

PENN TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
100 Municipal Building Road
Duncannon, PA 17020-1100

Henry A. Holman, Jr., Chairman

Randy Plummer, Vice-Chairman

Lucinda (CeCe) Novinger, Supervisor

MINUTES OF MAY 20, 2008

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The Penn Township Board of Supervisors (PTS) met on Tuesday, May 20, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. in the Municipal Building. Chairman Henry Holman, Jr., Vice-Chairman Randy Plummer, and Supervisor CeCe Novinger were in attendance. Other personnel present were Helen Klinepeter (Secretary) and Susan Long (Treasurer). The meeting was recorded to aid in the preparation of the minutes. A list of visitors is on file in the Township office.

OPENING REMARKS

Chairman Holman informed the visitors that the purpose of the meeting was triggered by proposals for additional revenue from the Duncannon (DFC) and Perdix (PFC) fire companies, to discuss a possible levy of a fire tax, and to hear public comments. He stated that no decision would be made at this meeting. He then turned the meeting over to the fire companies for their presentation.

Jodi Rissinger

Ms. Rissinger stated that she was the appointed spokesperson for DFC and PFC. She showed a PowerPoint presentation detailing the services provided by DFC and PFC, their service areas, and the population served. She also provided a breakdown of the costs necessary to maintain the two fire companies. Ms. Rissinger noted that the cost of the equipment that must meet National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) standards comes to \$9,025.00 per firefighter and that the equipment must be replaced every ten years. She reported that 45 volunteers and 8 fire police responded to 153 calls in Penn Township in 2007 and 60 calls to-date in 2008. Ms. Rissinger noted that, out of 4,500 requests for donations mailed to the residents, the response rate was 12.5%, with an average donation of \$35.00.

Ms. Rissinger noted that the PTS handout listed an amount of \$44,948.32 as being given to PFC. She explained that \$12,000 was not given by the PTS, but was derived from rental income. She added that PFC had to pay real estate taxes on that rental property, thereby lowering the net amount realized.

Ms. Rissinger clarified that the fire companies have always stated that they are not in favor of taxing the public and would favor it only as a last resort. She presented a prior proposal suggesting that the additional funding requested could come from the Local Services Tax (LST). She noted that, when a fire tax was discussed, the fire companies always prefaced their proposal with, "the equivalent of" a fire tax. She then presented a proposal showing additional funding to be derived from LST and "the equivalent of" a 1/2-mill fire tax. She ended by stating that a 1-mill fire tax on a home assessed at \$144,000.00 would cost the equivalent of \$12.00 per month or \$.36 per day.

Byron Worner, DFC

Mr. Worner explained the role of the NFPA. He stated that, if the fire companies want to apply for state or federal grants, its apparatus must meet NFPA. He reiterated that NFPA requires cleaning of the equipment at \$150.00 per set and replacement of the equipment every ten years.

Mr. Worner then noted that, if there were no volunteers there would be no fire companies and the PTS would have to provide fire protection. He added that the PTS is not required to provide police protection.

Chairman Holman

Chairman Holman stated that that PTS does not want to tax Township residents further, but it does not know where to get the additional funds to give to the fire companies. He informed the public that

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real estate tax revenue is \$95,000.00 and the PTS is giving a total of \$85,230.19 to the fire companies.

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Chairman Holman reported that the PTS received \$110,000.00 from LST and explained that the PTS is required to give 25%, or \$27,500.00, for emergency services. He presented graphs showing a breakdown of how the LST was used along with a breakdown of the distribution of real estate taxes.

Chairman Holman then reported that Wheatfield Township provided \$23,066.00 to DFC, Duncannon Borough provided \$25,094.96, and Reed Township provided \$250.00. He offered that a large number of calls are made by DFC to Reed Township and that it did not appear that Reed Township was paying its fair share.

Chairman Holman stated that, if it appears a tax increase will be necessary for 2009, he will call for future public meetings so that the public is informed of the needs and requests of the fire companies. He offered his opinion that any additional tax levied must be a true fire tax, not an increase in the real estate tax. With a fire tax, the tax collector forwards the revenue to the PTS, who distributes it to the fire companies as needed. Professional audits would be performed on the fire companies' finances. He also said he felt that a fire tax should be put up for referendum.

Jodi Rissinger

Ms. Rissinger offered that the amount paid by the PTS for workmen's compensation insurance should not be considered as part of the donation to the fire companies, as the Township is required to provide it. She also noted that the fire companies are 100% volunteer-staffed, while the EMS has a paid crew. She explained that emergency services are required to be provided, but police protection is not, and she does not feel that the cost of police protection should be included in the discussion. She offered that emergency service providers respond 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, while the Township police are available on a limited basis.

Supervisor Novinger

To Mr. Worner's question about what would happen if there were no volunteers. Ms. Novinger replied she was sure there would be volunteers, as there have always been volunteers for the fire companies. She asked why Marysville Borough and Rye Twp. do not provide contributions to PFC since PFC responds to calls in those municipalities. Ms. Rissinger replied that no contributions are given to Marysville Borough when its fire company responds in Penn Twp. She stated that in 2007 PFC responded to Marysville Borough 13 times while Marysville FC responded to Penn Twp. 6 times.

Chairman Holman

Chairman Holman noted that in 2006 there were 52 responses to Reed Twp. and from January through November 2007 there were 33 responses. He asked if DFC had spent as much time talking to Reed Twp. officials as it had Penn Twp. officials. Mr. Worner responded that Reed Twp. has increased its donation from \$250.00 to \$1,000.00. He explained that the assessed property valuation of Reed Twp. is only \$11,000,000.00, compared to \$140,000,000.00 for Penn Twp. and that DFC was in negotiations for further increases.

Nancy Valdez

Ms. Valdez asked if the fire companies had any figures on the trend toward paid emergency service providers. Byron Worner replied that the cost of insurance, training, and equipment is approximately \$100,000 per person. Byron Worner replied that more and more requirements are being put on volunteers, which is driving down their number. Paul Soltis responded that many companies are going to paid drivers.

Ms. Valdez asked if any thought had been given to merging the fire companies to save costs. Ms. Rissinger replied that the difficulty with merger is the proximity of the fire companies. She stated that the first step would be for dual dispatch and dual response and offered that she did not feel a merger would lower insurance costs.

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Robert Johnson

Mr. Johnson offered that companies are losing volunteers. He explained that, after the recruits have been trained, they move to areas with paid companies. He feels that the PTS should prepare now for the time when there will be no volunteers and will need paid firefighters.

Robert Shaffer, Sr.

Mr. Shaffer agreed that getting volunteers is a challenge and offered that perhaps the schools could help improve interest. He noted that the majority of service calls are for accidents along Rt. 11/15 and asked for the percentage. He was told that 80% of the service calls were accident-related and 20% were fire-related. Mr. Shaffer offered that a true fire tax would be for the 20% of the calls and did not know if it was fair to impose a tax for the other 80%. He said he thought Chairman Holman's idea of a referendum was a good one.

Chairman Holman

Chairman Holman noted that one of the proposals is for a 1-mill fire tax that would yield \$128,000.00 in additional funding and again questioned where the residents would get the money for increased taxes.

Byron Worner

Mr. Worner asked the PTS if it had given consideration to forming a "fire board" with Duncannon Borough and Wheatfield and Reed townships and asked if it was legal. He stated that DFC is in negotiations with Wheatfield Twp. and Duncannon Borough regarding a fire tax and has not run into any issues with them like it has with Penn Twp. Chairman Holman replied that he did not know if it was legal and was glad to hear that DFC was in negotiations with the other municipalities. He stated his interest in attending those meetings. Mr. Johnson suggested that a fire board should be under the control of the county.

Nancy Valdez

Ms. Valdez asked Ms. Rissinger if she could provide a breakdown of each municipality's donation – the amount given per person, as well as the amount paid for each call.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to be conducted, and upon a Holman/Novinger motion, the PTS voted to adjourn at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Susan E. Long
Recording Secretary