

**Whitewater Township Board
Minutes of Special Meeting held September 21, 2017**

Call to Order

Supervisor Popp called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Whitewater Township Hall, 5777 Vinton Road, Williamsburg, Michigan.

Roll Call of Board Members

Board Members present: Benak, Goss, Lawson, Popp

Board Members absent: Hubbell

Others present: Tim Arbenowske, Nick Carpenter, Eric Arbenowske, Dave Tilley, Tim Shaffer, Vaughn Harshfield, Arnell Boyd, and Robert Shugart

Set/Adjust Meeting Agenda

There were no adjustments.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

None

Public Comment

None

Agenda Items as Listed in Special Meeting Notice**Future of Whitewater Township Fire Department**

Tim Arbenowske asked what happened last night at the Rural Fire Board meeting.

Popp replied that he asked for a dissolution once, Fife Lake asked for it once. Bottom line: Union and Paradise are not going to do anything to dissolve until mutual aid agreements are in place and a cost factor established. Union is afraid that he cannot afford his fire protection. Union asked how much Whitewater would likely charge per year. Popp told him we would take a look at the cost recovery charges that are in place. They have not been updated in three years.

Tim Arbenowske said you have to look at hazards, fires, rescues; to them, it is all the same. A response is a response.

Popp said they made a commitment to have their pricing figured out by October 1, 2017.

Tim Arbenowske asked what happens if Springfield and Fife Lake are gone, and Rural still exists for six, eight more months, a year after that.

Popp stated last night they directed staff to generate an annual budget for 2018 with those two townships involved, as well as those two townships not involved. They also voted 3 to 2 to extend Weber's contract into 2018 month by month at the current rate. Whether he accepts is the next step. Popp stated if Fife Lake and Union cannot come to some type of agreement by 10/1, we should be prepared to move into 2018.

Equipment inventory, dividing assets, choosing a dissolve date, applying for a fire department ID number and approval time up to 90 days were all discussed.

Benak stated that tonight we want to open the dialogue, start the conversation. A lot has to happen before we are Whitewater Township Fire Department. It cannot happen without the fire department members. The board's role is administrative; we do not know fire. We need your expertise at the ground level. We need you to be fully involved in this. When we have meetings, we need you to be here.

Benak asked that copies of the MTA publication *On-Call Fire Departments* be ordered for the trustees and firefighters.

Lengthy discussion then took place touching on the following topics:

- The breakup of Rural Fire appears to be inevitable, so it would behoove us to start planning out what we want to do with our own department and get things ready so that when Rural Fire decides they are dissolving, we will be ready to go; it will be a smooth and seamless transition.
- "Our guys" want to fight fire. They do not want to be dragged through political turmoil. Consensus is they would rather move forward with our own rather than continuing to trudge through what happens tomorrow, what happens the next day.
- The township board's role is financial, regulatory, liability, the business end. Firefighters take care of the operational end of it.
- Benak sees the township board's role as something different than what it was when she first came on this board. She sees the firefighters, from the very beginning of the process, being fully involved.
- There is a good foundation to build on. They already do all the reporting, all the training hours, all the run reports.
- Job descriptions have been looked at for chief, deputy chief, safety officer, maybe captain, administrative position. MTA job descriptions may be used.
- It is not clear at this point what will happen to the firefighter records at Rural Fire. Popp stated it will be an agenda item next month (October). Training records are on the state website (except for in-house). Apparatus records go with the apparatus.
- It was noted that the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards are guidelines.
- An ordinance must be adopted establishing the fire department and the standards that the department needs to meet. Input for that will be sought from the membership of the department.
- It was proposed that Chief Weber be hired and paid as a consultant during the transition.
- Robert (Bob) Shugart was introduced to the board as someone who may be able to assist with the transition. He is currently with Elk Rapids Fire Department. He has 40 years as a volunteer firefighter. He originally came from Long Island, New York. He worked his way up through 22 years going from probationary fireman to lieutenant, to captain. He then became a commissioner, then became second deputy, first deputy, then chief. They ran about 1700 calls. They did fire and rescue. He then moved to New Jersey and was the business administrator, the interface from the town council to the fire department (he was a fireman at the time) for 3-1/2 years. He dealt with the town manager and the town

council, presented capital plans and operational costs. He then joined the ambulance squad and worked his way up to chief of the ambulance squad. They ran three towns, about 2,000 calls, BLS. That is his 40 years. As chief of the ambulance squad, he was also a trustee and dealt with the town for 2-1/2 years. He is currently with Elk Rapids Fire Department. He is nationally certified in almost all areas, Fire Officer III, Fire Instructor II, Fire Inspector, Plans Inspector.

- Shugart has offered to help with bylaws, policy files, any way that they need help, without compensation. He has been doing it for 40 years; he has a lot of experience and has been in successful fire departments and they are all volunteers. He just joined Elk Rapids as a firefighter. He is going to instruct with them and help with fire officer training.
- Shugart came on the suggestion of the ER chief. He was one of two candidates for the deputy chief position for Rural Fire. Popp has interviewed him.
- The firefighters met on Monday night with Bob to find out his level of interest.
- Shugart has taken an assignment for the next six months and will be traveling between Elk Rapids and Texas. He is a senior project manager on the current job. Prior to that, he ran eight distribution centers for Toys R Us for seven years. Before that, he worked for IBM for 19 years doing IT and hardware and software sales.
- Popp's meeting with the firefighters on Monday nights was discussed. Since those are training nights, Carpenter suggested a different night be scheduled.
- Benak suggested a new group e-mail be set up so everyone can be included on the communications that are going on.
- There are currently eight members total in the Station 3 department.

Popp asked for public comment.

Arnell Boyd, 6447 Baggs Road, stated he is glad to see that this board is finally seeing the fact that they need to listen to these firefighters. He is thankful for this man here for coming forward from Elk Rapids. You are applauded for listening to that man. It sounds like he has credentials that you need. He stated, nothing against the gentleman in place now at Rural Fire, but there is some old blood there that needs to be discarded.

Tim Shaffer, 5309 Moore Road, stated he is hearing we need to talk to this gentleman and pick his brain as much as we can. He is going to guide the board and the firemen for a positive system working. As far as the Rural Fire Board, it is dragging itself out, but it is not going to be much of a future, especially after the first of the year. Let's see if we can get this man helping us. It will be a tremendous help for the board and the firemen, and you will get a lot more personnel willing to coming into the fire department because it will help with better communications between the board and the fire department.

Discussion ensued as to whether job descriptions for chief and deputy chief should be the next step. The following points were noted:

- The board has not discussed whether the fire chief is going to be full-time or part-time. The structure of the department has not been discussed by the board.
- A hierarchy or chain of command should be determined first, then lay out the job descriptions.

- The fire chief may be responsible for fire reports.
- A deputy chief would ensure succession of command.
- Popp has put a list of documents together that he thinks are important for the Michigan Firefighter Training Council approval, and they are currently reviewing that.
- It was clarified that NFPA is not a regulatory organization. It is something that is looked to for guidance but is not required.
- The *On-Call Fire Departments* publication states that the township board needs to come up with the policies and standards they want to have met.
- Carpenter stated, for the size of the current department, administrative and command staff would be a fire chief, a deputy chief, and a safety officer. Captains and lieutenants would not be needed until the numbers get bigger. A fire chief could probably do all of the administrative functions, as well as be the operational chief. If the chief was out of town, the deputy chief would be the operational guy. The deputy chief would assist with attending board meetings, help the chief with administrative tasks, training, etc.
- Regarding whether the fire chief would be full time or part time, Carpenter noted that during the day they quite often only have one firefighter, maybe two, responding. If the Rural system breaks down, they might have to call on Metro or Elk Rapids to assist. Both townships are setting up cost recovery systems that are expensive. If you want to have coverage on top of the one guy who is usually responding, it makes sense to have your fire chief also be your on-duty guy.
- The minimum number of people needed for a structure fire with no lives involved was explained (no entry 3, entry 6). For a car crash with no one seriously injured, no one entrapped, no fluids leaking or fire danger, it was stated that 2 firefighters can safely work the scene with an ambulance crew.
- Traffic control was briefly discussed.

Carpenter stated they will begin writing operational policies and sharing them with the board.

Shugart offered that he can bring policies from different departments, as well as bylaws, meet with the guys, have them set up the policies they want, plus policies that are specific to the town and certain required policies. All the policies and bylaws would be approved by the board.

Popp stated his line of questioning about the numbers had to do with budgeting. Popp stated he has Rural's policies and will distribute them.

Carpenter said he personally sees the priorities being (when we change) who is going to be in charge of the department; who is going to be speaking for the department; who is going to be his second in command. We do require a safety officer. We already have the equipment we need to fight fires.

There was discussion of various inspections.

Carpenter noted he has at least two people who want to join our department, and inquired about a hiring freeze with Rural.

Popp replied that Chief Weber self-imposed a hold because he did not want to spend money on people and a department that might not be around in six months, but the board gave him authority last night to fast track those members. Anyone enrolling in training in November would have their fees paid in advance.

Carpenter said he will start the process. They already have firefighter certifications. He said the first priority would be the job descriptions, figuring out (when we get to that point) who is going to run this thing for the township.

Goss stated we need to get the ordinance drafted up and get it on an agenda to start looking at it.

General discussion followed concerning Shugart's availability, sample job descriptions, fire reporting software such as Fire Tools, and upgrading technology.

Carpenter will create a list of things they are going to need and share them with the board. They will need their own operational channel on the radio systems. He does not believe there will be a cost for that.

Board Comments/Discussion

None

Public Comment

None

Adjournment

Motion by Lawson to adjourn; second by Popp. Meeting discussion briefly continued. Meeting adjourned at 8:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl A. Goss
Whitewater Township Clerk