

Minutes of Watab Emergency Services Committee – January 29, 2018

The Watab Emergency Services Committee was called to order at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, January 29, 2018 at the town hall by Town Board Chair Craig Gondeck. Committee members present were: Lloyd Erdmann, Todd Waytashek, Bob Raveling, Craig Gondeck, John Olson, Sandra Saldana, Mike Burton, Jeff Wollak, Ray Thompson, and Pat Spence. Others present were: Sandra and Allen Saldana, April Burton, Doug Harden, Mary & Gary Aschenbrenner, Tom Kubat, Dale Dirks, Linda Dirks, Jeff Wollak, Steve Wollak, Ray Thompson, Lee Schnobiech, Elaine Legatt, ?, John Olson, ?, ?, Elaine Watts, Paul Wippler, Charlie Walters, Michael Burton, Terry Knapek, Bob Ravling, and Anna Saldana. Following the Pledge to the Flag, Craig turned the meeting over to Todd Waytashek.

Todd announced that he has spoken with Sauk Rapids City Administrator Ross Olson to set up a date for himself and John Olson to meet with Ross, the city finance director, and fire chief regarding a Sauk Rapids substation. The City Administrator is setting up the meeting date. Todd also said he is putting together a document of “Frequently Asked Questions” to add to the township website. He asked committee members to forward other questions. Finally, Todd addressed the process for negotiations by the new committee members with the City of Rice. Lloyd Erdmann asked who the leader for negotiating would be, and Sandy Saldana said that she would be that person. She added that they are looking for a better contract with better terms.

Pat Spence said that she had looked for the record of how the township had transitioned from a lump-sum contract to a Net Tax Capacity + Call contract with Rice. Caleb Voigt had stated at previous meeting that the town board had requested this change. Pat read the minutes of the November 6, 2013 meeting between the Rice City Council and Watab Town Board that shows that it was the city that discontinued the lump-sum contract. Here is the record of that meeting:

The Watab Town Board was invited to a joint meeting with the Rice City Council to discuss the next Fire Contract. The meeting was held on Wednesday, November 6, 2013 at 7:00 p.m. at the Rice City Hall. All board and council members were present: Chair Ed Kacures Jr., Supervisors Lloyd Erdmann and Craig Gondeck, Clerk Pat Spence, Treasurer Eileen Saldana, Mayor Dale Rogholt, Council Members Chris Scheel, Dave Thene, Al Voigt, and Brian Skroch, and City Clerk Marie Weinand. Mayor Rogholt called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The proposed contract from Watab was submitted to Rice on October 3rd; however, the Rice City Council did not see it until the day of this meeting. Watab’s proposal followed the suggestion of the Mayor to include a Cost of Living increase for our current lump sum amount of \$38,500. There was considerable discussion of various options including the suggestion of Al Voigt to eliminate medical calls. The town board responded that it would need to review this with Gold Cross Ambulance Service and the township residents in the northern twelve sections of the township who would be affected by a change in service. Other issues included the date that Net Tax Capacity information is available from the county, the urgency of getting a new contract since this one expires on December 31st, and the basis for the contract. It became apparent that the majority of council members in Rice want a contract based on Net Tax Capacity and a per call additional charge. Watab’s contract proposal was defeated by a

vote of the City Council with Mayor Rogholt and Councilman Scheel in favor and Councilman Voigt, Thene, and Skroch opposed. The council announced that they would place the issue on their November 18th council agenda for further action and proposals. It was noted that the Rice City Council will need a unanimous decision when they vote on the fire contract, since a member of the department serves on the city council and has a conflict of interest. (Rice City Attorney opinion). The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

A question was raised at how Sauk Rapids formulates their contract with Watab. It is based on Net Tax Capacity and has gone from 1.97% to 2.20%; the new contract proposal for 2018-20 will be calculated at 2.07%. Pat Spence explained that Watab Township would be the only entity that would have a cost increase in the Sauk Rapids contract because of our large increase in new housing construction: Net Tax Capacity. Paul Wannigman asked if Net Tax Capacity is a good thing. Pat responded that it is positive.

Todd Waytashek said that he felt the town board should give the negotiating committee further ideas to help them negotiate. There was pushback from some of the committee members about this idea, and it was not resolved.

Allen Saldana commented that Rockwood has been there for thirty to forty years and is not going away. Craig Gondeck said that last week he had a call from the Rockwood Estates manager that one party with over fifteen unpaid calls has moved out. Pat Spence gave history on what the township has done to initiate payment from Rockwood for unpaid bills. Their attorney and operations manager felt that the owner would contribute; however, he has not responded to the township's request for such payment. Pat suggested that Sandy Saldana speak to her brother Chuck Popp about how Graham Township got their contract cost with Rice cut in half. Sandy explained that he is a Graham Township Supervisor. Lloyd said that Watab got one payment from Rockwood for the difference in Net Tax Capacity Rates, but they didn't continue making any payments as promised.

Todd encouraged those present to look at the township website emergency services information and recommend anything that should be added.

Mike Burton asked what the cost was to Rice for 2017. Pat Spence reported the following: Contract payment was \$22,096.46; Fire Calls were \$1,050; Medical Calls were \$15,400; and Rescue Services were \$2,750. Sandy Saldana asked what the offset was in payments for services. Pat said that \$5,045.19 was received by the township in payment for services.

Mike Burton suggested that if the township had continued with the lump-sum contract and added three per cent annual inflation, the 2017 contract cost would be \$43,332. John Olson questioned why he would use three per cent rather than two per cent.

Steve Wollak said he has one big question, which is why the committee spent \$11,600 of township funds and wondered how much more would be spent. Todd Waytashek said that he believes that the committee has answered all the questions that were posed, and the committee work is finished. Steve expressed that \$9,000 in wages was outrageous. Todd explained how the time was spent and that much of the work he did was not billed. Other accusations followed. Lloyd Erdmann said that he believed that any future meetings of the committee should be strictly voluntary, and if members don't want to serve they can drop off. Craig Gondeck said that he has been recently accused of being paid to drive around the

township and said that he only gets paid if someone calls him out or his work is authorized by the board. He added that he doesn't see the need for any more committee meetings. He also doesn't think the township should go into a fire department at this time with all the criticism.

Pat Spence was asked to add the November 14th Information Presentation to the website.

Jeff Wollak was asked if the committee is finished. Todd responded that he and John Olson would be meeting with the Sauk Rapids representatives regarding the substation and the negotiating committee would come back to the town board with its results.

Lloyd Erdmann said he will make a motion at the annual meeting to have the question of whether to have a Watab Fire Department on the 2019 Ballot for the Annual Election. He stated, "The Town Board is elected to serve everyone in the township not just the people who come who are opposed to something."

Sandy Saldana said it doesn't make any sense to move away from the contracts with Rice and Sauk Rapids stating, "It is common sense that we have two fire departments that serve us, and we need to make it work." She asked where the positive people are that want to have a Watab Fire Department. Todd said that he has had calls from people saying that they won't come to any more meetings because of the negativity. Brad McIntosh said it is "....." if they don't want to come. He asked if everyone is aware that we could have a substation of Sauk Rapids with Gold Cross Ambulance and the Benton County Sheriff having a presence here. He agreed with Lloyd that everyone should have a chance to vote on it.

Ray Thompson said that his insurance will go way up with a Sauk Rapids substation. Todd answered that Sauk Rapids Fire Department ISO rating is better than Rice's. It is a four and Rice's is 5.5, and so everyone in the township would benefit by picking up the Sauk Rapids ISO rating with a substation in the township. Craig Gondeck added that Sauk Rapids' ISO rating was lowered to a four because of the facilities for water access in Watab Township, which resulted in large insurance premium savings for commercial property. Ray repeated that his rates would go up, and Terry Knapek agreed with him. Lloyd said that if Watab had its own fire department, rates would go up for the first three years, but if Watab had a substation of Sauk Rapids the premiums would have a lower rate.

Sandy Saldana asked why the town board hadn't contacted Sauk Rapids earlier to get an answer on a substation. She also expressed her disappointment that the electors' petition hadn't been acted on earlier.

John Olson said that the committee's purpose was to investigate options including what it would cost to set up a Watab department. The committee made several visits, analyzed budgets, and presented options at the November meetings. The committee got a lot of feedback which was both positive and negative. The Sauk Rapids City Administrator and Fire Chief said at the morning information meeting that they were open to talking, and Todd is setting it up. It might turn out to be the most viable option. Now, we brought five people on to talk to Rice. He added, "Go talk to them and come back with something. People can't vote on something without good information. That is what this committee is about. First, get some good information so you make a good decision for the township. It's not about making a choice now."

Steve Wollak said, "Go back to the taxpayers. I don't care about Todd. I was ignored." He added that he had previously wanted the decision to go to a vote of the people and was told that would take too long.

Lloyd Erdmann answered that when moving forward with Rice negotiating, you must consider the past. The township hasn't been treated fairly in the past, and I hope things change. He explained how excess township funds that are not used by the fire department go into Rice's General Fund. Craig Gondeck agreed and said that the legislature is going to review this. Todd encouraged the public to look at the auditor's findings on the City of Rice's financial audit.

Brad McIntosh said that Watab Township has two problems, which are Rockwood Estates and the City of Rice.

Paul Wannigman asked where the money from Watab is spent in Sauk Rapids. Craig answered that the contract money goes into the equipment fund. In Rice, it goes into the General Fund. The township doesn't know how much the residents of Rice are being taxed for emergency services. Jeff Wollak asked if there are other complaints with Rice than the contract. The only issues are the cost of services, being required to have medical first responder calls, and the number of fire fighters entering a home. Ray Thompson said that five is the most fire fighters that go into a home. Pat said that there have been numerous complaints that are part of the public record as testimony at meetings about this issue. She added, "The township has always thanked the fire fighters for their service, and that isn't the issue."

There were additional questions that have been covered at numerous, prior committee meetings. The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Pat Spence