

Minutes of Special Watab Town Board Meeting: June 24, 2014

A special meeting of the Watab Town Board was called to order at 7:00 p.m. on June 24, 2014 at the town hall by Chairman Ed Kacures Jr. for the purpose of discussing fire protection for the northern sections (1-6 and 8-12) of Watab Township. All board members were present: Chair Kacures; Supervisors Lloyd Erdmann and Craig Gondeck; Treasurer Eileen Saldana; and Clerk Pat Spence. Audience members were John Baune, John F. Olson, Patricia Medeck, Al Medeck, and Robin Foster.

Following the Pledge to the Flag, Chair Kacures summarized the board's attempts to work out a contract with the City of Rice beginning in September 2013. After receiving the current contract proposal from Rice on December 24, 2013, the City has been unwilling to compromise in any way. At the May 2014 town board meeting, the board decided to ask Sauk Rapids to consider serving the entire township for the duration of our contract with them. A letter was sent to them on May 7th, and twice during the month, Supervisor Kacures contacted the City Administrator, Ross Olson.

Last week the Watab Town Board members received a letter from Marie Weinand, Rice City Clerk stating that Watab's second 90-day fire contract extension was expiring on June 30th and that "the City of Rice will stop responding to emergency/fire calls within the Watab Township at 12:01 a.m. on July 1st, 2014, unless the Township approves, executes and delivers to the City Clerk before 4:00 p.m. on Monday, June 30th, 2014, an executed copy of the contract last proposed by the City". (This was the only contract offered the township other than the one offered earlier in December, which the town board approved and the City said was a mistake).

Supervisor Kacures explained that Marie's letter states that Rice has been supportive of working out an acceptable agreement between the township and city; however, the only contract that they will consider is the one that they proposed to the township on December 24, 2013. Supervisor Kacures added that last evening (June 23rd) he attended the Sauk Rapids City Council Meeting to see if they had made any decisions in response to his letter mailed on May 7th. There was nothing on their agenda, so he waited after the meeting to speak to the City Administrator, Ross Olson. It was then that he learned that the City had mailed a letter of response to the township using the incorrect mailing address, so the township did not receive it. Ross Olson presented a copy of the letter to Supervisor Kacures, which stated that the sub-committee of the council had met on June 13th and was recommending that due to response time and mutual aid service the Sauk Rapids Fire Department not expand its boundaries to serve the northern sections of Watab Township at this time. The City Administrator informed Supervisor Kacures that he could appear before the City Council to address the issue at a future meeting by contacting the Mayor, making a formal request to the City to be on the agenda, or by appearing and speaking during audience participation. He stated that he would be asking the board for their decision on this at the July 1 town board meeting.

Supervisor Erdmann thanked Supervisor Kacures for all his professional work in seeking an affordable contract for the Watab residents in the northern sections of the township and noted that the City of Rice would not negotiate since three council members voted against any of the township's proposals. Therefore, he said, the township has no other option but to sign the original contract that Rice proposed, so that residents would have fire protection. He made a motion for the Board Chair to sign the contract; motion was seconded by Supervisor Gondeck. The motion passed with Supervisors Gondeck and Erdmann voting in favor; Supervisor Kacures abstained, because he did not like how the process transpired.

Supervisor Kacures said that he would like the board to consider for a future contract fire and rescue protection only from the Rice Fire Department and eliminate the first responder calls. Both Supervisors Erdmann and Gondeck responded that citizens of the northern third of the township should be given a vote on doing this. This will also be placed on the July 1 agenda.

Audience members asked about the prospect of having a boundary change so that the homes on the north side of County Road 13 could be included in the Rice service area. The board responded that this would need to be looked at in the future, but that it would raise costs. Also, the fire districts which were established through the last annual election would need to be changed through another ballot question. The earliest that could occur would be March 2016.

Another issue that Supervisor Kacures raised was how the City of Rice would invoice the township for the contract that he was signing. Clerk Spence reported on the last invoice that stated that the township was over 40 calls for the year; then a phone conversation with city staff that stated that was a mistake, but that Watab was over the ten allotted calls by seven; then a phone conversation with staff stating that a council member and the city attorney had been reviewing the minutes of their meetings to clarify what the two contract extensions allowed. Clerk Spence was asked to address the issue of how Watab would be billed for the remainder of 2014 under this new contract.

Supervisor Kacures closed the meeting by stating that residents' taxes would be going up for fire protection. Motion was made by Supervisor Gondeck, seconded by Supervisor Erdmann, and passed to adjourn the meeting at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Clerk Pat Spence