

DRAFT

Whitewater Township Emergency Services Committee
January 20, 2010 Minutes

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Boyd at 6:57 PM.

Present: Emerson, MacLean, Pat Miller, Kuncaitis, Boyd, Galligan, Blakeslee, Goss, and 8 members of the public.

Boyd reminded the committee that the three goals originally assigned to them shall be listed on every agenda. They were reiterated as follows:

1. What services are needed?
2. What affiliations should be utilized?
3. What facilities will then be needed?

Boyd added that he feels that the following are a part of this ongoing agenda:

1. If ambulance is a priority, do we remain as we are?
2. Can we enlarge the existing facility?
3. Do we reduce some of Rural Fire equipment to make space for the ambulance?
4. Building additional or remodel?
5. If a new building(s), where?

Boyd addressed the committee and stated that he wished all meetings of the committee should end at 8:45 so that the building can be vacated by 9:00 PM.

What services are needed for Ambulance? It was discussed that the debt retirement is coming up for the Township Park and that maybe this money can then directed toward Ambulance service. Boyd will further research this and determine where the funds come from (i.e. general fund) and actual date of expiration.

Boyd discussed the memo from Department of Interior regarding fire protection for the Grand Traverse Band. The memo dated 1988 states that the based on the decision of several courts, municipalities may not charge the Band fees that it does not charge others. Further, trust property is entitled to the same services as other citizens within the service and should not be assessed charges that are not levied against other s in the service area. Discussion took place regarding what was specifically meant regarding residents of the "county."

Minutes of January 12, 2010 were accepted.

Next on the agenda was North Flight EMS – analysis from 1994. The report stated that Whitewater Township should remain with its provision of Ambulance Service and that it continues its proactive approach and further North Flight is committed to providing supplemental support.

The 2010 – 2011 proposed fire station budget was discussed. Hang on to this copy as it will be discussed at a later meeting.

Contact information regarding North Flight was provided and the representative will be asked to attend the next meeting.

Boyd reported on the Township Board meeting from the previous evening on their comments regarding the Rural Fire Contract with the Board. Added to this was communication from the MTA attorney that stated the Township was under no legal responsibility to provide ambulance service, but politically it is a different subject.

Minutes from the January 18, 2010 Disaster Plan Committee were discussed as all agencies use different frequencies and lots of duplicity is taking place. SOP's should be addressed.

The question on the table is now – “Do we need Ambulance Service?” The majority response was yes.

Kuncaitis added that he is confident that we need a form of Advanced Life Support (ALS). Though we have it now, it is 25 minutes away. The majority of our residents do not understand the complex myriad that it currently takes to provide the service. As we grow there will be a need to expand the service. Whether it is alone or in conjunction with neighboring municipalities or expanded presence with North Flight is to be determined.

Blakeslee stated that we need to determine what the costs are to do it ourselves, share with Acme or bring North Flight to us.

Kuncaitis added that we must be careful as possible to use an economy of scales as doing these things ourselves adds responsibilities that could be overlooked – business management, budgeting, employee oversight, etc. as the Supervisor is currently a part-time position.

Emerson stated that all equipment in the Fire Station is essential equipment and that he feels the Ambulance service is as good as it gets for basic life support (BLS). Bringing the Ambulance members up to the next level is the next step. This is where Elk Rapids is currently. Paramedic status – we can bring ourselves to this level or work with North Flight to expand.

Kuncaitis stated that the million dollar question is “if North Flight cannot provide full time service with a 24 hour presence and turn a profit, should we?”

Miller asked if we had enough volunteers to move to the next step.

Chief Stites was asked about membership and interest. Membership has been down to 6 and has high as 20. They have never missed a run. Currently the roster is at 10.

Emerson stated that he would check with Blair Township. Blair staffs and maintains 3 units and chose to do it themselves, not contract with North Flight.

Kuncaitis stated that in his meeting with Blair, they chose to go on their own as they 1) had the staff, 2) didn't want to deal with the politics of boundary sharing and that it was a business decision.

Boyd added that he would hate to base life saving measures on a business decision.

Miller commented that as much as he hates to say it, we may need to expand our coverage area to enhance the revenue stream.

The question was asked, does the ambulance need to be located in the same facility?

Emerson stated that for training and scheduling purposes, it makes sense. He then invited everyone to come over for a tour of the current facility so that they could see what they are using.

Halstead, member of the audience, asked if the committee really thinks that the citizens of this community would support additional millage as they didn't support the previously requested ¼ mill? The committee needs to figure out where the money is going to come from first before you can move forward.

Boyd stated that the first step must be to determine what we need and advise the Board who will then determine how it will be paid for.

MacLean agreed.

Kunciatis said that a good recommendation would be that all contracts must be completely reviewed. Further, determining how to expand our services as cost effectively as possible is the result.

Goss stated that perhaps building a shell and finishing it as needed is a possibility.

Next possible locations were discussed. If we were to share with Acme, they are going to request that the station be located with a closer proximity to their center. The proposed fire station location and the current location allow reasonable access to Elk Rapids, Kalkaska and Acme.

The next meeting of the Committee was scheduled for February 2, 2010 at 7:00 PM. Emerson will contact North Flight for a presentation on the services they provide. Miller offered to bring someone in from Elk Rapids to discuss the same.

Several options were discussed for locations.

Education is going to be key regardless of the recommendation of this committee.

The reasoning for the proposed station having 5 bays was to accommodate Ambulance. Most folks don't differentiate between fire and ambulance.

The lack of interest in the Fire Department's open house this past fall was discussed.

MacLean stated that we must look at the building as a 50 year project not short term.

Kunciatis asked committee members if in their decision to serve on this committee they heard from anyone that "we don't need a new fire station." He thinks not. The issue was the lack of promotion, need and education as to what we need and why.

WWTESS 1/20/10

Blakeslee stated that until just recently (since joining the committee) she didn't understand the disparity in the provision of services for Ambulance. This has been eye-opening for her and feels that the education is key.

Emerson added again the need for a second ambulance.

Kunciatis requested a copy of all necessary equipment to adequately protect the uniqueness of Whitewater i.e. traveling on two-tracks, open fields, etc.

Goss questioned the amount that has been spent to date on the proposed fire station and that if we are too far into that to shelve it.

Boyd stated that the amount was approximately 130k with 100k coming from the tribe.

A brief discussion ensued into the history of the previously proposed building.

Harshfield, member of the audience, reminded the committee that their original goal was to differentiate between wants and needs. Do not lose track of that.

Arbanowski, member of the audience, stated that given the choice, he would say the Township needs a new facility before a new ambulance.

Boyd asked that the Fire Department have one spokesperson. Feed any information through Emerson.

Blakeslee questioned whether a combination of neighboring communities will provide for an economy of scales.

The history of the previous design was discussed. It was reiterated that the building was not designed by the Fire Department but evolved from the wants and needs and then compiled by a percentage based Architect.

Kunciatis again stated that the community never became invested in the Fire Station and its premise.

Meeting adjourned at 8:49 PM.

The committee members that were interested went on to the Fire Station for a tour of the facilities.