

**CHEROKEE BOARD OF ETHICS**  
Meeting Minutes

**Date:** May 7, 2014

**Meeting Location:** Bridgemill Community Center

**Board Members:**

Gil Howard, Chairman	Present	Debra Frieden, Vice-Chairman	Present
Julie Cullins, Director	Present	John Seufert, Director	Absent
Phil Dodge, Director	Present	Stacey Vyneman, Director	Absent
Gaylen Roberts, Director	Present	Natalie Bergeron, Director	Present

**Others Present:**

L.B. "Buzz" Ahrens, Jr., Chairman, Cherokee County Board of Commissioners  
J. Marshall "Buzz" Wehunt, CCBoE Attorney of Record  
Laura Shoop, CCBoE Secretary

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- **Chairman Howard called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.**
  - **Approval of Minutes from January 7, 2014**  
Member Julie Cullins made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 7, 2014 meeting, seconded by Chairman Gil Howard. Motion passed.
  - **Discussion: Welcome New Members**  
Chairman Gil Howard suggested skipping ahead to the welcome of new members, items one and three on the discussion agenda, before opening the floor for ethics complaints. New members Natalie Bergeron and Gaylen Roberts were welcomed and introduced themselves. All present introduced themselves to the new members.
  - **Public Hearing of Ethics Complaints**  
Chairman Howard opened floor for public hearing/discussion. No one had been made aware of any ethics complaints. There were no ongoing/pending complaints. Mention was made of the twofold philosophy of the Board of Ethics: ensuring that the public knows there is someone looking after their interests, and ensuring that elected officials are not being abused by false accusations. A brief history of how complaints have been handled in the past was given for the benefit of the new members. Motion for public hearing closed.
  - **Discussion: Resignation of Member Stacey Vyneman**  
Vice-Chairman Debra Frieden announced that Member Stacey Vyneman would be sending a formal letter of resignation. It was determined that it was not necessary to table discussion pending receipt of the formal letter. Vice-Chairman Frieden made a

motion to accept Member Vyneman's resignation. Member Cullins seconded. Motion approved.

▪ **Discussion: Ethics Question**

Attorney "Buzz" Wehunt was asked to report on the ethics question raised by a resident of Cherokee County via email regarding whether there was a conflict of interest with the law firm of Moore Ingram Johnson & Steele simultaneously representing a Cherokee County resident in front of the zoning board and representing the Cherokee County Board of Ethics. While he thought it was an important question and could see why someone might be concerned, Attorney Wehunt did not see any conflict of interest. He stated that neither he nor anyone in his firm had a direct interest in the issue and would have excused themselves if they had. The firm handles planning and zoning issues for many counties, not just Cherokee. It was determined that if such a broad issue could be considered a conflict of interest, it would be impossible to find an attorney for the Board who would not have such conflicts. It was noted that the resident who raised the ethics question seemed pleased that the Board was receptive to input and satisfied with Vice-Chairman Frieden and Attorney Wehunt's response.

▪ **Discussion: Budget Report**

Secretary Shoop reported that she had contacted the county manager and assistant multiple times requesting the CCBoE budget information for 2013 but had not yet received the information. The initial conclusion was that Attorney Wehunt would write a letter if the Board did not receive the information. After further discussion, Chairman "Buzz" Ahrens offered to take care of providing the budget information to the Board. A suggestion was made that this information could be sent out each year in the form of a brief annual letter. Chairman Howard asked Secretary Shoop to send the information out to all CCBoE members once he and Vice Chairman Frieden received it.

▪ **Discussion: Update Members on Status of Potential Update of Ethics Legislation**

Acting Chairman Howard summarized the progress of discussions regarding a potential update of ethics legislation and provided a status update. No further discussion had taken place since the meeting on January 7, 2014.

*Timeline:* It was determined that the previously agreed upon deadline of completing the project during the current calendar year and having a model ready to present to the legislative delegation by the 2015 legislative session was still agreeable.

*Process:* Rather than an entire revamping of the ethics legislation, it was determined that there were only a few issues that need to be addressed. The primary issues that were discussed included the party affiliation requirements for CCBoE members, term limits, process of appointment and removal for CCBoE members, and expansion of the scope of the CCBoE. The one issue that the Board agreed was a definite and pressing problem was the need to broaden the scope of the Board, specifically to bring under CCBoE jurisdiction other entities that were created after the CCBoE and thus not included in the original legislation.

In conclusion, it was determined that for the current year the CCBoE will concentrate on the issue of scope/jurisdiction and address the other issues at a future date, if necessary. Chairman Howard asked Attorney Wehunt to draft the wording of O.C.G.A.

by the next meeting, when the board would review it. The ultimate goal is ultimately to send a detailed model to our senator or state representative to have it made into a bill and put into law.

- **Next Meeting:**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarterly Meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 15, 2014, at 6:00 p.m. at the Hickory Flat Community Center.

- **Motion to Close:**

Member Phil Dodge, Chairman Ahrens and Attorney Wehunt had to leave at 7:20 p.m. Due to the loss of members, Chairman Howard asked if there was a motion to adjourn. Member Julie Cullins made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Member Gaylen Roberts. Motion passed.