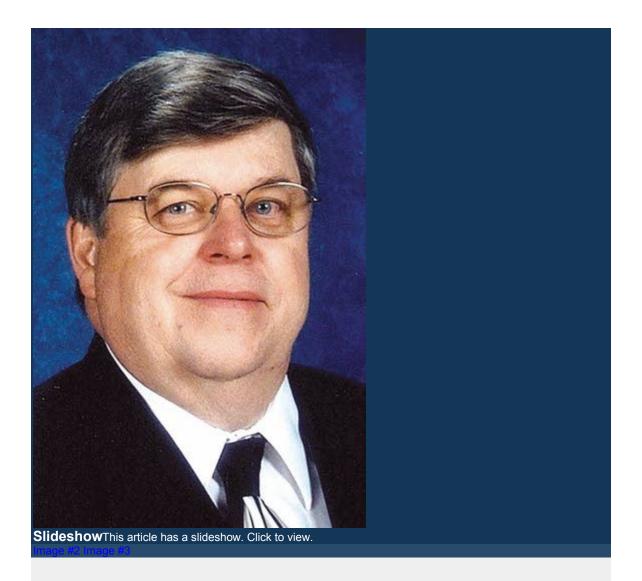# Lewiston recall try gets under way

- **June 11th, 2010**
- (3) comments

By Sandra L. Lee of the Tribune

Organizers target four city councilors who were elected in November

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The recall process has been started against four Lewiston city councilors who were elected in November.

The initial petitions citing the basis for the recall of Mayor Kevin Poole, Mayor Pro Tem Bradley A. Cannon, and councilors Dennis W. Ohrtman and Thyra Stevenson were approved Thursday. Those petitions were required to have 20 signatures of registered voters.

To get the recall on the Nov. 2 ballot, petition organizers have until approximately Aug. 10 to gather 3,273 signatures of registered voters. That number is 20 percent of the registered voters at the last general city election.

Ohrtman was re-elected in November to a second four-year term. Poole had previously served eight years on the council before taking four years off. Cannon and Stevenson, along with Ohrtman and Poole, were sworn in Jan. 4.

The petitions allege the four have "misspent our public tax dollars in numerous unnecessary and inappropriate ways. Chief among them has been the dismissal of our previous city manager, along with the hiring of an interim city manager at exorbitant cost."

By law, organizers may wait until Aug. 24 to turn in the petitions. But if the signatures can't be verified in time to be submitted to the Nez Perce County clerk by Aug. 30, the election might have to be put off until May 2011, City Clerk Kari Kuchmak said Thursday in a letter to the committee, Citizens for Better Government.

Under state code, petitions asking for a recall must be submitted all at one time, not as they are gathered.

Mark Havens, a member of the citizens group, said they weren't aware of the shortened time frame until this week. Earlier discussions with the city and county clerks and even state elections officials had led them to believe they had until Aug. 24, he said. "It just makes us have to work harder ... and faster."

They also had to redo the initial petitions this week because the entirety of the petition statement and 20 signatures weren't on the face of one sheet, something they weren't told of until the petitions were submitted.

Identical wording on each of the petitions says the four councilors continue to make decisions that benefit special and private interests, and not the public interest, that they have pursued a political agenda on which they did not campaign "for the benefit of campaign contributors and selected others."

In the pursuit of that private agenda, they have exposed the city to potential legal liability for violations of the Idaho Open Meeting Law, impugned the integrity of city staff and implied that the former city manager was guilty of misconduct, according to the petitions.

According to statements on the petitions directed at each councilor, Ohrtman made false statements pertaining to the scheduling of meetings, communication with staff members and the appointment of a citizen to a city commission.

Poole continues to violate the city manager form of government by meeting with staff and department heads, personally directing their work, scheduling meetings and setting agendas without the city manager's participation.

Cannon "acted unethically and dishonorably toward our former city manager," according to the petition filed against him. "He condoned the actions of the other three members of the city council in their violations of our city manager form of government and the repeated false statements and rumors spread by council members."

Stevenson has overstepped her role as a councilor by meeting with city employees, speaking to the Federal Aviation Administration without authority and appropriating office space at city hall, according to the petition.

Poole, Ohrtman and Stevenson said the petition statements are unfounded and defended their positions and voting records while refusing to deal with specific accusations.

Poole said the opinions expressed are those of three of the Havens brothers - Douglas, who was ousted from the council by voters in November, Keith and Mark.

There aren't a lot of lawsuits stacking up against the city and things are moving forward, Poole said, but state law outlines the process that citizens can follow and have the final say.

Stevenson said her disappointment lies in a recall being divisive to the community. She didn't come into office with an agenda regarding personnel, she said, and she won't address accusations about matters that occurred in executive sessions.

Ohrtman said he assumes the marks against him are related to a missing e-mail, for which he took responsibility, an appointment of a fireman's spouse to the Emergency Medical Services Advisory Board when she was the only qualified candidate, and campaign contributions from firefighter political action committees. "I don't think any amount of money from any group is going to influence my vote," Ohrtman said, and he didn't plan to fire the city manager when he ran for re-election.

Cannon couldn't be reached Thursday evening.

The citizens group had hoped to look at the format of a successful council recall in 1988, but none of those records, other than the outcome, were saved, Havens said.

Lewiston residents also recalled councilors in 1970 over annexation of the Lewiston Orchards. More recently, in 2008, an attempt at least partially fueled by former City Manager John C. (Jay) Krauss' firing of the city clerk fizzled. The firing of the same city manager in March has been widely speculated as being at least in part retaliation for the removal of that clerk.

Havens said the recall discussions began in earnest when former Councilor John C. Currin resigned in January, saying some councilors were behaving dishonorably toward the city manager.

He said plans for gathering signatures will be finalized in the next couple days. Some people will carry clipboards, a few businesses have offered to make them available, and tables probably will be set up at a few locations.

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