

Madison County Treasurer Kurt Prenzler calling for greater transparency in chairman's appointment process

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EDWARDSVILLE —Treasurer **Kurt Prenzler** is calling for greater transparency in the **Madison County Board** chairman's appointment process.

“The chairman places people in positions that control millions of tax dollars,” Prenzler said. “Their names aren’t usually seen until a county board agenda comes out and sometimes their names are left off the agenda.”

Prenzler said the chairman appoints people almost monthly and the county board approves them with little or no discussion. He said December’s appointments marked the first time in a long time that any appointments were discussed.

“The only reason for discussion that time was due to the controversy surrounding the Metro East Sanitary District,” he said.

He feels there should be more transparency with the appointment process.

“Wednesday night there were appointments on the agenda and there was no discussion by the board,” he said.

Prenzler said he understands there are appointments that require party affiliation as well as those needing specific skills, however there are plenty of people who would like to serve on a board, yet they have no idea how to go about it.

“There are no public listings of any of the chairman’s appointments,” he said. “There is no way to tell when a position is even open. The only way I got the information was by submitting a FOIA request with the chairman’s office.”

The Madison County board chairman appoints approximately 300 individuals to 70 boards and commissions

Appointed board members vote to levy millions in property taxes, spend millions in sales tax revenue and determine millions in user fees.

“Most people have no clue how much taxpayer money is being controlled by a select few,” Prenzler said. “Some districts may not collect property taxes, but they set user fees and rates to operate.”

Prenzler said the appointment process should be more transparent like it is in other counties. He said DuPage, DeKalb, Lake, Will, Kane, Kendall and Peoria counties place information on their websites informing the public as to who serves on boards appointed by the county chairman.

“These counties set a benchmark for what we should be doing,” he said. “They put it all out there for the public to see. That’s the way we should do it.”

The DuPage County website includes an ACT (accountability, consolidation and transparency) portal.

“Information is provided to taxpayers about local service agencies,” he said. “It’s everything they would want to know in one spot.”

The transparency portal provides the public with information on the boards, appointed board members, terms of office, qualifications for service, compensation, statutory authority and more. Kane and Will counties also provide similar information.

Prior to county board approval of appointments, some counties discuss the applicant in committee before a board meeting.

Prenzler said the Kendall County chairman actually puts out a public notice when he is looking for someone to serve on a board.

“He advertises when positions are open,” he said. “He asks for people to submit applications or resumes.”

There is no application process in Madison County.

“How does someone go about being selected?” Prenzler asked. “In other counties, you can go online and submit your application to volunteer to serve. In Madison County, no one knows how it’s really done.”

Prenzler said it wasn’t until the ethical wrongdoings of an appointed MESD board member were brought to light that questions started arising about the appointment process, coupled with the fact the individual also received an annual \$15,000 salary.

“What I saw was a complete lack of transparency,” he said. “That board member filed a false economic interest statement, gained monetarily from contracts with the MESD and donated nearly \$30,000 to the county chairman’s political campaign. Do we know where the investigation stands?”

In response to media, the county administrator stated the county chairman only appointed board members and had no control over the boards they governed.

“It may be true the chairman has no direct oversight over the boards,” Prenzler said. “He appoints them, but the law allows for him to remove them as well.”

He said the MESD situation serves as an example as to why the county needs greater transparency of the appointment process.

“We need to change how we do it in this county,” he said.