

## ST. JOSEPH COUNTY

### Union Township Trustee Advisory Board

#### Meeting Minutes

**Meeting Date:** August 19 2024

**Members Present:** Kelly Carrico, Mike Wozny, Ryan Schafer, Trisha Carrico and Marcel Lebbin, Township Attorney.

**Public Present:** Several members of the public were present.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by Trisha Carrico, Advisory Board President.

#### Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Ryan made a motion to approve the minutes from February 20, 2024 and Mike seconded. All in favor.

Trisha made a motion to approve the April 14, 2024 minutes. Ryan made a motion, Mike seconded. All in favor.

#### New Business

*Resolution 2024-06* Kelly Carrico (Township Trustee) explained that this resolution was to clear the \$300 left in the building construction fund. She tracked it to a misappropriation in 2021 for monies that were taken from the fire fund that should have been taken from the construction fund. Also to transfer 480.09 to the General Fund to correct a misappropriation.

Trisha made a motion to approve the resolution, Ryan Seconded, Motion passed unanimously.

*Bids for Fire Station Driveway.* Bids were sought for bids to change the driveway on the west side of the fire station to the sidewalk. This would include one parking place on the west side of the building. There were two bids received. Precision Concrete for \$22,032 and Majority Builders at \$16,975. Kelly mentioned that this would come from the General Fund-Capital Outlays for Improvements.

Trisha made a motion to award the job to Majority Builders, Ryan seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

#### 2025 Township Budget

Kelly presented the proposed 2025 Township budget that she and Trisha have broken down the numbers to to show the 2024 numbers from January - June and how we stand compared to 2023. These numbers can be changed before the public hearing on September 10th if the board feels the need. One notation Kelly would like to make is the General Fund maximum levy is \$162,003.

She stated that this budget is large. The DGLF (Department of Local Government Finance) told her to keep the General Fund high and to appropriate the LIT (Local Option Income Tax) monies , approximately \$40,000 to offset the emergency service expenses from GF. She did remove the utilities from the Fire Territory, and will expense them thru the Township General Fund to free up money for the Fire Territory.

One other thing that was done in the budget is to include Fire and EMS services for \$10,000 that could be used for services and charges. Supplies \$5,000 and \$30,000 for emergency equipment.

Kelly stated that the Township General Fund should have always been banking the Fire Territory. We should have never had a \$328,000 appropriated in General Fund. That is crazy. We left approximately \$250,000 of unused funds over past years. Her hope is to over the next couple years to increase the appropriations for Fire Territory while reducing the General Fund since we can appropriate expenses within the allowable maximum levy of General Fund, unlike the Fire Territory that can lose its levy if it is not used. What is needed is to starve the Fire Territory and then transfer monies from the Township General Fund to the Fire Territory. She stated that the Township General Fund ideally should be able to easily operate on about \$90,00.

LIT money cannot be deposited directly into the Fire Territory. The monies must go into the Township General Fund, but could be appropriated for emergency expenses or if needed transferred for offset of Fire Territory if money isn't sufficient for the budget.

In comparison, the 2025 Township General Fund has a maximum levy of \$162,003 and the maximum levy for the 2025 Fire Territory is \$198,855

Trisha asked if the board had any questions.

Ryan commented that when looking at the budget he sees where there is more money this year allocated for cemeteries. He is glad to see this as he feels that the cemeteries are in need of some work. Kelly agreed. There are some headstones that need repaired and some grounds work that needs done.

*Question from the Board:* Mike Wozny asked about the salary and wages of the Fire Territory. Kelly explained that the \$461,000 was approved by the Fire Territory Board and is the total amount of dollars for wages. This includes volunteer compensation, paid personnel and Chief's wages.

*Question from the Board:* Mike asked what is being paid to the volunteer firemen? Kelly explained that for 2024 there is \$30,000 appropriated. For 2025 that amount has not been established. There are volunteers that participate at different levels, some are dedicated and some are hardly seen. This is something that the Chief will need to figure out.

*Question from the Board:* Mike asked what is the current wage for the Fire Chief. Kelly explained that the board approved \$24,000 for the 2024 year. The 2025 has not been set since we have not gotten a budget approved and passed yet.

*Question from the Board:* Mike asked how will this effect the taxes. Kelly stated the current tax rate for the Fire territory is .0839. If we receive the maximum levy appeal, which is \$672,246 and the DLGF approves it, then it would go back to the Territory Board to determine if full amount needs to be used. If the board approves full amount then the tax rate would be approximately .29, but this is a tentative number since the assessed value for the township has not been released by the County.

In the past, the Territory should have been spending the total budget monies. We need to show that there is a need for more money by the Fire territory. Then we can build the tax rate/levy to cover the expenses. In 2006 the tax rate was .1287 the following year (2007) the rate was .067. In 2008, the trustee didn't submit a budget, so the rate we received was .0459. Over the years the tax rate for the territory was .10 and very erratic since then. If we would have kept the tax rate from 2006 and had it today, we would have an additional \$102,000 in our budget for 2024. If the levy would have been increased by 1% a year since 2006, we would not need to seek such a tax levy.

*Fire Station:* Kelly reported that some of the offices have been repainted and the hallways and upstairs is being repainted also.

A contractor was in to look at the question of the building settling. It was determined that this is normal. The cracks and areas in question have been repaired, and if in time there are any further developments they will be addressed at that time.

Trisha asked Mike what are his concerns. He stated that it is a lot of money. We would be putting a burden on the taxpayers. Trisha stated that we are not getting good emergency service coverage for the community. Ryan stated that currently with the Territory having paid staff Monday thru Friday 7am-4pm every call for service has been answered. But during the night and on weekends there have been several times in the past month where there were no volunteers responding to the call for service. The Territory's budget would provide for two firemen to be at the Fire Station all the time.

Trisha commented that she doesn't want taxes to go up either. They are ridiculous, but if this guarantees me to be able to have someone to respond to my emergency, that is properly trained, and able to do what they need to do. Then it is money well spent. Rather than giving the money back to the government or not spending it for the good of the community.

Ryan stated he will share some research as to what the tax rate is for other Fire Territories or Fire Departments.

Liberty/ Green	.27
Lapaz/North Township	.4115
Warren/Portage	.77
Centre Township	.50

Interestingly enough, if you look at your tax bill for Union Township and break it down.

Library Tax .2725

School 1.04

Ryan asked Mike if he was aware what he pays for taxes to the Library? Mike stated, "yes". Ryan commented that the tax rate for the library is .2725 The Fire Territory tax rate currently is .08

Kelly mentioned that she was told of a person in the community that has come forward and stated that their homeowners insurance has dropped since part time people have been at the Fire Department.

Trisha asked if Mike had any other questions. Mike doesn't like the idea of the monies for wages. Trisha explained that the Fire territory board already approved the Territory's portion of the budget. It is the township that administers the Territory's budget. The Township does not set the budget for the Territory.

Kelly explained that the budget has not been approved by the DLGF. She is going to plea to the DLGF that the Fire Protection is not suitable for this community. The failure of former trustees, the lack of properly trained volunteers is not a good service for the community. She wants to be assured that when someone calls 911, that someone responds that can take action, that is properly trained.

She stated that is a huge liability for the community to not have properly trained people available to answer the call for emergency service. It would cost far more to pay out lawsuits than to provide a good service.



Ryan Made a motion to approve the 2025 Township Budget, Trisha Seconded. Motion passed with two Ayes, one abstained.

#### **Maximum Levy appeal.**

Kelly stated that we will be using Nicole Franklin to put the papers together. Unfortunately we do not have the Assessed value from the County yet. When this is recieved then Nicole can put together the proper documents to do so. You need to plea your cause for the levy appeal. Why you are requesting.

Kelly explained that with the township is not contracting with Union North Ambulance Service, this allows to ask for an appeal. The \$110,000 that the township had appropriated for EMS/ambulance can go to the Fire Territory.

Of the \$464,000 that the Fire Territory is asking for to use as wages, \$110,000 will come from the Township that was set aside for the EMS/ambulance Service. We are asking that those dollars be put into the Territory budget and not into the Township budget.

Kelly mentioned that she intends to move the Trustee's office when the budget process is completed. Thus not paying rent for the current office.

Ryan asked if there needed to be a resolution covering Board members attendance by a zoom or similar remote attendance. Kelly stated that according to the Attorney, with such a small board, that he did not recommend it.

#### **Public Comment**

It was asked if the concrete in front of the fire station would effect the water retention requirement? Kelly mentioned that the town had raised some concern. The contractor has assessed and sees no issues. It would need to be approved by the town. She will ask the contractor about it.


It was stated that there were concerns by the firemen about equipment needing repaired. Trisha asked if the Fire Chief was made aware of the concerns. Trisha asked of the concerns could be emailed to the Trustee and it could be forwarded to the Chief.

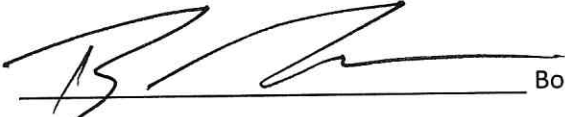
A concern was brought up about cracks in the concrete in the South parking lot. It will be reviewed.

With no other business Ryan made a motion to adjourn, Trisha seconded. Motion passed at 6:45.

Minutes approved 10 Day of September 2024

 Board Chairman

 Board Member

 Board Secretary

 Trustee