

**Benton Township Board Meeting
February 13, 2019**

Meeting called to order by Husk at 6:34 PM.

Attendance:

Michelle Bright, Trustee
Joe Husk, President
Hans Kelson, Secretary
Lynn Stevens, Member
Kevin Robling, Counsel

1. January 9th Minutes

Motion to approve Jan. 9 minutes: Kelson

Second: Stevens

Passed Unanimously

2. Reports

Trustee's Report- Michelle Bright

- Numerous reports filed, including:
 - IRS Monthly deposit 2018
 - 1099s for 2018
 - W2s and W3s for IRS
 - Dept. of Workforce Development
 - WH1
 - WH3 - state payroll withholding
 - Checks, both front and back
 - Gateway annual engagement - new this year. Upload minutes from meetings, fund balance and bank balance reports

Motion to approve - Stevens

Second - Kelson

Passed Unanimously

Township Assistance Report:

- Provided assistance for propane
- Food pantry was used 4 times, total value about \$172. Donations of about \$70.
- Mary McInerney is working on a food drive with Boy Scouts to help out people affected by federal government shutdown.

Motion to approve: Stevens
Second: Kelson
Passed Unanimously

3. Fire Reports: Northern Monroe Fire Territory

End of Year 2018

- 2018 total runs:
 - Benton Township 187
 - Bloomington Township 477
 - Washington Township 188
 - Mutual Aid 38
- Run totals: 890
- 1488 people responded to 187 runs in Benton Township.
- 8 average personnel per incident

January 2019:

- Northern Monroe - sole responder on 8 runs
- Both units responded to 6 runs
- No disregards

Motion to approve: Kelson
Second: Stevens
Approved Unanimously

4. Fire Reports: Benton

- Run data:
 - Fire: 37, including false alarms
 - Car wrecks: 10
 - EMA: 115
 - Brush fires 12
 - Misc. 13
- Volunteer hours:
 - Runs: 194 hours
 - Training: 1260 hours
 - Meetings: 174 hours
 - Total: 1628
- Training
 - Completed training of new drivers
 - Joint training with NMFT
- Recruitment

- One new recruit, completed Fire 1 & 2
- Plans for recruitment Fair
- Webpage
- Auction
 - 35th year
 - Great turnout
 - Many items donated
- County Fair
 - Great turnout, great weather
 - Good opportunity to reach out to public about fire prevention
- PS-LIT Funding
 - Dept. was granted \$50,000
 - Funds used for new water tender truck
- Halloween Party
 - Held at a community church, as a Trunk or Treat event
- New equipment
 - 14 new SCBAs, replacing old ones
 - Also obtained a Polar Breeze cooling apparatus, used for rapid cooling of firefighters during high-heat fires
 - Looking into purchase of new water tender
- Final notes
 - Some members retired in 2018
 - EMS run volume increased, with volunteers across the township at times on 3 different calls at once
 - Volunteer hours continue to decline
- Contract Money
 - Received funds of \$23,000
 - Total of \$22,293 was paid to active members
 - One member returned his run check for deposit back into Benton Twp Fire Association fund
- Reviewed December and January run reports

Motion to approve: Stevens

Second: Kelson

Approved Unanimously.

5. Annual Report

- Reviewed Annual Report
 - Pages 3 & 4 detailed info on receipts
 - Total earnings from investments

- Sale of property on North Shore Drive
 - Pages 5-7: details on disbursements
 - Pages 6-13 detailed description by vendor
 - P. 14- Debt statement. (none)
 - P. 15 - Leases (none)
 - P. 16 - Capital assets (Total: \$1,687,596.68)
 - P. 17 - Jan. 1 Accounts payable/receivable
 - P. 18 Financial assistance to nongovernmental entities
 - P. 19 - 22: Township Assistance Reports
 - 35 requests for township assistance, 12 approved
 - Direct benefits
 - Utilities: 5 households, 13 people
 - Housing assistance: 2 families
 - Food baskets and pantry
 - Burial - 1
 - Emergency shelter: 0 nights
 - P. 23: Pension plans (none)
- Certification of report

Motion to approve: Stevens

Second: Kelson

Approved Unanimously

6. Public Comment:

- In January, homeowners insurance rates increased significantly because of rating for fire services. Would rather pay for fire services than pay extra for insurance for reduced services. Affects property values. Cincinnati Insurance Company. Compared about 20 insurance companies, and nearly all were even higher.

<5 minute break>

7. Presentation and Discussion of Fire Protection

Review of what happens when a 911 call is placed:

1. Dispatch sends out:
 - a. 2 EMTs
 - b. Firefighters from Bloomington, NMFT, and Benton volunteers
2. Units on scene assess situation. Can request additional help, through mutual aid agreement.

3. If no agreements with Bloomington and NMFT, no one will be dispatched from those entities.
4. ISO (Insurance Service Office) Ratings: currently 7/9. If you live within 5 miles of a fire station, your rating is a 7. (Lower number = better premium). Many residents have called in saying rates have gone up about \$1000/year.

Township is funded by:

- Civil Levy
- Fire Levy
- Cumulative Fire
- Debt Fund

Property tax increases are limited by state law, we cannot change that.

Review property tax bill from a resident's perspective (see Notebook)

Facts of our situation:

- Contractual relationships with other entities go back nearly 40 years.
- We have had several consolidation discussions in the past.
- There is some movement to eliminate townships, and move all functions to county executive.
- Current situation is no longer sustainable. This year we are already cutting into our cash surplus. Also, we lack volunteers, and a significant portion of our population is not suitable to be volunteer firefighters.
- Cannot continue operating the way we have; we must decide soon how we should proceed.

What do we have to do?

Indiana Code: Township Executive shall provide fire protection. May provide by:

- Purchasing equipment
- Contracting with contiguous township or county
- Contract with volunteer firefighters
- Contract with other firehouse

What does our community want?

- Guaranteed response, short response times
- Qualified personnel
- Low tax rates
- Keep firefighters safe (training, health care, vehicles in good condition, etc.)

What are our options?

- Can we provide service on our own? No. That would cost \$750,000. Way beyond what we can afford.
- Can we increase our revenue? No.
- Can we write grants? Not a long-term solution, plus we don't have personnel.
- GoFundMe? Not practical to raise this amount of money.
- Contract with City of Bloomington? No. That would cost \$1.2million/year.
- Contract with Perry/Clear Creek Fire District? No, they are not capable at the moment.
- Cancel contracts and rely on mutual aid? No. That's not how that works.
- Change contract with Bloomington Township? Lower cost, and make changes? No. They offer a certain level of service, and that's it.
- Dissolve township and let someone else deal with it? We could, but there isn't really infrastructure in place and that likely isn't what we want to do.

Consolidation? Two Methods:

- Fire Territory:
 - An interlocal agreement between contiguous units where a new tax rate is set. Overseen by an executive board consisting of officials from all involved entities.
 - Must form by April 1 to begin July 1.
- Fire District:
 - 20% of all taxpayers in the full region sign a petition.
 - Creates special taxing district overseen by special board, appointed by County Commissioners.

Consolidation Options Explored:

- Washington Township in Morgan County - no interest in consolidating
- Brown Co Washington Township - no interest in consolidating
- Brown Co Jackson Township - no interest in consolidating
- Salt Creek - not interested in consolidating with Benton

Went to McGrath consulting company to see if they could come up with a solution. Submitted a 98-page report. Evaluated demographics, funding, ISO ratings, etc.

3 recommendations:

1. Provide Protection via a combination of options: hire a part time fire chief directly and contract with Perry/Clear Creek Fire Department, encouraging Benton volunteers to join Perry/Clear Creek. Not an option, Perry/Clear Creek does not have the personnel.
2. Join Perry/Clear Creek Fire District: Wait for Salt Creek to join, then we will have a contiguous border, meaning we can start the process. That will likely happen in 2021 at the earliest. They are not interested at this time, but perhaps in the future. Minimal time frame for us to join is 2024-2025 even if they do let us join.

3. Join Northern Monroe Fire Territory.

McGrath did not recommend relying on volunteers.

Option 4 would have been to rely on part time staff. We can afford approximately 58% coverage with 2 people. Michelle is not comfortable with this, as deciding what hours we will have guaranteed responses is not a good situation to be in. We could afford 1 person for 24 hours a day, but one person can't fight a fire on their own.

We already have a good relationship with the Northern Monroe Fire Territory. Several Benton volunteers have moved on to full or part time positions with NMFT.

In summary, we have to decide this year, preferably by May, what direction we want to take.

Options presented:

1. Consolidate with NMFT
2. Wait for an opportunity to join the Perry/Clear Creek district and hope everything works out
3. Do a piece-meal combination of volunteers and staff to provide service

Husk expresses interest in joining NMFT.

Kelson expresses interest in joining NMFT.

Stevens would like to have time to think.

There was discussion about equipment, building location, and how to approach the possibility of public meetings. Difficult to summarize, as no conclusions were ever reached. There is an audio recording of this meeting available.

Motion to Adjourn: Stevens

Second: Kelson

Unanimous Approval, meeting adjourned at 9:14 PM.