. "It's troublesome that they're using this window of opportunity to resign."

Replacements will be chosen by Mayor Dr. James Cooper, a dentist, and a majority of the remaining council. Those officials consist of Victoria Boyce and Robert Graziani, both being recalled; and Ted Kedzierski and Dan Schulte, elected last February and not being recalled.

Schulte recommended that the appointments be made by unanimous decision.

"There was discussion about division in the community and council," Schulte said. "Anything less than a

unanimous appointment is going to result in even more division.”

Lee organized the recall against officials who voted last year for a 1–mill tax increase. He’s also criticized Shores officeholders for operating without transparency.

He said the appointees should serve only until the May recall election.

“What’s the threat to let voters go to the polls in May and have a say?” he said.

“Anybody appointed to the vacancies would serve to the remainder of those terms,” said Mark McInerney, city attorney, referring to the charter. “All terms on this council end in November 2011.”

Thereafter, council terms are staggered.

“In 2011 we have an election,” McInerney said. “The first three (top vote–getters) get four–year terms. The next three get two–year terms.”

Cooper accepted the resignations with regret.

“For almost 10 years, Brian has served this community with integrity and dedication,” Cooper said about Hunt.

Cooper said to Minturn, “No one can ever say you didn’t give 100 percent of yourself. Grosse Pointe Shores will miss your financial expertise.”

Resident Dr. Bryan Lane criticized the recall drive.

He called Hunt’s resignation “one fallout already from this recall stuff. My message is simple: be careful what you wish for. We’ve got a good thing going with these people.”

Graziani called for an end of “repetitive criticisms and finger pointing.”

“Now more than ever,” he said, “we must band together to address practical solutions to concerns and issues facing our community.”

Cooper appointed Kedzierski, a CPA, to fill Hunt’s seat as mayor pro tem and chair of the committee of the whole.

Residents wishing to fill the empty terms should submit resumes to City Manager Brian Vick “as soon as possible,” Cooper said.