

Grosse Pointe Times (MI)

Shores one step closer to recall election Recall petitions submitted to county for review

K. MICHELLE MORAN C & G Staff Writer
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GROSSE POINTE SHORES - Only a year and a month after they were sworn into office last April 1, voters could decide to remove the mayor and the majority of the City Council. This May, Shores voters could be deciding whether to recall the officials they elected last year to lead the newly minted city. On Jan. 19, recall organizers announced that they'd collected more than 500 recall petition signatures against all of the candidates in question. Chief recall organizer Dr. Robert E. Lee, a one-time council candidate, said that number is well above the required minimum of 394 signatures, leaving he and the other recall supporters confident the petitions will withstand the anticipated signature challenges. Lee said the petitions were submitted Jan. 19 to the Wayne County elections office.

The recall targets Mayor James Cooper and City Council members Vicki Boyce, Robert Graziani, Brian Hunt and Fred Minturn, who approved a 1-mill tax increase in June 2009 for the 2009-10 fiscal year. City Council members Ted Kedzierski and Daniel Schulte - who were elected to the council for the first time in February 2009 - voted against the tax increase and the 2009-10 Shores budget, so they're not included in the recall. According to Lee, the number of signatures collected for each individual ranged from 515 for Hunt to 545 for Cooper. In many cases, Lee said, the number of signatures on the recall petition exceeded the number of votes the officials received last February. He said he and about 30 other individuals collected petition signatures.

While the recall started over the millage hike, Lee said it's now about other issues, as well. ***"It's a behavioral issue, a lack of long-term planning (and) duping the citizenry,"*** Lee charged. ***"People want fiscal responsibility (and) transparent government that treats people with respect."***

John Booth, a recall supporter and vocal critic of the way the council has handled its finances, said officials have to come up with a new way of doing business to save the amount of money necessary to maintain the Shores. ***"We need some really creative solutions. ... This council has got to get active,"*** Booth said. ***"They have to do something."***

Recall targets dispute these charges.

"I am disappointed that a vocal minority has been able to influence enough residents with misinformation and manipulation of the facts," Cooper said. "The city will have to spend even more money and time because of them. This is a wakeup call to all residents to make a stand against those who would attempt to take over Grosse Pointe Shores."

Minturn said the recall points to a need for officials to find better ways of sharing information about what they're doing in response to these challenging times. Officials and administrators have been looking for ways to save money across the board. ***"The core recall group is obviously well-organized,"*** Minturn said. ***"They should certainly be recognized for all their hard work. I must admit, I didn't expect that number of people in Grosse Pointe Shores would sign on to recall five recently elected fellow residents and neighbors. I don't recognize the names on the petition as people I know personally or as those who have always supported me in the past. That tells me that we need to do a much better job of communicating to all of our residents about the things taking place and our future plans for maintaining the excellence of our community. I am serious when I say, 'Thank you to all the good people who signed the petitions, for making me aware of your concerns, your passion and your desire to continue having Grosse Pointe Shores be held to the highest possible standards.'"***

Boyce, Graziani and Hunt could not be reached before press time for comment. The officials targeted by the recall have 30 days to challenge petition signatures. Challenges must be issued in writing and include a reason for the challenge, according to the Michigan Secretary of State's Office.

Should the recall succeed, there's some question as to who would govern the Shores, since the remaining council members - Schulte and Kedzierski - wouldn't be enough to constitute a quorum to appoint successors to serve until the next election.

In the case of township boards, Michigan election law is fairly clear. If one or more elected offices are vacated, resulting in a board that doesn't meet quorum requirements, state law says, ***"The board of county election commissioners shall make temporary appointment of the number of members required to constitute a quorum for the transaction of business by the township board."*** These appointments are valid until a successor or successors are elected or appointed.

It's less apparent what the protocol for cities should be in the event of a majority recall. State law seems to suggest that the governor might appoint the interim officials. The law reads: "*Where power to fill a vacancy by appointment exists, then in such case such office shall be filled in the same manner by temporary appointment until a successor shall be duly elected and qualified as herein provided; otherwise, the governor of the state may fill such vacancy until said recalled officer's successor is elected and qualified.*"

As to who might run for office in the event of a special election if the recall succeeds, Lee said don't look for his name on the ballot.

"I'm content with my current role as a citizen trying to hold elected officers accountable," Lee said.

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