

WHITEWATER TOWNSHIP BOARD
Minutes of Special “Town Hall” Meeting held June 12, 2014

Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance

Supervisor Popp called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. at Mill Creek Elementary School, 9039 Old M-72, Williamsburg, Michigan, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call of Board Members

Board members present: Benak, Goss, Hubbell, Lawson, Popp

Board members absent: None

Others present: Ambulance Coordinator Dawn Martin, Fire Captain Tim Arbenowske, G.T. Rural Fire Chief Theo Weber, Tribal Representative Chuck Stewart, Recording Secretary Lisa Bowerman, and 65 others

Set/Adjust Meeting Agenda (not addressed)

Declaration of Conflict of Interest (not addressed)

Public Comment (other than on New Business Items) (not addressed)

New Business

Fire Station Information

Supervisor Popp opened with thanking Mill Creek School and Staff for their technology, time, and use of the building for the Special Meeting. Popp said that the Board recognizes that the information mailed out to the township people is not the whole story or the entire picture, but an attempt to get accurate information out. We want to engage the citizens at ground level discussion, get your opinions and priorities.

Popp instructed the crowd on how to address the panel with their questions and that there were index cards available for those who do not wish to speak publicly.

Popp introduced the panel.

Representative for the GTB Chuck Stewart addressed the crowd with their proposal. Option 1, GTB has offered to construct a 12,872 square foot emergency facility.

A GTB member was asked 4 years ago to sit in on a committee meeting. The GTB started gathering information from the committees. They took into consideration the Master Plan, with existing needs and services to the township and looked 20 years down the road. The GTB, wanting to partner with

Whitewater and be cost effective for the township and the taxpayers, came up with Option 1. GTB has land that is close to the village of Williamsburg and meets the criteria of the Master Plan. It also has good access to Turtle Creek. They found a building that could be built to house all the existing Whitewater emergency equipment, which is currently not housed in one location.

Stewart addressed the concerns about public safety needs for residential, commercial, and the citizens of Whitewater Township.

Stewart stated that part of the building would be for tribal police. The Band would cover the cost and operation of that part of the building. Whitewater Township would lease this building for \$1 a year.

Supervisor Popp asked for any discussion. There was none.

Popp discussed Option 2, a fire station owned and operated by Whitewater Township taxpayers, located on Cram and Elk Lake Roads.

Needs of the building were discussed, cost estimated at \$1 million and a 0.5 millage over 15 years.

Popp states that the Department of Agriculture is on board for financing.

Popp asked for questions.

Charlie Davis, 8500 Crisp Road, asked who is going to manage the \$1 million project for Option 1 and what are the regulations the township has to meet, and what are the building expenses.

Popp stated that the township would spend about \$10,000 more a year to operate the larger facility.

Fire Chief Weber addressed the township's requirements. There is a risk analysis to determine what the township needs are. Emergency vehicles are purchased on that need. Whitewater does not house all their equipment in one location. The ladder truck is currently housed in Kingsley. Also, the Whitewater proposal, Option 2, does not have enough room for all the emergency vehicles that Whitewater currently owns.

Nicole Stibbs, 9675 Old M-72, thanked the Tribe for bringing Option 1 to Whitewater Township. Asked if the Tribe will be accepting bids from local companies to build this facility. Asked will local county police and state police vehicles be housed in this facility. She also asks if the facility will just be tribal police. Where is the \$10,000 difference to run this facility for a year coming from?

Stewart stated that anyone can bid on the project, and the Tribe has a procedure to have a minimum of 3 bids.

The Tribe has an agreement with county and state police and the details of that are still to be worked out.

Popp stated that the additional operational funds will come from the Fire Fund, which is a special assessment, separating the existing operational funds from the old building and transferring them to the new building.

Glenn Savage, 7833 Pineneedle Lane, stated the Tribe put in a water service, and if you are 1000 feet from the water, your insurance goes down and that should be looked into for the fire barn.

Arnell Boyd, 6447 Baggs Road, thanked Chuck Stewart and the Board. Also thanked the Tribe for bringing this proposal to Whitewater. The Band wants to partner with us and we should receive it. Asked if the EMS people employed in the casino would be able to respond in the township. Several pluses in this option, including state and local police. Also asked about backup generators and communication.

Stewart stated that the Tribe is working on the issues of EMS employees of the casino responding outside of the casino. He states that the procedure is working well at the Leelanau Sands Casino. He also states that to be a Red Cross Shelter, the building needs to be self sustaining, and this building would be. It would have a backup generator.

Mark Smith, 326 Island View Drive, stated that it was a great opportunity and a single location makes sense, because minutes count in response time. Is there an agreement with other neighbors and how does that work for our residents?

Popp stated yes, we do have agreements with other neighbors and the agreements are being reviewed.

Weber stated that there are 66 firefighters available to Whitewater through Rural Fire and a strong relationship with Metro, City, and Blair Fire Departments, 27 agreements in all. There are 9 partners in Rural Fire and Whitewater is an equal partner.

Stewart stated that the Tribe's site and approval plan process is 2-6 weeks after they receive the plan.

Mike Conlan, 5918 Vinton Road, asked if there are any federal funds for Option 2 to build the building. He stated that both Option 1 and 2 have good egress for EMS and firefighters. If we go with Option 1, we will see NorthFlight come

aboard and that is a positive for the Township. Option 2 has no room for expansion. He is in favor of the Tribe's proposal, Option 1. He states that it is forward thinking and long overdue.

Tom Emerson, 8785 Park Road, stated that he has been on 2 committees in the past and has looked at what the needs are for a building. Whitewater is falling behind. EMS and Fire are moving to 24/7 manned station. He says that the Tribe's plan is what we need, and that the building in Option 2 is not big enough to house all the equipment Whitewater currently owns. He is in favor of the Tribe's proposal.

Kim Halstead 7923 Cook Road, addressed the sewer and water at the tribal facility. He thanked the Board and the panel for bringing these proposals to the township people.

Stewart stated that road improvements and sewer and water are included in the plan.

Kathy Ledezma, 5429 Moore Road: Is Option 1 large enough to house all of Whitewater's equipment and large enough for expansion? If we house other entities, are they going to help with the costs?

Popp stated that the costs estimates are a rough draft.

Stewart pointed out that the building in the Tribe's proposal is large enough to house all the equipment that Whitewater owns. He stated that 80 percent of the structure would be filled up with Whitewater equipment.

Weber said that all the equipment would fit, including the tower.

Popp stated that Rural is in charge of Fire; the township has no control over that. Popp stated that the township does have control over ambulance.

Weber stated that we are working towards staffing.

Pat Erway, 8335 Church Street, stated money is an issue, but the bigger question is life. Life is the issue.

Tim Shaffer, 5309 Moore Road: What is the size of the property of Option 1?

Stewart stated that the Tribe determines the needs and designates the appropriate area or acreage.

Popp used the overhead projector to show the Township and Tribe property proposed in Options 1 and 2.

Chris Hubbell, 8055 Angell Road: Can the public make this decision in support of the Tribe?

Popp stated that the decision can be put on the ballot.

Rod Kuncaitis, 6204 Elk Lake Road, talked about the development happening in Acme and coming this way. He talked about the information gathered by the Emergency Services Committee (ESC) from 2 years ago and that the committee was leaning toward the Tribe's proposal. He is in support of Option 1.

Greg Haughen, 5661 Williamsburg Road, asked what is going to happen to the properties that are currently housing Whitewater's equipment.

Popp stated that it will be used for storage.

Discussion followed about storage.

Dick Bukowski, 10304 Elk Lake Trail, asked over 25 years what are the costs of operation for Option 1 and Option 2? Current cost of fire and ambulance to the casino? He addressed the lease issues and expenses for the township and casino.

Popp asked for any Board comment. There was none.

Ambulance Information

Popp moved on to Option 3 and 4 which deal with the ambulance service.

Popp states that we are required to have 2 people 24/7. That is a State law as well as a medical control authority, which is Munson Medical Center. Whitewater received a disciplinary letter because we missed 2 calls. He stated that the Board approved \$80,000 for one year to fund the ambulance, ending in March 2015.

Option 3 – Hiring 1 person Monday through Friday and Sundays 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., also a second person to have a 12-hour pager shift, being compensated \$40. In addition, they would get their normal pay if called out.

Discussion followed about having a trained EMS park manager. This would assure that someone is in the township and would be available to respond.

Option 4 - A single person to be in the station 24/7 as a first responder, the second person as a volunteer that would be compensated \$40 for a 12-hour pager duty and paid normal wage if called out.

Andy Jeurink, 8601 Church Street, stated that he does not see the need for a park employee to be a first responder.

Popp said that this is a way to save money.

Charlie Davis, 8500 Crisp Road: What are we paying now? And what are you going to do with money being used for ambulances?

Popp and Benak respond that the money would be reallocated to other areas.

Popp stated that a 1 mill special assessment generates \$50,000 to \$60,000. We generate \$20,000 to \$30,000 from the insurance.

Arnell Boyd, 6447 Baggs Road, asked what is the response time to get from the park to the station.

Popp stated that the emergency vehicle could be at the park.

Discussion followed about a park manager responding to emergency calls.

Glenn Savage, 7833 Pineneedle Lane, said that if the state mandates 24/7, we either need to man the ambulance or turn it over to someone else. He is in favor of fire and ambulance 100 percent.

Discussion followed about labor and supplies to man the ambulance.

Kim Mangus, 1214 Cerro Road, asked if we were looking at NorthFlight. What is the price difference of staffing in-house or with NorthFlight? She talked about BLS and ALS and their differences.

Discussion followed about ALS and BLS differences.

Tom Emerson, 8785 Park Road, stated that not all firefighters are cross trained, and the people that we do have are getting burned out. He talked about BLS and ALS.

Weber addressed the differences between BLS and ALS.

Popp stated that he received 7 phone calls to his office from people that could not make it to the meeting. Popp said that the community wants full-time responders.

Kathy Ledezma, 5429 Moore Road, is not in favor of Option 3. We need 24/7; we need better response time. Our EMS needs more training and they need to be compensated.

Tim Shaffer, 5309 Moore Road, addressed the 24/7 service and noted that the volunteers are very dedicated, but they have day jobs.

Brooke Schalow, 5665 Deer Run Way, asked if she gets trained and moves here, is there going to be an ambulance service.

Martin stated that there is going to be ambulance service in the township and she is in favor of 24/7 coverage.

Rod Kuncaitis, 6204 Elk Lake Road, encouraged the public to do some research on the ESC report.

Tom McElwee, 8016 Lakeside, asked what percent of the calls go to NorthFlight.

Popp discussed the percentage of calls from each quadrant.

Discussion followed about transports, NorthFlight and where they intercept with the township ambulance.

Levi Gaskin, 5653 Vinton Road, stated that the rig goes from BLS to ALS once NorthFlight gets on board.

Adam Shaffer, 5309 Moore Road, asked who is going to man the station and can we use local people.

Lois MacLean, 5919 Linderleaf Lane, stated that we didn't go over Option 4. It's a little more but worth it.

Popp stated that if we are going to be a 24/7 station, it would be up to the current EMS employees if they wanted to fill those spots.

Popp also stated that Option 3 and 4 appear to be off the table. When we put this packet together, we didn't understand how important medical is to the township people. We understand that it is important, but we are talking about a lot of mills. We wanted to start small.

Discussion followed about the next step to take and how we get it on the ballot.

Goss explained that the fire special assessment was approved by the voters in 1974 and can only be used for fire. It never goes back in front of the voters; only the board can vote on it. Goss stated that the board does not want that. The Board would like the voters to be involved.

Dick Bukowski, 10304 Elk Lake Trail, asked if we can split fire and ambulance.

Goss stated that it could be an option to split fire and ambulance.

Arnell Boyd, 6447 Baggs Road, asked if the special assessment is 1 mill.

Goss stated yes, 1 mill.

Ted Hooper, 6575 Cook Road, stated the township people need to be educated as to what they are going to get.

Kim Mangus, 1214 Cerro Road: What are the numbers on the mills for 1 full-time with one 1 on call personal?

Popp said 1.4 mill on Option 4.

Tom McElwee, 8016 Lakeside Trail, stated we get 1 call every 4 days; it's going to be hard to sell manning the station 24/7. Do we have an agreement with other areas; can they help us out?

Discussion followed about other areas helping.

Brad Link, 705 Supply Road, talked about the ambulance calls to his home the past couple of years and appreciates these volunteers, that these people need our support.

Mike Conlan, 5918 Vinton Road, stated there are mutual agreements in place with other areas and they work well. He stated that our problem is that we don't have a pool of volunteers to pull from. We need to decide: Do we want people available? We need to support our community and these people.

Kim Halstead, 7923 Cook Road, stated that Option 4 is the best one. We need more options and to let the people decide.

Discussion followed about Option 4 and mills.

Popp encouraged people to look at their tax bills and see how this affects them. There were 1530 mailers sent out and 65 people showed up.

Mark Smith, 326 Island View Drive, stated that he wants professional people to respond and that we need to give these people what they deserve; they deserve benefits.

Renee Savage, 9833 Pineneedle Lane, asked if the Tribe could fund 1 of our full-time people.

Stewart replied that it is an option.

Discussion followed about tribal land and federal trust land.

Stewart states that Turtle Creek Casino paid just under \$15,000 in property taxes last year.

Tim Shaffer, 5309 Moore Road, asked what are surrounding areas being paid.

Weber said Metro runs off 2.4 mills for fire alone.

Popp asked for any other comments as we wrap up the meeting.

Stewart said that he is very thankful for Whitewater EMS; they saved him from a severe heart attack and he appreciates them very much. He said this is a small group, but you have enough information to go out and educate the rest of the community.

Weber said visit GTfire.org for more information on Rural Fire, or call the office.

Martin said she is thankful for the responders we have and grateful for how they serve this community.

Benak said thanks to everyone for attending and the comments.

Popp asked to please fill out the index cards, call, or e-mail with comments or questions.

MacLean noted that if you know anyone who would be willing to give their e-mail to us, we need to start getting the word out. She asked about the Halloween party; would we still be able to hold it with Option 1?

Stewart said that the township will control the building, so yes, you can still host the Halloween party.

Public Comment (not addressed)

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 8:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:
Lisa Bowerman, Recording Secretary