LITTLE RIVER BAND OF OTTAWA INDIANS TRIBAL COURT 3031 Domres Road · Manistee, MI 49660 (231) 398-3406 tribalcourt@lrboi-nsn.gov

LARRY ROMANELLI, Ogema of The Little River Band of Ottawa Indians Plaintiff, Case No. 24-010-GC

Honorable Caroline LaPorte

v.

LITTLE RIVER BAND OF OTTAWA INDIANS TRIBAL COUNCIL, Defendant.

Dennis Swain (P29866) Attorney for Plaintiff 2608 Government Center Drive Manistee, MI 49660 Gary S. Pitchlynn (OBA #07180) Attorney for Defendant PO Box 722786 Norman, OK 73070

ORDER AFTER SHOW CAUSE HEARING

On February 19, 2024, the Court held a show cause hearing in the above captioned matter. All parties appeared in compliance with the Court's previous orders. All parties were sworn in.

a. Addressing Tribal Council's OBJECTION to the Order Striking their Motion to Vacate

Prior to the hearing, on February 18, 2024, Tribal Council's attorney filed an objection to the Order Striking his Motion to Vacate, calling it a RCP 4.602(b)(3) Motion. This is improper. A 4.602(b)(3) motion is for a proposed order that parties submit for the Court's consideration. As such, the Court STRIKES the objection.

b. The Show Cause Hearing and Arguments by Tribal Council and Ogema

During the show cause hearing on February 19, 2024, the Court was presented with arguments from Tribal Council about their understanding of the budget as presented in August by the Ogema. Their attorney focused on the fact that the budget was not balanced according to Tribal Council's interpretation. The Court entertained the argument, as well as the sworn information provided by certain Tribal Council Members, as a matter of respect for their Office and as a matter of ensuring the General Membership is informed (also as a matter of respect for the body of individuals that this Tribe derives its sovereignty from). And the Court stated, very plainly, that regardless of their interpretation, they voted on the veto, failed to override the veto via the 6-3 vote that was required, and that their action as one body (the vote) put the budget in place. It

was at this point that Tribal Council's *duty* to appropriate funds triggered. Tribal Council voted on December 13, 2023 to override the Ogema's veto. That veto failed. The Court found that there was a budget as a matter of law at that point, which was the budget the Ogema submitted without amendments from Tribal Council.

If the Court were to accept Council's attempt to invalidate their own vote, the Court would put itself in the improper position of attempting to adjudicate what Council might have done differently *if they had only done it differently* every time they voted.

The Court is uninterested in doing that.

Furthermore, the Court is not in the business of determining what money should be spent and where. The Court does not have that authority. Nor does the Court have the *duty* of making sure the dollars get to where they need to go. The Court also does not need to find a budget to be balanced or not balanced. However, *the Court is well within its authority to determine that a budget is in place as a matter of law* (the budget the Ogema originally submitted and subsequently signed on December 13, 2023), *and that it is Tribal Council's constitutional duty to appropriate those funds.* That is what the Court has done, and it has exercised its *constitutional power to issue writs of mandamus* to do so.

c. To be Clear Again: The Budget Signed on December 13, 2023 is the FY2024 Budget and Council has a Duty to Appropriate

The Court has stated ad nauseum at this point that the FY2024 Budget is in place and that AS A MATTER OF LAW it is the Budget the Ogema signed into law on December 13, 2023.

According to the FY2024 Tribal Budget, a copy of which is attached to this Order, has the Tribe's total operating expenditures at \$46,273,486.00. The FY2024 Tribal Budget has a Gaming Distribution of \$22,486,874.00. Tribal Council's position is that what made the FY2024 Budget not balanced was the "supplemental" of \$4,211,515.00. So Council was unconcerned regardless about the difference in expenditures and the gaming revenue, which is what Tribal Council relies on as the basis of their argument. Additional revenue listed in the FY2024 Budget is as follows:

Gaming Tax Revenue	\$3,250,000.00	
Rental Revenue	\$233,832.00	
Program Revenue	\$5,642,043.00	
Taxing Authority Revenue	\$590,189.00	
Third Party Revenue	\$250,000.00	
Dividends and Interest	\$1,500,000.00	
Grant Funds	\$8,109,033.00	
Other Revenue	\$4,211,515.00	

All of this (the additional revenue plus the gaming distribution) equals \$46,273,486.00.

1. The FY2024 Appropriations

For purposes of informing Tribal Membership, the FY2024 Budget required an appropriation total of \$26,698,389.00. The **PROJECTED** gaming distribution was stated as \$22,486,874.00, leaving the need for an additional \$4,211,515.00. On January 12, 2024, Tribal Council passed resolution #24-0112-003, "Appropriating Funds for Expenditures during the First Quarter of FY2024," in which Tribal Council appropriated \$2,810,859.25 for expenditures, shorting the FY2024 Budget by about \$1,052,879.00. Tribal Council has since passed an additional resolution, but the Court has not received it and it is not yet an official part of this record.

2. The General Fund (Restricted vs. Unrestricted)

During the show cause hearing, certain individual councilors (who elected to speak after not being called to testify, but who were also sworn in at the start of the show cause) could not confirm what was in the general fund and no one stated what the unrestricted general funds were in their response either. This might be explained via timing or other mitigating factors if individual council members were off by dollars, hundreds of dollars, or even tens of thousands of dollars. But tens of millions? Regardless, that is an issue for the general membership to address should that respected body choose to do so.

3. The Misnomer of the Supplemental Request in the FY2024 Budget

	Item	Cost
1.	Maintenance- Capital Outlay	\$104,000.00
2.	Next Generation Learning Center	\$237,000.00
3.	IT Elevate/Arctic Contract/Capital Revenue	\$703,000.00
4.	Utility Department- Capital Outlay Department	\$2,629,965.00
5.	Executive Legal	\$225,011.00
6.	3% COLA Raises	\$310,875.00
TOTA	AL	\$4,211,515.00

For the purposes of informing tribal membership, the following was included as the "supplemental" request in the original budget:

This "supplemental" funding was included in the FY2024 Budget as submitted by the Ogema, and though it is titled as "supplemental," it was included in the original budget. This means, importantly, that when Tribal Council voted on December 13, 2023, they were aware that "supplemental" funding was part of the Ogema's submission. The Court asked Council's representation when his client became concerned about the budget being "unbalanced" according to Tribal Council's interpretation of the 2013 Budget and Appropriations Act and the response was on or around the time that the Ogema presented it. This would have been in August.

d. The Duty of Council to Appropriate

What is truly critical here is that the vote that Council took in December of 2023 is a vote that is outlined within the **Tribe's Constitution**. Council took that vote and failed to override the Ogema's veto. Because of this, council MUST appropriate the funds in accordance with the FY2024 Budget that the Ogema signed on December 13, 2023, which the Court has already stated numerous times in previous Orders. The Court requested supplemental briefing for what was required appropriations-wise in order for Council to be in compliance with funding the FY2024 budget in accordance with their Constitutional duties. The Court has since reviewed both briefs supplied.

The Court, as stated in the hearing, is giving Council an opportunity to cure. Regardless of whether twenty (20) million or seventy-six (76) million dollars is in the general fund, there is adequate funding for the FY2024 budget. If modifications are necessary in Q2, Q3 or Q4, that is not before the Court nor are the initiation of budget modifications a power of the Court.

During the show cause hearing the Court permitted, without objection of the attorneys present, some testimony via statements of individual Councilmembers who wished to speak. During the show cause hearing, Shannon Crampton, Al Metzger, Julie Wolfe, and Gary DiPiazza provided statements regarding their positions on the FY2024 Budget as submitted by the Ogema without any amendments by Tribal Council. The Court takes each of their positions in kind.

1. Councilman Crampton's Objection to the FY2024 Budget- 3% COLA Raises for Employees or Employee

Councilman Crampton's stated objection to the FY2024 Budget was the 3% COLA raises for Tribal employees as listed in the "supplemental". He specifically stated it was one tribal employee. He did not identify the employee. But upon review, the 3% COLA is in the amount of \$310,875.00. Either Mr. Crampton objects to one employee's raise and that is employee is making \$10,362,500.00, which would be a reasonable objection or Mr. Crampton is objecting to just one employee out of a pool of employees getting a COLA raise, which would raise other concerns that are not before this Court (as singling out AN employee to not receive a COLA raise might be problematic).

2. Councilman Metzger's Objection to the FY2024 Budget- A Shortfall Created by the Supplemental Request

Councilman Metzger stated his issue was that there would be a shortage created by the "supplemental" in the Ogema's budget, but Councilman Metzger failed to acknowledge that the supposed shortfall was reflected on the revenue side of the budget (see OTHER REVENUE). Councilman Metzger reported that his understanding of what was in the Tribe's general budget was twenty (20) million, but this is much closer to the unrestricted portion and the Court will assume that is what Councilman Metzger was referring to.

3. Councilwoman Wolfe's Objection to the FY2024 Budget- The Tribe would have to Acquire a Loan to Cover the Alleged Shortfall

Councilwoman Wolfe stated that her issue was that the Tribe would have to borrow the money for the supplemental via a loan (but this is a red herring). Even if a loan would be necessary, it could be reflected on the revenue side of the budget. Regardless, there is money in the unrestricted general fund and again, the funds are reflected under "other revenue". And whether or not the Tribe chooses to take out a loan to finance some sort of project or work is, at least with this set of facts, not the Court's concern. At any rate, a budget is a projection...which is why it is subject to modification processes in accordance with the Act.

4. Councilman DiPiazza Stated that the Ogema's FY2024 Budget is the Budget

The Court agrees. No further analysis is necessary since the Court has issued repeated orders stating that the FY2024 Budget is in place as a matter of law.

e. Conclusion

Per the affidavit submitted by William Willis on February 21, 2024, the <u>unrestricted</u> general fund cash balance as of January 31, 2024 is \$25,789,842. Tribal Council stated through their representation that the budget was not balanced, despite the unrestricted funds, because the budget relied on funding that was not from net gaming revenues. <u>But half of the dollars</u> required to fund the FY2024 budget do not come from net gaming revenues. Those dollars come from Gaming Tax Revenue, Rental Revenue, Program Revenue, Taxing Authority Revenue, Third Party Revenue, Dividends and Interests, Grant Funds and Grant Revenue. The only thing left then is where the money for the "supplemental" expenditures come from. And where it comes from is the unrestricted dollars in the general fund. <u>A budget is just a</u> projection. What is not lost on the Court is that the budget for FY2024 relies on *PREDICTED* gaming revenues (amongst other revenue that might be more knowable---such as grants), and not on actuals.

Nevertheless, the Court wanted to ensure that enough funds existed to cover the approved FY2024 Budget that was signed on December 13, 2023. The reason for that is clear: holding Tribal Council in contempt of court for not appropriating funds that the Tribe simply does not have would be highly problematic. The Court stated as such during the show cause. The Court does not determine, nor does it have the power to determine, how the Tribe should spend its money. The Court is concerned with applying the laws to the facts and in the enforcement of its orders consistent with its jurisdiction.

The Court found that once Council failed to override the Ogema's veto in accordance with both the Constitution and the 2013 Budget and Appropriations Act that a budget was in place as a matter of law. The budget signed by the Ogema on December 13, 2023 is the FY2024 Budget.

Again, on January 11, 2024 the Court received an ex parte request for a writ of mandamus at 4:29 pm. The Court issued its order regarding same on January 11, 2024 at 7:24 pm. The urgency

of the response was required, again, **because funds were being expended.** A show cause was preemptively set for Council for January 12, 2024 in the event that Council felt they did not have a Constitutional duty to appropriate funds in accordance with the laws of the Tribe. They appropriated funds rather than appearing at that show cause.

So, again, all that is at issue is this: has Tribal Council appropriated funding in accordance with their Constitutional duties via Resolution #24-0112-003? Based on the information supplied by the supplemental briefs as well as the information that the Court has on the record, the answer to that question is no. The Court has not received a resolution regarding the Q1 Budget post the show cause hearing and is just now in receipt of a supplemental brief alleging a failure to appropriate in accordance with the budget for Q2.

The determinations of the trial court are **ORDERS.** However, Council still has time to cure its contemptuous actions (prior to the end of Q1) or to provide a resolution indicating the funds were appropriated for Q1 in accordance with the FY2024 Budget and this Court's **ORDERS**. Once again, when Council failed to override the veto (which is a Constitutional power that the Ogema has), as a matter of law the Ogema's budget as submitted without the amendments of Tribal Council was the approved budget.

If Tribal Council has passed a resolution to fund Q1 in accordance with the FY2024 Budget, Tribal Council has until March 28, 2024 to provide it. Failure to do will result in a finding for CONTEMPT of COURT.

IT IS SO ORDERED this 25th Day of March 2024.

DocuSigned by: aroline Laporte

Caroline B. LaPorte, J.D. Associate Judge

CERTIFICATION OF SERVICE

I certify that a copy of this order was sent to the attorneys for the parties via email and USPS mail on this day.

3.25.24 Date

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Fund # 1000-115 2000-403 2000-405 2000-457 1010-102 1010-106 1010-149 2000-459 2000-401 1060-158 1020-109 1020-109 1020-117 1020-113 2000-400 1030-120 1030-121 1035-174 **1020-101** 1080-144 1015-150 1010-154 1050-151 1035-124 1015-112 1010-162 4036 4018 4031 4017 Sub - Environmental & Natural Resources Great Lakes Fisherles Assessment Gaming Commission/Compliance Subtotal - Gaming Office **Government Buildings** Subtotal - Indirect Cost Pool Total - Tribal Government COLA . **Commissions/Committees Tribal Historic Preservation** Information Technology Sturgeon Rehabilitation **Property Management Inland** Enforcement Human Resources Subtotal - Housing **Natural Resources** Muskegon Office Communications Housing Elder Complex m **Election Board** Maintenance **Public Safety** Survelliance Finance Prosecutor Grants 33.00% is in in in s s s s s s so s \$ 1,190 361 \$ 1,190,361 ŝ a a a a a 5 5 50 in s Ş \$ s s s \$ 688,696 5 396,778 5 396,778 275,5870 5 1,475,870 ~~ 611 5 1,741,220 2,055,955 7,420,670 7,420,670 178,611 \$ 178,611 1,930,884 \$ 3,060,697 \$ 258,720 \$ 1,108 720 118,375 \$ 973,351 \$ 269,669 \$ 253 110 \$ 253 110 255,683 \$ 255,683 10,000 \$. r . \$ 33,000 \$ 700,000 \$ 5,224,937 \$ 17,911,163
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EXHIBIT A

Tribal Council submission 10/13/23	2024 Budget - Executive Summary

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Initial Projected Distribution was \$21,972,467

2024 Budget - Executive Summary Tribal Council submission 10/13/23

Allocation of Tax Revenue Tax Office \$ Members Assistance \$ Down Payment Assistance \$ Total \$	Revenue Pharmacy \$ 5,719,895 Utilities \$ 728,380 Program Revenue \$ 103,500 Statistics \$ 103,500 Other - Supplemental Items - unmet needs \$ 6,551,775 Maintenance - Capital Outlay - 2 Work/Plow trucks \$ 104,000 NGLC \$ 237,952 IT - Elevate/Arctic Contracts/CapitalReserve \$ 703,712 Utility Department - Capital Outlay Items \$ 2,629,965 Executive Legal \$ 225,011 3% COLA \$ 310,875 Total Supplemental Items - unmet needs \$ 4,211,515
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