

# Clinton Township planning director retires after trial testimony

**Board votes to approve internal investigation**

By: [Nick Mordowanec](#) | [Fraser - Clinton Township Chronicle](#) | Published July 2, 2018

CLINTON TOWNSHIP — Carlo Santia is now the former planning director of Clinton Township.

Out of the ashes of the Dean Reynolds corruption saga came something else that caught Clinton Township officials off guard: testimony from Santia June 20 in U.S. District Court that described an out-of-office relationship between him, Reynolds and former Giffels Webster engineer Paulin Modi.

On June 22, Township Supervisor Bob Cannon said the Board of Trustees would make a recommendation on Santia’s future.

Treasurer Paul Gielegghem and Trustees Jenifer “Joie” West and Mike Keys placed Santia’s dismissal on the board’s June 25 meeting agenda. That same morning, Santia formally announced his retirement.

He made \$99,100 per year and, as a union member with a collective bargaining agreement, will retain his pension and benefits.

Santia testified during Reynolds’ trial that he helped Modi funnel dollars through his side subcontracting business, Traffic Engineering Consultants, due to Modi not being paid back approximately \$15,000 in relation to bribes made out by Reynolds. That money was then transferred to Modi’s wife’s business, SAI.

Township Attorney Jack Dolan said June 25 that the only information he and board members were privy to was information furnished through the press. At press time, the township did not possess any transcripts from the court proceedings, alluding to a possible 30- or 60-day waiting period.

In relation to some residents publicly speaking out regarding Santia’s benefits, Dolan said Santia had earned his benefits when he was previously a Macomb County employee.

“Employees are protected by collective bargaining and employment agreements,” Dolan said. “We’re not gonna act precipitously in any of these situations.”

Gielegghem, West and Keys initially offered an additional agenda item calling for a request for proposals for an outside firm to conduct a forensic audit to determine if township decision making was compromised. In Gielegghem’s official motion, he requested for three outside firms to investigate.

Trustee Ken Pearl issued an amendment stating that the township, through its legal representation, would first conduct an internal investigation based on Santia’s official testimony, what the FBI knows, and whether the FBI is willing to provide terms based on the last few years of its countywide investigation.

Gielegghem was opposed, saying he wasn’t sure whether Pearl’s amendment was “intended to muddy the waters, or water it down.”

Keys agreed, saying Pearl’s amendment doesn’t provide the public with an independent outside look, calling it “business as usual.”

“We weren’t willing to sit on our hands,” Keys said. “We wanted to be proactive, and that’s what the public wants in this case.”

Resident Roger Holtslander said that with 20 people arrested in the FBI’s probe, and possibly more arrests to come, Pearl was attempting to avoid outside investigation.

“It has nothing to do with the words,” Holtslander said. “It has to do with the intent. The people of this township will not trust an internal investigation by this board and by the employees of this township.”

Another resident, Bob Hogan, said the township needs a conflict of interest policy, as well as a code of ethics.

“The Dean Reynolds trial and conviction has made a wake-up call that this policy is needed,” Hogan said.

A 4-3 amendment vote ultimately determined that the township would conduct an internal investigation, with findings and recommendations made by Dolan in relation to policies, ordinances and state law. Gielegghem, Keys and West all voted “no” on the amendment. The investigation itself was unanimously approved.

“(Santia retiring) was the honorable thing to do,” Cannon later said. “He did something wrong, he’s remorseful about what he did, wish he hadn’t done it, tried to get out of it after he started and was not able to. ... I was shocked (Santia) had any time to have a second breath, let alone a second job.”

At one point during the meeting, Cannon referenced some board members’ motives as a “witch hunt.” He stood by those words, saying that Gielegghem “schemed” to have supporters show up and speak in favor of the external investigation.

“I’m very upset with the way (Gielegghem, West and Keys) proceeded. ... I think they fully intended to embarrass Mr. Santia and enhance themselves,” said Cannon, who has known Santia since 1984. “They were trying to create a name for themselves and get their names in the paper. It disgusts me.”

Gielegghem later said he saw Santia’s retirement coming following an emergency staff meeting June 21 in which Cannon informed staffers of Santia’s testimony and admitted wrongdoing.

He maintained that since it’s the first time the township has experienced something like this, he wishes that qualified outside bodies would provide the necessary oversight.

“Since I’ve gotten on the board, I’ve been confronted with, ‘This is just the way we always do it,’” Gielegghem said. “We need to assure the public that it has been thoroughly investigated and there are no conflicts of interest.”

In terms of it being a “witch hunt,” Gielegghem said the motions he makes at board meetings are the way he votes, adding that Cannon’s words regarding setting up public outcry is “obfuscation” and trying to distract from the real issue at hand.

“I think that a lot of people thought that this whole ordeal was going to end with the trial and conviction of Dean Reynolds, but what we’re finding out is that it’s like the season finale of a TV crime drama: They conclude with certain things but leave you with more questions than answers. ... This sounds the alarm that we need a very strong ethics policy with teeth that lets people know and requires disclosure, requires penalties for violating provisions that are designed to prevent conflicts of interest,” he said.

At this juncture, it’s unclear how long the investigation will take place.

“It’s another tough time in Clinton Township history, not near like the Dean Reynolds part,” Cannon said. “We will get through it and be stronger when we get through it.”



Former Clinton Township Planning Director Carlo Santia discusses a local road millage April 9 during a Clinton Township Board of Trustees meeting. He retired June 25 due to fallout from court testimony he provided.  
File photo by Nick Mordowanec

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