ST. JOSEPH COUNTY

**Union Township Trustee Advisory Board**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Meeting Date:**  November 15, 2023 – 6:00 PM, Lapaz Fire Station

**Members Present:**  Kelly Carrico, Mike Wozny, Ryan Schafer

**North Township Board:** Emily Haskins (Trustee) Stephen Barber, [Steven M. Davenport](https://ballotpedia.org/Steven_M._Davenport_%28North_Township_Board_Member%2C_Marshall_County%2C_Indiana%2C_candidate_2022%29), [Carmen Megonnell](https://ballotpedia.org/Carmen_Megonnell_%28North_Township_Board_Member%2C_Marshall_County%2C_Indiana%2C_candidate_2022%29)

**Union-North Ambulance Service:** John Lampkins (president) and approximately six members.

**Public Present:** Approximately fifteen members of the public.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by Emily Haskins, North Township Trustee.

Introductions of Union Township Trustee and Board, Introduction of North Township Trustee and Board, Introduction of Union-North Ambulance President and representatives.

Kelly stated that Ryan Schafer had requested a joint meeting, it was requested earlier this fall. She had sent an email earlier in the fall to Emily about a joint meeting but at that time it was said that they had just met in July, so they had just spoken on behalf of the board. She turned the meeting over to the board.

Ryan asked John how the ambulance service is financed. John stated the funds are mainly from the services they provide through the EMS billing and from funds from both townships, and then from any fundraisers or donations. He stated there have also been a few grants over the years that they have applied for that were for equipment. There were a couple of PEP loans during the Covid pandemic. Ryan asked if the towns of Lakeville and Lapaz contribute? John: They do not. Residents of Lakeville and Lapaz do get billed if they are transported; but they are billed as non-residents. Ryan asked if there are two rates. John stated there is non-resident, which is a higher rate for those who do not pay taxes in the township, and the resident rate is a slightly lower rate because they pay taxes, so they get a little bit of a break.

Ryan clarified that the ambulance is funded by Union and North Townships plus fundraisers and billing. John stated the majority of the funds come from townships and billing.

Ryan asked if there are any excess funds after being compensated from each township and their billing and making their expenses. John stated as of November 1st, we have had a total income of $240,602 and we have spent $296,711.82. Ryan commented, you have spent more than you have received.

John mentioned that is typically how it goes except for the last two years, that there is more money coming in than is spent.

Ryan: How is the ambulance service staffed? John: They are staffed by at least one Emergency Medical Tech (EMT) and one driver. To send an ambulance out there must be an EMT and a driver by the time the ambulance arrives at the scene. During the week, Monday-Friday, 6am to 6pm is a paid position, paid hourly. Robin Kaser is the full time daytime EMT. Weekends are also paid hourly, but at a lower rate. Nights are volunteer, paid twice a year.

Ryan asked if this is meeting the needs of the Community. Do you answer every call?

John said no. So far this year they have turned down sixteen (16) calls. Seven (7) in Union Township, and nine (9) in North township. The main reason calls have been turned down is due to the lack of an EMT. One instance there was a second call, and there was no crew for the second ambulance.

Ryan asked what it would take to up the staffing? John: To pay more. Ryan: What would it take to pay more? John: More money. Ryan asked how many dollars? John stated that he had given those figures earlier in the year. Ryan: The figures were for full time staffing. John stated he did not have any other figures.

Ryan expressed that he is curious and understands that we need an ambulance service, and he does not like to explain to the community why we did not have a response from the ambulance service. That is why he is interested in increasing the staffing and retaining members. What would it take to do that?

John mentioned that he and Ryan have been having these conversations, Walkerton is paying sixteen (16) something dollars an hour, January 1st North Liberty will be paying twenty (20) dollars an hour. He says they cannot compete starting people out at fourteen (14) dollars an hour, and not providing any benefits.

Ryan stated that was his question, what would it take to start people out at a higher wage and provide benefits so people wouldn’t leave.

John: More money to pay for that.

Ryan: How many dollars? One hundred dollars? One hundred thousand dollars? That is a number he would like to know.

John: I sent an email, Ryan stated he does have his email, and it reflects full time staffing. That figure is $464,000 a year. Does that number include the $105,000 each township pays or $210,000 a year that each township currently pays for the ambulance service? John: That would be total dollars for salaried staff at $18.00 an hour. That does not include the current payment from each township.

Ryan: If each township paid an additional $150,000 dollars, or a total of $300,000 total; additional income that would allow for two full time staff.

John: That would give the ability to pay a decent wage.

Ryan: That was what he was leaning toward; is what kind of contribution would each township have to make to make that viable.

Ryan: Going down the agenda.

John: November 1 they are at approximately five hundred (500) calls for the year, pretty much divided equally between the two townships. Last year was seven hundred fifty-two (752).

Ryan: I like the idea of having an ambulance service local, and that I don't like the idea of falling short of manpower. The ambulance service needs to be made whole, so when you call the ambulance, it comes and is there timely.

Kelly Carrico stated that she wants to make one note, from the financial side of things. When she pulls the Form 990 (Income Tax reporting of a not- for- profit entity) she is seeing that there was an income of $357,014 and paid out approximately $159,000 dollars in personal. That is a surplus of $197,000 dollars. My question is why are you not utilizing those monies?

John: They took in $377,781 last year and spent $255,000

Kelly went on to say if you look at services rendered of $150,000 that it is about $9,000 short of what is paid for current staffing. Currently both townships are contributing $60,000 each or a total of $120000 towards personnel.

John: Last year’s personnel cost was $160,000 plus other expenses.

Kelly agreed that there needs to be payment (by the Townships), but what cannot be done is to fund an entity that has a surplus of $208,000 from the last financial statement. Then go to the taxpayers and say we need more money for staffing. You are a not-for-profit organization; I would say you need to deplete your funds before we take any more burdens to our taxpayers.

John: Currently the checking account has $133,000 and three different CD’s. Usually, between the three, there is approximately $30,000. Basically, they operate out of their checking account. That is why, when the Townships purchased new equipment, UNAS was able to pay for extended warranty and some other equipment. Also, they have increased their pay from starting of $13 to $14 an hour. Weekend pay for drivers at $10 hr., EMTs at $11 hr.

Kelly: That raises another question, from a liability standpoint. The townships own the ambulances jointly, what are the qualifications for drivers? John: the insurance company requires every driver to complete driver training. When someone new is brought on, Al, our Safety Officer, takes them out and checks that they have the required skills. They do a driver’s license check. The driver must be over the age of eighteen (18). If everything is good, they are good to go. Kelly asked is that stated in by-laws? John was not sure if it was in the by-laws or Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG).

Steve Barber asked John what the amount for services rendered so far this year? John: As of November 1st. $131,680.57. Steve said that appears to be on track with last year. John stated that last year end was $149,725.59. Steve: That appears to be on the high side from the past six years. What do you attribute to the increase in the amount of revenue? John: Last year they had the most calls of any time. They were dispatched to 752 calls and turned down 39 of them. This year, as of November 1st, they have responded to 500 calls. Steve said the revenue seems to be a benefit.

John agrees. They can purchase a lot of equipment that the townships did not have to pay for.

Steve commented that looking over the records of the past six years there is a high degree of variability, but it appears that on average the revenue exceeds the expenses by approximately $30,000 a year. John agreed. Steve asked what the intention for the excess funds are. John said that there has been a surplus for the past few years. They try to give that money back to the members as pay. Pay to attract or keep people. The pay increases mentioned have not taken effect yet.

John expressed that he is skeptical of jumping pay up and losing funding.

Steve: would it be possible to increase the payroll by appropriately $30,000 a year and/or are there other benefits that could be adopted to help retain or entice people to join the service?

John: the surplus goes toward payroll. As far as benefits, are you talking insurance, or what do you mean?

Steve: Some kind of retirement plan? health insurance? retirement savings where funds are matched?

John: $30,000, when you divide it up among twenty-five people, doesn’t go very far. Currently, he is trying to play catch up with the surrounding agencies that are offering more. Insurance, overtime, vacation time, holiday pay etc. He mentioned that Robin gets holiday pay, and four weeks of vacation a year, they try to do a few picnics a year, meals together. They are trying to get people and retain them. Trying to compete is the hardest thing right now.

Kelly asked how many people they have currently? John: 21 total. Kelly: How many in each township? John: 7 in Union township total, 7 EMTs in North Township and 3 in Union township. 4 EMTs live outside of Union and North Township.

Kelly asked of the missed calls when were they. John: This year one weeknight call, six weekend day calls and nine weekend night calls. Kelly: Who picks up the calls if UNAS does not respond? John did not know; he assumed that in Union Township it would be South Bend Fire Department.

Ryan stated that another twist in things is that in St Joseph County, the County provides ambulance service, so technically the people in Union Township are paying twice for ambulance service. John: St Joseph County provides an Advanced Life Support service. So, if there is not a local ambulance to respond the County provided ambulance will respond.

John went on to explain that (St Joseph) county residents pay approximately $5 a person per year for the County provided service regardless of if what township you live in. John didn’t know what the breakdown in cost is for the taxpayers for UNAS.

Ryan said he had worked up the numbers and it is approximately $29 a person for Union Township.

Kelly asked Emily how she funds the Ambulance service. Emily replied the Fire Fund.

Next item was equipment needs: John stated that they just purchased new Stair Chairs, and is working on a grant for Lucas Devices. (Mechanical CPR machines)

Public Question: Is UNAS a public or private entity? John stated they are their own cooperation governed by themselves.

Public Question: How can UNAS receive Federal Grants for Public entity and you believe you are a private entity? John: We are an Ambulance Service; we are applying for ambulance service grants. He does not know, but they have gotten several grants. UNAS has a Federal Employee Identification Number stating that they are a governmental entity. They are not for profit. They govern themselves. Ryan stated that they are a Publicly funded (with taxpayers’ dollars) Not-for-profit entity. That provides a public service. Everything (all financial, Articles of incorporation and SOG’s) is public knowledge.

Public Question: How many people from Union Township and how many people from North Township are on the Ambulance Service Board. John declined to answer this question.

Emily called a point of order.

John mentioned that they are continuously looking for grants.

John also stated that we should be looking to replace the 2015 ambulance, as it is on a ten-year replacement program and the lead time is approximately two years.

Ryan: What is the approximate cost for an ambulance. John; approximately $350,000. He mentioned that the payments are made usually in three steps and paid for in full upon completion.

Mike Wozny commented that he would like the pay increased so people do not leave to go elsewhere. Ryan stated that he would like to see the excess funds go to pay and retention. Reducing the balance in accounts to a more reasonable amount. John stated he does not like operating like that. Ryan: I do not want to have to explain to the sixteen people who called for service and had no ambulance show up, when they pay taxes for that service.

Steve Davenport: Paying someone a dollar an hour more may not fill the gap. He also asked since Union township has an Advanced Life Support Ambulance (ALS) now, and a Basic Life Support (BLS) in UNAS, do you really feel like you are double paying. Ryan said yes, he personally feels that he is paying for two services.

Steve: Is the response time comparable? Ryan: Yes, it is, because the paramedic ambulance is at the St Joseph County fairgrounds, staffed all the time. Steve: even at LaVille High School? Kelly: I can speak for that, even during the time of the Fire Department shutdown, Southwest Fire territory beat Lapaz Fire to the High School; along with a Paramedic Ambulance. John: Southwest has never beaten our ambulance to a scene unless it was close to New Road. Kelly: This information came from Darrell Eiler (Southwest Chief). You also must remember that you need to go back to double taxation, we are already providing an ALS ambulance, we still benefit from having a BLS service. If there is no staffing for UNAS there is still an ambulance provided. Ryan: Yes, we do have a backup, but his issue is that we need to make sure every call gets answered (by UNAS). Steve: So, if you are funding an ALS ambulance now and want to increase the monies to the BLS, you would have to raise taxes? Ryan: You wouldn’t necessarily need to increase the taxes, there are funds available, it would depend on the extent of the increase. Steve: In your budget could you say add $100,000 from now on? How close are you to reaching the tax limits? Ryan: There is some wiggle room within the budget. I cannot answer all the specifics of that. Steve: Will the state allow you to do that, or is that money coming from an excess that you have? Ryan: That is something that I do not have an answer for, that would be a Kelly question. I know that there is some wiggle room and that we are not tight against our budget cap. I am trying to get an idea of what it would look like (the budget) and what it would take to have adequate staffing; so, we don’t have these unanswered calls. You must start somewhere. You need some kind of idea.

Kelly: North township funds the Ambulance service under the Fire Department budget. Union Township funds the Ambulance through the General Fund. There is more room within the General fund as where the Fire Territory is already capped out in the way that the maximum tax levy was set years ago. There is also new legislation that states you can spend General Fund monies on Emergency services, which would be beneficial to our Fire Department. We cannot add the Ambulance Service to the Fire Territory and go to the state and ask for more money for that. It is capped. There is legislation that states that you can spend General Fund monies for EMS services. That would be beneficial to the Fire Territory. We have a very lopsided budget when it concerns Fire Territory and General Fund.

Public Question: I thought there was a House bill that required EMS to come out of the Fire Fund? Kelly replied that technically Union Township cannot provide Ambulance Service. We could be in violation. The only way that a Township can fund an ambulance service is if there is none provided. Since we are already provided a service by St. Joseph County, there is Ambulance Service provided. Union Township has a BLS (Basic Life Support-non transport) service with the Fire Department. The Ambulance service is not funded by the Fire Territory. That is the only way we can provide EMS. This is already in front of the State Board of Accounts. I am asking, can we do this? Can we continue to provide this or are we in violation of the Indiana Code? We’re waiting for an answer. It is also in front of the Township Attorney. It is not that we want to pull this service, it is that we need to comply with what the state allows us to do. It is not that we don’t want an ambulance service, I want an ambulance service, but we can’t double tax the taxpayers. So that is the question we have setting in front of us, and I must wait for an answer. John asked if Kelly had checked with Andy Meyer, (the EMS Chief from South Bend). If for whatever reason UNAS is no longer responding at all, would South Bend (by County Contract) be responding? John stated that the county is only providing ALS service (Advanced Life Support) and would not run every call.

Kelly said that she has reached out to Andy and is trying to get a meeting set up to discuss the matter. This information was presented to her, and she does not know the answers. This is a question that needs to go in front of the legal people. She was told if the Ambulance service was under the Fire Territory, then it would not be an issue, but the only way to support that would be to increase the tax levy for the territory, and that is already fixed. Since that cannot be done then you would have to dissolve the Territory and reform it with a higher tax levy to include the Ambulance service. It would be beneficial as then we could bring the tax levy up to cover the costs. But she’s not going there as we would have this community in an uproar. She does not want to get rid of UNAS she just wants to provide a good service to the community.

John stated that is what they are trying to do. It is hard to keep people, hard to get people to respond. This year we have turned down less calls than in the past few years. One call is too many. Some things are improving.

Public Question: (Directed at Kelly) When you asked the state, who did you talk to? Kelly: I spoke to the State Board of Accounts. She also presented the information to the Townships Attorney. Steve Davenport asked when she would have an answer. Kelly: I do not know. They will research it but cannot give legal counsel. Steve thought that would come to light when there is an audit. Kelly replied that Union Township is currently being audited. She is back and forth with communications SBOA and providing the paperwork for the preliminary portion now.

Public Question: When you say that Lakeville/Union Fire Territory has EMT’s, how many do they have and how is it staffed? Kelly answered that it is not currently staffed. There are four EMT’s on the department and we know that there may be an EMT on the scene while the Fire Department is waiting on the ambulance. That does not mean that we will always have an EMT since the department is all volunteer.

Ryan: We did talk a little bit about the Ambulance Service Contract discussions. Any questions about that? I think that answers part of the question as to why Union Township does not have a contract in place with the Ambulance Service currently. John stated that the last signed contract was either 2018 or 2019. Ryan: This should be resolved, technically the trustee should not issue a check without a contract.

Steve Barber: One thing I did not understand about the contract is, it didn’t seem to indicate a specific amount paid by the Townships.

John stated that the contracts have been basically the same since 1974. The Attorney for UNAS is reviewing the contract and should have it back hopefully within a week or so. Once we see that, the UNAS board will need to go over it for any changes. Then each township attorney will want to review it. Not saying that the contract for Union Township will be the exact same for North township. Usually Union Township makes quarterly payments, and without a contract we may not be receiving this.

Ryan: I believe that you will be getting your money, but with the township being under audit everything needs to be correct. I am pro-Ambulance Service. I also believe that we need to keep the pay competitive. We need to be able to retain people and make it a career for them. I don’t know what that looks like, or where the money may come from.

Steve Barber: How many people are on the Union Township Board. Ryan: We are missing the President, Trisha Carrico. I am the Secretary.

Kelly: I have a question regarding the By-laws of UNAS. I just received these today and I see where you did a repeal in 1981 where your board consisted of an EMS coordinator, a Township Trustee, and one community member from each township, and one ambulance board member, and one ambulance non-board member, and one town board member from each town. Is there a reason that was repealed to take out townships? John: I was not alive until nine years after that, so I do not know. Kelly asked is there a way of putting that requirement back in? John: There is but I don’t know the reason that was taken out. Kelly: When I look at the documentation that the state has regarding the Union-North Ambulance service when they incorporated, you are funded by Union township, North township, and Liberty Township. There was never an amendment to that. The by-laws that are recorded by the Secretary of Indiana do not reflect what is current. This should probably be updated. The concern from Union Township is that this (UNAS) is a North township Board. Sandy Robinson (UNAS) responded that we do not separate the communities. So, where you come from, as far as being on the board, to me, makes no difference. Kelly: I just wanted to know that since UNAS is government funded by the taxpayers that there is fair representation. Sandy mentioned that each board member’s position has qualifications. Kelly: I was just simply asking what the reason for this repeal was for. John stated that the reason it is in there is at the last time the by-laws were reviewed, that the president at the time said it had to stay in there. So, it stayed in there. I don’t know why.

Ryan: I feel it is good that we had this meeting. I feel that we should get all together sometime after the first of the year, now that everyone can see the dilemmas. Maybe a year end update in January. And maybe we can meet semiannually or every quarter. For some reason the previous trustee got away from that. John agreed that we should meet after the first of the year.

Steve Davenport made a motion to adjourn, Ryan seconded it. All in favor

Minutes approved \_\_\_\_ Day of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 2023

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