

## Minutes of Emergency Services Information Meeting – November 14, 2017 at 7:00 P.M.

The second Emergency Services Information Meeting on November 14, 2017 was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Town Board Chairman and Supervisor Craig Gondeck. Other board members present were: Supervisors Lloyd Erdmann and Todd Waytashek, Clerk Pat Spence, and Treasurer Maureen Graber. Other committee members present in addition to the board were John Olson, Jason Krueger, Ed Kacures Jr., Bob Raveling, and Dick Raveling. Audience members were: Ralph Berger, Ervin Christle, Robert Beitz, Wayne Larson, Dothan Aleshire, Sandra Saldana, Allen Saldana, Anna Saldana, Steve Wollak, Craig Nelson\*, Vern Kosloski, Kim Kosloski, Julie Johnson, Mary Kivi, Mark Saldana, Roxi Saldana, Cliff Weitgenant, Jessica Storkamp\*, Steve McFadden, Dale Dirks, Paul Wannigman, Janel Vaillancourt\*, Dan Durant, Kenneth Graber, Jason Fleming\*, two SR residents with Jason Fleming\*\*, Noel Johnson, Tom Roettger, Caleb Voigt\*, Linda Voigt, Scott Voigt, John Pearson, Brian Erdmann, Wendy Erdmann, Jeff Wollak, Dennis Keim, Ray Thompson, Terry Knapak, Tom Kubat, Peggy Kubat, Ron Schlichting, Durwood Bettenberg, Deb Poirier, Linda Dirks, Cliff Poirier, Kevin Reiter, Tony McNeal, Ken Feia, Paul Jacobs, Shelly Jacobs, illegible name, Dayle Tenney, Janet Maleska, Kevin Maleska, Scott Janski\*, Doris Janski\*, and Paul Wannigman. (Names with asterisks are non-taxpayers in the township).

Following the Pledge to the Flag, Chair Gondeck turned the meeting over to Committee Chairman and Township Supervisor Todd Waytashek. He presented the same Power Point presentation that was given at the morning meeting. Again, he thanked Negen Architects for giving the township a copy of the plans and costs for the fire hall he designed for Chain of Lakes at no cost to Watab. They also gave estimates for the cost of the same building today and an estimate for a pre-cast concrete building using that floor plan. Todd asked those present to save their questions for the end of his presentation. He was interrupted numerous times during the presentation. Some who spoke were those who don't pay property taxes in the township and were members or affiliates of the Rice Fire Department.

Input given from residents was:

- An accusation that the town board was lying about the charges for emergency calls. The man claimed that he was charged \$500 to have a lift assist for his wife. He called the Sheriff's Department directly and asked for a deputy to assist him. The Sheriff's office dispatched the Rice First Responders instead. Then, he said he got a bill for \$500 from the township. A board member said that they would investigate and report back on the accusation. The bill should have been 75% of the \$350 charge or \$262.50. During the meeting the Treasurer found the bill; it was for \$262.50.
- The operating budget projections should have an inflationary rate added. Todd agreed.
- The Benton County Sheriff asking for a presence at a Watab Fire Hall might be good for our township residents, but it will add to county expense, and he will need approval from the County Board.

- Would people in the Rice Fire District save money on fire protection and Sauk Rapids Fire District residents cost for fire protection increase if there was a Watab Fire Department?
- The City of Sauk Rapids website says that it costs \$4,500 to train and outfit a firefighter, so you haven't budgeted enough. Fire Chief Jason Fleming said that is incorrect; he said that Sauk Rapids spends \$14,000 per fire fighter. Craig Gondeck said that Watab budgeted for in-house training and used fire fighter equipment.
- The formation of a fire department should go to a vote of the people.
- I know that you can't get fire fighters in the township.
- Concern about the ISO rating effect on property insurance.
- Wait until the current debt for the town hall and road projects is paid before forming a fire department.
- How can you build a fire hall when you can't even install a PA system in the town hall so we can hear?

Jason Fleming gave figures on what Sauk Rapids pays for training and equipment for their fire fighters as \$14,000 per firefighter. Todd Waytashek said that the Watab committee's budget projections include in-house training and used or donated equipment. Costs were based on information from the other township fire departments that the committee visited. We would not purchase new equipment, because used and donated equipment is readily available. The committee also hasn't factored in any grant money. Since so many questions were raised about costs for equipment tonight, Todd said that the committee will revisit the estimates. The Watab budget is almost identical to the Chain of Lakes budget, which serves a slightly larger population than Watab's.

John Olson, committee member, said that having contracts with Rice and Sauk Rapids for fire protection is like renting an apartment versus home ownership; Watab is currently "renting" fire protection from Rice and Sauk Rapids and doesn't have input into the rent costs. He added, "the blue line on the projections shows the increase in contract costs. It has a four percent inflation amount added in, because that is the amount the costs have gone up on average each year for the past ten years. The amount shown on the blue line is not negotiable. It shows what your rent will be for fire protection. We need fire protection. We can continue to rent it or we can own it. Setting up a fire department has two options: owning our own; approach other townships; or set up a substation. We have just started to explore options. If you buy a house after renting an apartment, your initial costs go up because you have a mortgage and start-up costs, but eventually the mortgage is paid. Based on the numbers we have seen, it looks like we will be better off having our own department. We don't have a vested interest. We only want direction on whether we should proceed to talk to Sauk Rapids and get more detailed information on costs. Please give us your feedback." A resident responded, "We want to fill out the survey tonight, and you let us know how it turns out before we leave. We don't trust you."

A resident in the back of the room stood up and said that he didn't know what was wrong with some of the negative people. He added, "You should be thanking the committee, this is a good idea."

Todd announced that surveys would be handed out by Maureen Graber to those who pay property tax in the township. Clerk Spence noticed Doris Janski and another non-taxpayer take surveys. Supervisor Gondeck went to the back of the room to tell them they couldn't fill out a survey. They said they were turning them in for residents who couldn't come to the meeting and placed completed surveys in the survey box. Both people turning in these surveys have affiliation with the Rice Fire Department.

As the meeting broke up, Julie Johnson and Sandra Saldana picked up the surveys in the box to count them. Clerk Spence asked them to bring them to the front of the hall, so that she could observe. A few other committee members also observed. The surveys were sorted into piles for "Yes" and "No." Julie and Sandra wrote the total of 33 on the "Yes" surveys and 37 on the "No" surveys. This included the surveys from the morning session. Pat saw them put the survey in the "No" pile that had a "?" on the "Yes" line and the comment written "or sub-station," and Julie removed her own survey from the morning session stating that she wasn't for or against yet, because the survey didn't ask the right questions.

Some of the committee members stayed to review the sign in sheets. Concern was expressed about Sandra and Julie's position that the surveys for the two non-residents needed to stay in the count, because no one knew how they voted. Clerk Spence said it was likely that they filled in "no" because they are related to Rice fire fighters. Todd Waytashek said that Julie wouldn't allow him to turn in a survey for his wife, because she wasn't present; why could others turn in surveys for those not present? Committee members noted that feedback from the surveys should not come from non-taxpayers in the township, and now the validity of the surveys is questionable since there were several non-taxpayers in the crowd and at least two turned in surveys. Clerk Spence was asked to review the sign in sheets to compare the total count of surveys with those who were eligible to complete them. This will be reviewed at a future meeting.

Respectfully submitted by Clerk Pat Spence