

COOK COUNTY BOARD OF ETHICS
69 West Washington, Suite 3040
Chicago, Illinois 60602

IN THE MATTER OF)	
)	
Chris Anchor,)	Case No. 2012 I 0006
Wildlife Management Biologist III)	
Forest Preserve District of Cook County, Illinois)	

NOTICE OF DETERMINATION

In August 2012, the Executive Director of the Cook County Board of Ethics received an anonymous email alleging that Cook County Forest Preserve District (“FPD”) employee, Chris Anchor, married his co-worker, Laura Anchor (neé Rericha). The anonymous complainant further alleged that Chris Anchor supervises Laura Anchor at the Poplar Creek Wildlife Management Field Station in Elgin, Illinois and that Director of the FPD Department of Resource Management Chris Merenowicz was aware of the situation and attempting to cover it up by having Laura Anchor sign in and out of the Northwest Resource Management Field Station in Elk Grove Village, Illinois.

Based on the anonymous complaint, the Board of Ethics (“Board”) undertook an investigation of Chris Anchor to determine whether he is exercising authority, supervision or control of his wife in violation of Section 2-582 – Employment of Relatives of the Cook County Ethics Ordinance (“Ethics Ordinance”). The Board has completed its investigation and determined that no violation of the Ethics Ordinance occurred.

INVESTIGATION SUMMARY

An investigation directed by the Board found evidence supporting the following:

Chris Anchor is employed as a Wildlife Management Biologist III in the Wildlife Management Division of the Department of Resource Management for the FPD. He is stationed with the other Wildlife Management biologists at the FPD’s Poplar Creek Field Station in Elgin, Illinois. As Wildlife Biologist III, Chris Anchor’s job duties include supervision and daily duty assignments for his staff of Wildlife Management biologists at the Poplar Creek Field Station. The crew from this field station reports directly to him. He also signs staff time sheets, completes staff evaluations and approves their vacation requests.

Chris Anchor’s wife, Laura Anchor, is also employed as a Wildlife Management Biologist II, in the same Department. They met on the job and a personal relationship developed resulting in their marriage in 2004.

Laura Anchor initially worked directly under Chris Anchor's supervision. Immediately after their marriage, however, Chris and Laura Anchor disclosed their familial relationship to the director of the Department of Resource Management. The FPD administration has taken a number of steps to remove Laura Anchor from her husband's direct supervision while allowing both biologists to continue to provide their highly specialized services and research to the FPD. These steps included requiring Laura Anchor to sign in and out of a different FPD field station than the one her husband supervises (back when the FPD used paper timesheets) and having the Deputy Director of the Department (instead of Chris Anchor) sign off on her time, approve her vacation requests, evaluate her and provide her with daily assignments.

Based on interviews and documentation, these measures appear to have been successful in eliminating Chris Anchor's supervisory authority over Laura Anchor. Board investigators reviewed all 2011 and 2012 signed Timesheets and signed Requests for Time Off for Laura Anchor; no evidence was found that Chris Anchor had signed any of the timesheets or requests. Further, no evidence was found that Chris Anchor participated in the professional evaluation of Laura Anchor or retained the authority to provide her with daily assignments.

DISCUSSION

The Ethics Ordinance states that:

No official, board or commission appointee or employee shall participate in a hiring decision, or shall employ or advocate for employment, in any agency over which such official or employee either serves or over which he or she exercises authority, supervision or control, any person who is a relative or domestic partner of said official or employee, or in exchange for or in consideration of the employment of any said official's or employee's relatives or domestic partners, by any other official, board or commission appointee or employee.

County Code, § 2-582(a).

The Board has previously considered violations of Section 2-582 of the Cook County Ethics Ordinance, and has strongly enforced the employment of relative restrictions and prohibitions found in this Section. Section 2-582 of the Ethics Ordinance is intended to protect the County from the potential abuses presented by employment of relatives, including, but not limited to, conflicts of interest, misuses of office, poor morale, and preferential treatment in the hiring, supervision, evaluation, promotion and salaries of County employees.

Based on the facts uncovered in this investigation, it does not appear that Chris Anchor is exercising authority, supervision or control of his wife. The limited firewall that the FPD administration established between Chris and Laura Anchor appears to be serving its intended purpose. Further, the investigation shows that complete separation of Laura Anchor from Chris and the biologists for whom Chris determines daily duties, evaluations, time and time off, would

degrade the services and research provided to the FPD by Laura Anchor and Chris Anchor.

CONCLUSION

For the forgoing reasons, with respect to the above-captioned matter, the Board of Ethics concludes that there is NO VIOLATION of Section 2-582 of the Ethics Ordinance. Any request for reconsideration of this determination must be made within thirty (30) days of receipt of this notice.

September 18, 2013

So ordered
COOK COUNTY BOARD OF ETHICS

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Roseann Oliver", written over a horizontal line.

Roseann Oliver
Chairperson