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Hearings begin on police employes fired during investigation of missing money

By DAN McCOSH

The fate of two Farmington Hills police personnel fired in the wake of an embezzlement investigation remained up in the air after two days of hearings.

Lawyer Norman Lippitt, representing Lt. William Kelly the officer fired for his handling of the embezzlement report, left the police trial board hearing Saturday at 4:30 p.m. to catch a plane for a two-week Florida vacation.

The hearing on Lt. Kelly was adjourned to Friday, April 12.

The hearing on Mrs. Debbie Roberts, which began Thursday, has also been adjourned to Tuesday, April 5.

The two employes were fired in the midst of an investigation of funds handled by the police department.

No warrants have yet been issued on the embezzlement.

Mrs. Roberts is the clerk who apparently first discovered the embezzlement, and submitted a letter of resignation the following week.

She is appealing before a personnel committee and says in fact she did not resign, but was fired. She is also appealing the dismissal.

Although the city denies the firing, a list of charges has been prepared against Mrs. Roberts, and the personnel committee is hearing testimony on the charges.

LT. KELLY'S examination before the trial board began at 3 p.m. Thursday, ran to nearly 11 p.m. that night and continued Saturday.

Witnesses who testified included City Manager George Majors, Public Safety Director Ronald Holko, Lt. Russell Conway, representatives from the State Police, and a number of clerks, cadets and officers from the department.

Lt. Conway, the officer assigned to investigate the actual embezzlement, was on the witness stand for over two hours.

The police board, consisting of Chairman Earl Opperthaus, Keith Deacon and Frederick Lichtman, was appointed for the case recently by Mayor Robert McConnell.

AT ISSUE is the question of Kelly's actions during the investigation.

Following the disclosure by Mrs. Roberts of missing money in the department, Kelly first checked with the city finance department and later reported the missing money to the city manager.

His suspension resulted from his efforts to file a felony report and make a notation on the police log.

The suspension was followed by a notice of dismissal after he and his attorney took the report to the state police.

The city's position has been that an investigation was begun immediately, and Kelly's actions hindered the investigation.

Kelly was charged with violation of police rules regarding chain of command and handling of confidential information by Director Holko.

The hearing is being conducted as an informal trial, with rules adopted by the appeals board.

The board is taking testimony from witnesses from both sides. Attorneys for the city and Lt. Kelly conduct cross-examination, as well as members of the board.

MRS. ROBERTS' case began Thursday evening, before a personnel committee of Mrs. Joan Dudley, William Ortman and Margaret Schaeffer, all city councilmen.

Mrs. Roberts and Director Holko were the main witnesses called Thursday.

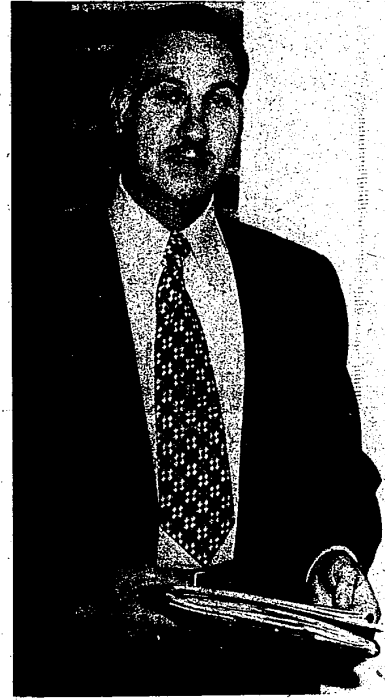


LT. WILLIAM KELLY

The suspended officer with chairman Earl Opperthaus.



MRS. DEBBIE ROBERTS



DIRECTOR RONALD HOLKO

Millage renewal vote coming up tomorrow

Tuesday, April 2, the renewal of five mills of property tax for ten years will be voted on by residents of the Farmington School system.

Voting places will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Precinct one votes at Farmington Junior High; precinct two votes at Dupckel Junior High; precinct three at Eagle Elementary; and precinct four votes at Middlebelt Elementary.

Medical clinic on school agenda

By NANCY STEIN

Last Monday the Farmington Hills City Council voted to cancel funding for Rap-Line and the free health clinic which it is trying to establish.

On the agenda for the April 2 meeting of the Farmington School Board under new business is "Utilization of Rap-Line Portable."

The portable referred to is a trailer located at the far end of the school administration building's parking lot. It houses all Rap-Line equipment and facilities.

Joe Damiani, director of Rap-Line

said, "We have funding that will last until July 1, 1974."

Damiani said he will try to be present at the meeting. "But I do have another important commitment that night."

"As I understand the issue, the question is if, and to what degree the schools must assume liability as a result of the medical clinic at the Rap-Line facility." He continued, "I endorse this line of questioning. They need exact answers."

The meeting will take place at 8 p.m. at the administration building, 32500 Shiawassee. It is open to the public.

Prosecutor asks for tapes; criminal warrant is delayed

By DAN McCOSH

"Why couldn't he have asked for those tapes weeks ago?" City Manager George Majors indicated a growing impatience with the prosecution of the alleged embezzlement of funds from the Farmington Hills police department.

While hearings were being conducted on the dismissal of two people who reported the missing funds, a warrant on the suspected embezzler has been under consideration by the Oakland County prosecutor's office.

Friday, when assistant prosecutor Richard Thompson was expected by city officials to make a decision on whether evidence in the case was sufficient for a warrant, the investigators were met with another request for more information.

This time it was for tapes of interviews made with employes at city hall during the investigation conducted by Farmington Hills detective Lt. Russell Conway.

Thompson said recently he was waiting for a report from the state police crime lab and the results of a state audit of the department before his office could make a decision.

That information was conveyed on Friday, according to Majors, and the prosecutor requested the further information.

THE DELAY RAISED the question whether criminal charges would result from the round of accusations and investigations which followed public disclosure of the embezzlement.

"An embezzlement based on circumstantial evidence is a tough case to prove in court," Majors said.

The suspected embezzlement was of approximately \$1,900 in license and other fees being received by the Hills police department.

The embezzlement itself has been nearly obscured by the hearings on the dismissals of two principals in the case: Lt. William Kelly and Mrs. Debbie Roberts, the policeman and clerk who allegedly reported the missing money to the city finance department.

Kelly was first suspended, then fired, by Director Holko, based on his actions during the investigation of the missing money.

Mrs. Roberts also says she was fired, rather than resigning from the department, which Holko disputes.

The city's position has been that on Kelly's report to the city finance office, an investigation was started, first of the books to determine whether an actual crime had been committed, later a criminal investigation of the department conducted by Lt. Conway.

Kelly's attorney, Norman Lippitt, says Kelly felt his charges were being "covered up," while the city maintains Kelly's actions interfered with the investigation.

Majors said earlier that the results of the investigation conducted by the city finance department indicated "there is no question a crime has been committed."

He maintains the investigation by Lt. Conway was basically completed the first week of the controversy, nearly a month ago, and the information was transmitted to the Oakland County prosecutor for a decision on a warrant.

The prosecutor first requested an official state audit, handwriting analysis and now is asking for the tapes, according to Majors.

"I feel he could have asked for them all the first day," Majors said.

Assistant Prosecutor Thompson was unavailable for comment Friday.

He maintains the investigation by Lt. Conway was basically completed the first week of the controversy, nearly a month ago, and the information was transmitted to the Oakland County prosecutor for a decision on a warrant.

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New private school is on council agenda

A decision on a legal case which may lead to permission to open a private school in the old Brennan estate on Drake Rd. in Farmington is expected to be made by the Farmington City Council Monday at the 8 p.m. meeting in Farmington city hall.

The council will also consider establishing informal hearings on paving on some "sealcoat" roads in the city to determine resident interest.

The paving of Prospect will have a public hearing.

Also being considered is an ordinance requiring downspouts connected to combined sanitary sewers to be disconnected.

The Observer & Eccentric index

	First Section
News	8
Opinion	8
People	12
Community Calendar	15
Sports	15
Obituaries	16