

Watab Town Board Meeting Minutes April 22, 2014

A special meeting of the Watab Town Board was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chair Ed Kacures Jr. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss options for the Rice Fire Contract with the residents of the northern third of the township. All town board members were present: Supervisors Kacures, Lloyd Erdmann, and Craig Gondeck; Treasurer Eileen Saldana; and Clerk Pat Spence. Audience members included: Janel Vaillancourt, John Polcher, Joyce Saldana, Earl Tuttle, Kim Kubat, Gene Kubat, Bruce Christofferson, Daniel Olmschenk, Art Betker, Bob Rahn, Troy Heck, Jerry Kostreba, Mark Beckman, Molly Vaillancourt, Darcy Freihammer, Andy Freihammer, Loren Popp, John Baune, Kevin Reiter, Rand Schaper, Pat Rolph, John Olson, and Phillip Nelson. There were a few others present who did not sign in.

Following the Pledge to the Flag, Chair Kacures went through a Power Point presentation that included the goals of the meeting, the negotiation process, the difference between the City of Rice's and the township's contract proposals, the considerations the board has used in developing a contract proposal, and various options to move forward. Currently the township has emergency services protection from Rice under the second, three-month extension of the 2013 contract with a lump sum of \$38,500 for 40 calls; additional calls will be billed at \$350 per call.

The options Chair Kacures presented included the following:

1. Accept the City of Rice's proposal. Residents of the northern third of the township would accept responsibility for payment of the contract costs, which are estimated at \$40,117 for 2014. This is based on the contract base amount plus \$350 for the first hour and \$300 for additional hours on calls.
2. Get the City Council members to change their minds and vote to accept the most recent contract proposal from the township.
3. Request that the Rice Fire Department discontinue medical first responder calls. This would reduce the cost to taxpayers approximately \$10,000 annually.
4. Make a formal request to the City of Sauk Rapids and Sauk Rapids Fire Department to cover the entire township beginning on July 1, 2014 and continuing through the duration of the township's current contract with them. Sauk Rapids charges 1.97% of the 2014 Net Tax Capacity plus \$355 for the first hour and \$240 for each additional hour on calls for the southern two-thirds of the township. We do not know what rate they would charge for the northern third of the township if they agree to accept these sections.

Chair Kacures then asked residents for their input. Concerns expressed with leaving Rice were: 1) response time on calls; 2) losing EMT services; and 3) impact on property insurance rates. One resident said that his insurance would go up significantly; another said that he had checked and it wouldn't make any difference. Concerns stated about accepting Rice's contract proposal were: 1) the high cost in taxes for the homeowners in the northern third of the township compared to the cost of Sauk Rapids coverage; 2) the continued difficulty of the board in negotiating with the Rice Council; 3) the cost for having EMT's respond plus the ambulance cost for those receiving service; 4) number of times that the ambulance arrives before the First Responders; and 5) the number of people from the northern third of the township who don't pay their bills for emergency services, which then is passed on to the taxpayers on property taxes.

Other suggestions from the audience offered for moving forward were: 1) ask Sauk Rapids to consider building a substation in Watab with the township providing the land and building and leasing it to Sauk Rapids. Funds could come through grants and gambling proceeds. This would reduce the response time and give us a professional department; 2) get the Rice City Council to negotiate in good faith and keep them as the fire department for the northern sections; or 3) talk to Sauk Rapids about them serving the entire township, and if they agree, find out what it would cost.

Questions from audience members were answered by Brad Vaillancourt, Rice Firefighter; Troy Heck, Benton County Sheriff's Deputy; and board members. Several audience members expressed appreciation to the board for their work in trying to get a contract and for holding the meeting to ask for their input.

Supervisor Kacures said that the board would take two weeks to think about how to proceed and discuss it at the May board meeting. He thanked everyone for attending and for their input.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Clerk Pat Spence