

May 12, 2011

Rotary Charities
202 E. Grandview Parkway, Suite 200
Traverse City, MI 49684

Gentlemen and Ladies of the Traverse City Rotary,

Though never directly participating, I have watched the philanthropic efforts of the Rotary for years and marveled at how some good works have benefited by the addition of rotary funding mechanisms. To be sure, the community benefits when 'private' organizations such as the Rotary, bring a unique and non-governmental eye to giving, solutions, and encouragement of community collaboration.

In having the Rotary as a part of our community, we have truly been blessed.

These days, something seems different however.

In just the past 8 years, the Rotary seems to have changed its mission a bit. It has gone from a stated 2003 mission:

"The Mission of Rotary Charities of Traverse City is to provide appropriate funding, within its resources, to organizations primarily within the five county Grand Traverse Area in order to improve the well-being of the Area with special emphasis on youth, community needs and quality of life. The five priority areas for grant making are: affordable housing; education; environment, to include managing growth; culture, to include recreation; and strengthening families." (From the Rotary Charities website in 2003)

to the current:

"The mission of Rotary Charities is to lead positive change in the five-county Grand Traverse (MI) region by assisting community organizations to better achieve their missions. We do this by:

- Providing grants and resources,
- Providing leadership,
- Providing a Management Support Organization (MSO) for the nonprofit sector,
- Facilitating strategic partnerships, and
- Promoting philanthropy "

(From the Rotary Charities website in 2011)

The continuing commonality appears to be merely that "the Rotary gives money away."

While that is all well and good, it appears that the Rotary has also shifted from a community centric charity with needs and quality of life issues to one that encourages *planning and "visioning"* in a manner that attempts to move and influence government within the process.

It appears that the Rotary has become a political entity.

There can be no argument that some of the grants offered in recent years have required political counter action by those who have disagreed with the processes created or advanced by the Rotary contributions. Consider the Boardman River projects. Indeed there can be no claim to unanimity in the decision making, and political decisions that have been made with regard to the support or lack thereof financially by such groups as the Rotary.

How does an organization such as the Rotary escape political finance statutes if it encourages or discourages publicly funded (government) activity through its "philanthropy?"

As recently as May 9, there is an application for a \$5,000 grant that will be considered by the Rotary board which also has serious political considerations. A Grant request to fund the start up of a new Corridor Improvement Authority for the "Miracle Mile" in East Bay township. Given the fact that the ultimate end of such a project requires those who are not accepting of the project to participate through the compulsion of a new authority created under political circumstance.

Will Rotary Charities consider its mission to be that of moving political boundaries further through approval of this grant?

I hope not.

Sincerely Concerned.

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