

9/4/2005

Shores councilwoman under fire for lecturing Eastpointe on failed millage

Shores officials want transcript, video of comments.

By Mitch Hotts Macomb Daily Staff Writer

The St. Clair Shores City Council may censure a councilwoman who has come under fire for addressing the council in neighboring Eastpointe on that city's failed millage election.

St. Clair Shores Councilwoman Erin Stahl appeared before the Eastpointe City Council on Aug. 16 to publicly address a 7 mill tax increase that Eastpointe voters rejected in the primary election earlier that month.

Some members of the Eastpointe council felt her comments were inappropriate since elected officials generally restrict their comments to their own community.

"In my view, what she did was outside the line of professional conduct for elected officials," said Eastpointe Councilman Ron Selvidge. "I'm open to hearing advice from someone who has a vested interest in our community, not from someone as inexperienced as she is."

Stahl, a Libertarian, is known as a critic of her own council and its spending practices. She opposed a police-fire millage in St. Clair Shores a few years ago that voters turned down.

Stahl said she spoke in Eastpointe in part to support Councilman James Collins, who has been the lone vote in his city against the public safety tax. She said elected officials have a duty to question the spending of tax dollars even if their views are unpopular.

"I was standing up for Councilman Collins because when I went through the same exact thing in St. Clair Shores, no one stood up for me," Stahl said. "My character was attacked and my knowledge was attacked all because I said there is no accountability for the funds when it goes into the general fund."

At the Eastpointe meeting, Stahl suggested the council dedicate a tax solely for public safety instead of drawing money from the general fund. She also spoke about a "little secret" that politicians use in scheduling tax votes for primary elections when fewer voters are likely to show up at the polls.

Robert Soulliere, a member of the Shores council since 1993, said council members want a videotape or transcript of the meeting before their next meeting Monday. He said it's possible the council may vote to censure Stahl.

The council can censure Stahl but can't remove her from office. A censure is a strong public criticism.

"I've been getting an earful from people about what she did in Eastpointe," Soulliere said. "I know most of our council people are unhappy about this. I guess (Stahl) doesn't believe anyone when it comes to money for police and fire."

Stahl, who once protested a tax assessment against her home while dressed in a black-and white jail uniform, was elected to the St. Clair Shores City Council in 2003.

Stahl said a censure will not stop her from speaking her mind when it comes to public finances.

"If they want to censure me as an American speaking on behalf of the taxpayers, shame on them. I have to look my family and my supporters in the eye and know that I did what I felt was best for the community," she said.