

Former assessor, wife accused of malfeasance

State auditor's report says Anthony and Tiffany Rogers used their positions to purchase property that should have been foreclosed

By Brandon Macz of the Tribune

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A report released by the Washington state auditor's office Wednesday alleges the former Asotin County assessor and the chief deputy treasurer abused their positions for personal financial gain while costing the county money.

According to the report, Anthony Rogers used his position as county assessor to purchase property from an owner who was more than four years' delinquent on property taxes. Rogers resigned from his elected position Monday, citing health reasons.

Rather than foreclosing the property after 3 1/2 years, which the county is required to do by state law, the report states Rogers and his wife, Tiffany Rogers, paid the delinquent \$1,301.88 in taxes and the landowner transferred ownership to them through a quitclaim deed.

"I knew the person personally," Rogers said in a phone interview Wednesday. "His wife was sick and he called me and asked if I was interested in the property."

Rogers said he went through a title company to purchase the property - which he said was a legal acquisition.

"Evidently, the state auditors have a different view on the purchase that was done," he said. "I thought everything legally was done. I don't know why, after all these years, they just found out."

Tiffany Rogers resigned her position as deputy treasurer, "in lieu of termination by Asotin County," on Feb. 22, according to her resignation letter. This was due to the county commissioners' response to the state auditor's findings, in which they would recommend to the county treasurer Tiffany Rogers be terminated, according to the report.

"The file on this foreclosure was missing from the treasurer's office," according to the state auditor's report. "State law requires the county to retain this file for six years."

The property transferred to the Rogers in March 2004 and was sold at its assessed value in August of that year for a reported "personal gain of \$10,700 and a loss to the county of \$10,700."

The auditor's report has been reviewed by Prosecutor Ben Nichols, who will decide if criminal charges should be filed against the Rogers, who are accused of using their positions in the county "to secure special privileges."

Nichols said there should be another report detailing whether the Rogers did anything to warrant filing criminal charges.

"I can't even speculate about what I'll do until I've seen that investigation," he said. "The county commissioners may or may not be sending it to me to consider criminal charges."

If charges are filed, a special prosecutor may be appointed to represent the county, because of the conflict of interest, he said.

Commissioner R.E. (Buck) Lane confirmed the commissioners made the recommendation to terminate Tiffany Rogers' position after the state auditor's office submitted a draft of its findings.

"We had no control over an elected official," Lane said of Anthony Rogers' position, "But we supported the treasurer's office in terminating (Tiffany Rogers)."

Tiffany Rogers could not be reached for comment, but issued a statement by e-mail Wednesday, stating she and her husband were within their legal rights to purchase the property and questioning the auditor's office's investigation.

"We believe a short audit was conducted and placed blame too soon before all the facts were presented," according to the e-mail.

The e-mail explains the property had been in foreclosure status at the time of the purchase, but "the foreclosure process had not been started yet by the Asotin County treasurer."

"Foreclosure laws were not circumvented since the property was not in the foreclosure process," Tiffany Rogers' e-mail states, adding the foreclosure clerk, not her, would handle the files the auditor's office claims were missing. Those files remain missing, said Asotin County Treasurer Margaret Crabb, who began working with Tiffany Rogers in 1989.

"I've had my staff looking and they haven't been able to come up with them at all," she said. "There would have been information from the property in question. I think this (state auditor's) report is very clear about what happened."

The vacant assessor seat will be filled by the commissioners, said Shannon Inzunza, human resource director. Since Rogers is a Democrat, a list of possible candidates will be submitted to commissioners for consideration from the Asotin County Democratic Party, she said.

"They would probably give us a list after some interviews," Lane said. "We would probably interview and make a decision at that time."

Lane added the search may have to wait until March 23, when Commissioner Doug Mattoon returns from vacation.

Macz may be contacted at bmacz@lmtribune.com or (208) 848-2275.