

Strategic Planning Committee

Bill Hefferan, Chair

Bryan Smith

Laura Stanek

Minutes October 31, 2016

Members present: Bill Hefferan, Bryan Smith, Sherry Comben, Sheryl Guy
Members absent: Judy Parliament, Laura Stanek
Others present: Pete Garwood, Janet Koch

1. The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m.

2. Approval of Minutes

It was noted that 2) should be “as corrected,” not “as presented.”

Motion by Sherry Comben, seconded by Sheryl Guy, to approve the minutes of the October 18 meeting as corrected. Motion carried – unanimous.

3. Communication Training

Becky Garland from Conflict Resolution Services (CRS) of Traverse City, said CRS had been in business 25 years ago and had started as a community dispute center and had expanded into assisting with communications training.

Ms. Garland asked what help the Committee was requesting. Bryan Smith, County Commissioner, said recent strategic planning sessions had identified communication between the Board of Commissioners and the elected and appointed department heads as a priority issue. Sherry Comben, County Treasurer, said not all department heads felt valued by the commissioners. She added that the negative dynamics between commissioners trickle down to department heads and employees.

Ms. Garland asked if there was an existing communication process between commissioners and department heads and was told it was not a formal process. Pete Garwood, County Administrator, said he'd been asked by the committee to create communication flow charts, which he had brought to the meeting (**see attached pgs. 4-7**). He said there was some feeling among department heads that the rules for some were different than the rules for others.

There can be formal or informal flow of communication between dept. heads and commissioners, Ms. Garland said. The problem with an informal flow is that there are too many sides to any given story. Ms. Garland recommended that the Committee make a decision regarding what type of communication needed to be established.

Mr. Smith said relationships between the commissioners and department heads should be informal, but county-related issues should be communicated through the chain of command. He said commissioners should not be micro-managing. Ms. Garland said the organization has to determine the desired flow of communication, and decide where it needed to go. She added that that hardest part would be eliminating any existing informal communication channels.

It was noted that on January 1, 2107, the longest-serving commissioners will each have 6 years of experience serving on the board. Mr. Hefferan said in addition to the relative inexperience of the board, there have been other significant organizational changes in last few years.

Ms. Garland asked how structured and formal did the Committee want the County's communication to be? She said in government there are a lot of people with a lot of opinions and that the people on the ends are typically the loudest. Confirmation statements can be used to expand communication.

Ms. Garland said complaints are sometimes more about just being heard. In mediation, she said there is "uninterrupted time" for each party to speak which requires that both parties listen and not speak. Ms. Garland acknowledged that perhaps they are not truly hearing, but they are listening in at least a perfunctory manner and this can lead to change.

Sheryl Guy, County Clerk, agreed there should be a structure to communication, adding that the structure should be easy and uncomplicated and not a burden to follow. Ms. Garland said the intent of a chain of command isn't to stifle personal relationships with commissioners; however, with departmental issues, established processes should be followed.

Ms. Comben approved the idea of communication flow charts. Mr. Smith anticipated that flow charts could lead to less micro-managing. Ms. Garland suggested that communication flow charts include a reference to email. Janet Koch, Associate Planner, noted that not all county employees have email addresses.

Ms. Garland said it seemed as if the Committee had a good feeling for what needed to be done. She indicated that a successful new flow of communication will depend on buy-in from department heads, commissioners, and employees. Ms. Garland recommended allowing employee input into the communication flow discussions.

Mr. Smith noted that employee buy-in might be encouraged by saying the recommended flow was a result of the strategic planning process. Mr. Hefferan reminded the Committee that their task was to improve communication between department heads and commissioners. Mr. Garwood said the committee's recommendations could include working toward employee buy-in.

Ms. Garland said many of the suggested changes would be mindset changes. She added that there is no such thing as a happy medium. She said that though you have to identify the agitators and address their issues, the agitators don't have to be the complete focus.

Possible training sessions available through CRS were described, such as listening training, conflict resolution training & team building training. Ms. Garland said team-building training is primarily learning about each other. When you learn something about people, you have a new understanding and perhaps a sympathy with them. She said this isn't hard to teach, but it's hard to learn, and even harder to practice. Ms. Garland said she would work to provide a proposal regarding training by the next meeting.

4. Leadership Definition

Mr. Hefferan indicated he had asked for the definitions as previous committee discussions had started to lean toward leadership training and he'd wanted the Committee to agree on a definition prior to considering any type of leadership training. However, as the Committee's focus seemed to be shifting away from that type of training, he thought it would be appropriate to set aside the definition of leadership. Ms. Guy noted that the Committee hadn't had the opportunity to hear from Laura Stanek regarding the issue.

It was agreed that the definition of leadership would be included during the next meeting.

5. Communication – Flow Charts

Ms. Comben briefly described the recent department head meeting discussion regarding the organizational chart, which had been placed on the County's website on October 17. Mr. Garwood and Ms. Comben said a good solution to including MSU Extension would be to create a second flow chart that showed relationships between the board, committees, commissions, and other agencies. It was agreed that the existing organizational chart should have a new title noting that it was only showing the lines of supervision.

The Committee discussed combining Mr. Garwood's communication flow charts into one document. One line could end in "Refer to the Purchasing Policy," or "Refer to the Harassment Policy."

The Committee discussed a term of reference for elected and appointed department heads. It was noted that some supervisors are not department heads, and that not all department heads have employees. Ms. Comben said the Board didn't have the statutory authority to tell elected officials what to do, but they could recommend a flow of communication. The Committee discussed adding a line between commissioners and elected dept. heads; Mr. Smith said that could leave the County Administrator out of the communication loop.

Ms. Koch said she will begin working on a one-page flow chart and email it to the Committee for comment before the next meeting.

6. Recommendation Formulation (Beginning)

Mr. Hefferan said the Committee's goal was to write up recommendations to the Board on how to improve communications. The recommendations should include time frames. He said he was cautiously optimistic that CRS will have a training recommendation by the next Committee meeting. Other Committee recommendations would be specific improvements to commissioner training, the organizational charts (both supervisory and inter-organization), and implementation of the communication charts.

Mr. Hefferan said he was looking forward to hearing a response from the Board on the Committee's recommendations; and that it was possible that the Committee would be given a new directive.

Ms. Koch said she will not be attending the next meeting, but that she believed the best decisions were made when various points of view were heard and discussed reasonably, which requires listening and positive relationships.

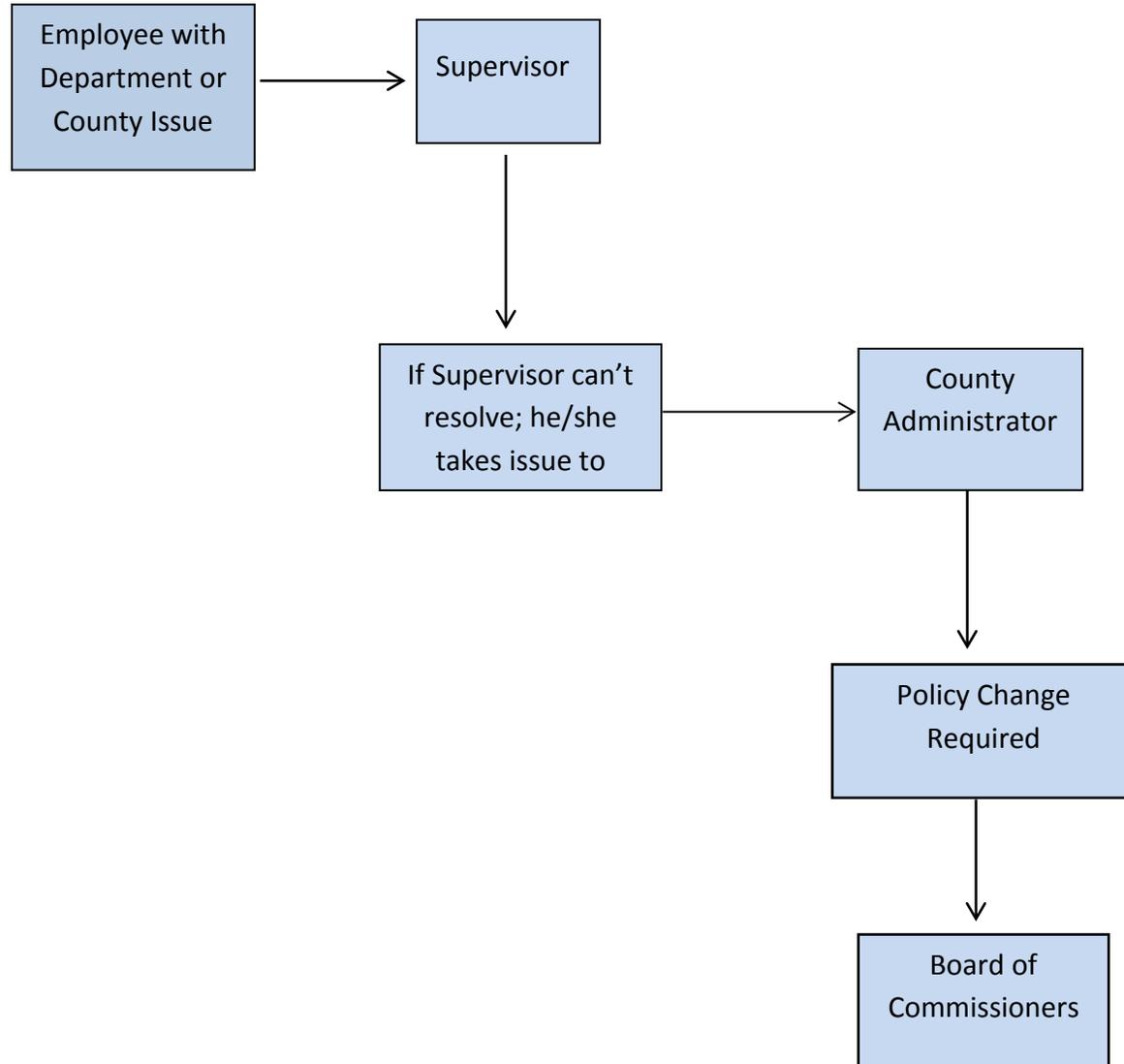
7. Various Matters

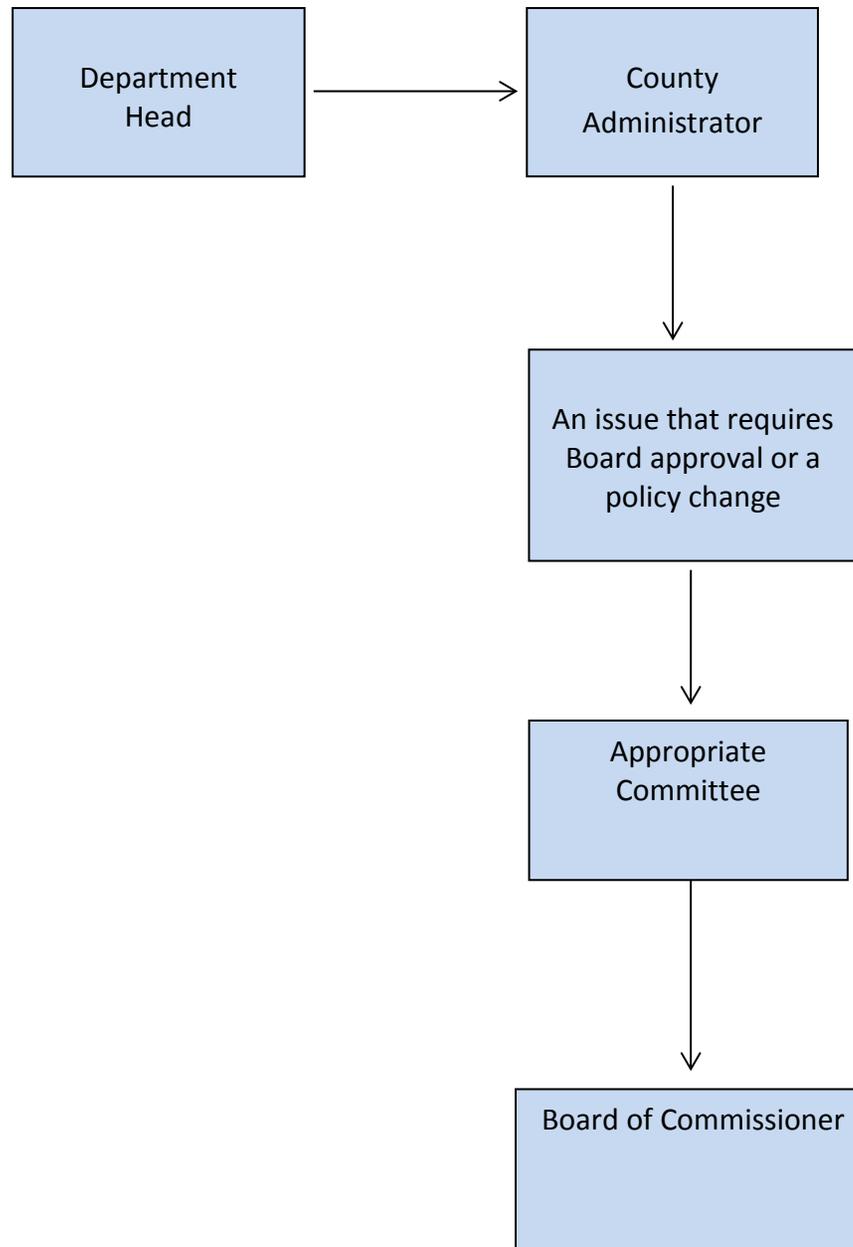
It was noted that the Telephone Paging Policy would be discussed by the Administration Committee at their meeting of November 3.

The next Strategic Planning Committee meeting was scheduled for November 16, 2016.

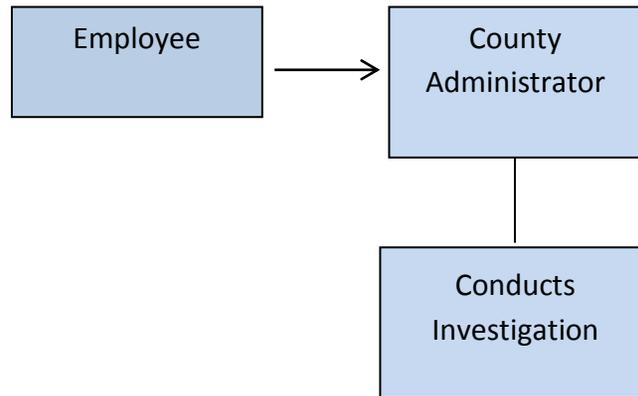
**Motion by Bill Hefferan, seconded by Bryan Smith, to adjourn the meeting.
Motion carried – unanimous.**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:53 a.m.

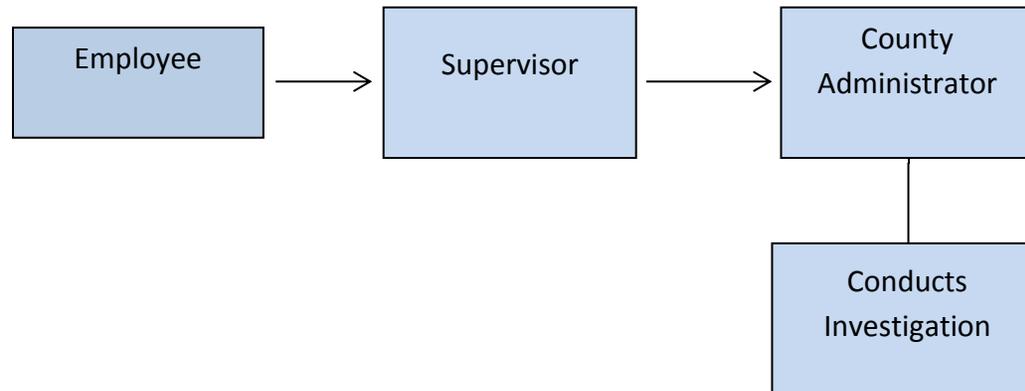




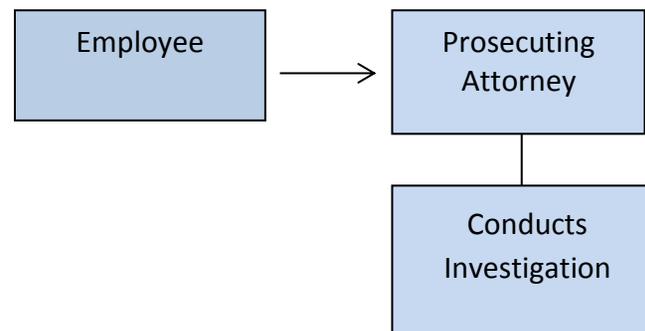
Employee who is harassed by Supervisor



Employee to Employee Harassment



Administrator or County Commissioner Harassment



Commissioner Questions

