

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

Henry A. Holman, Jr., Chairman

Lucinda (CeCe) Novinger, Vice-Chairman

Randy Plummer, Supervisor

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The Penn Township Board of Supervisors (PTS) met on Monday, August 31, 2009 in the Municipal Building. Chairman Henry Holman, Jr. and Vice-Chairman CeCe Novinger were in attendance. A list of visitors is on file in the Township office.

Chairman Holman called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and announced that the meeting was scheduled to continue discussion of 2010 fiscal year funding for the fire companies.

PTS Comments

Chairman Holman reported that he is tired of hearing that he is the reason for the delay in reaching an agreement for funding of the fire companies for 2010. He stated that the Township's taxpayers can be considered natural resources, and when they are financially exhausted they will have nothing left to give. He reported that the Township's sewer customers have delinquencies totaling over \$30,000.00. He reported that he has heard that the PTS has enough funds to give the fire companies what they are requesting. He reiterated that, while the funds might be there for a period of time, those funds would be quickly exhausted.

Chairman Holman stated that he understands the financial plight of the fire companies and has tried to be supportive to the best of the Township's means. However, he would like to continue operating on the current real estate tax levy of .075 mills.

Chairman Holman noted that public opinion is very important. He then noted a vehicular accident on August 21st during which a Perdix Fire Company (PFC) member was requested by Duncannon Borough (Borough) police to help control traffic and was advised not to assist. Chairman Holman quoted from a letter from Borough Officer Derr stating that he was informed by Monte Supko that PFC and Duncannon Fire Company (DFC) will not assist with traffic control in Penn Township. Chairman Holman stated that the information that went out over the emergency services airwaves did not help public opinion. He asked what PFC's policy on traffic control was in other municipalities and stated that he would like to have a written copy of the policy, if available. He also questioned if PFC was able to speak for DFC.

Kevin Bissonette, DFC, replied that this issue has been addressed many times, and that Monte Supko is allowed to be the spokesman for DFC. Jodi Rissinger, PFC, asked what was said over the airwaves but received no answer. Mr. Supko later said that he would obtain a copy of the tape from Perry County Dispatch. He noted that PFC's responsibilities are to fight fires and assist with extrication during vehicular accidents. He also noted that the PTS was advised in 2007 that, due to budgetary constraints, PFC would no longer remove trees from, or assist with traffic control in, Penn Township. Ms. Rissinger explained that PFC does not have fire police, and that an increase in its funding would allow for the training needed to have fire police.

Chairman Holman again asked for written policy concerning traffic control, noting that local and PA police officers are not aware of the policy. He explained that a written copy of the policy would enable responders to know who to request for help.

Chairman Holman stated his opinion that the amount of trips made to Reed Twp. by DFC in relation to the donation given by Reed Twp. to DFC is not fair to the Borough or to Wheatfield and Penn Townships. He said that he has a hard time believing that the donations given by the other municipalities to DFC are not being used for responses to Reed Township. Chairman Holman reported that he tried to set up a meeting between all the municipalities served by DFC. He relayed

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that Reed Twp. declined the invitation, on the basis that its funding cannot be increased, and does not feel it has anything to add to a meeting.

Mr. Bissonnette stated that DFC's 2009 donations total \$71,000.00 while its budgeted expenses total \$177,000.00. He reported that he has met with Reed Township officials, who have stated that they are looking into ways to increase the funding.

Duncannon Fire Company (DFC)

DFC representative Kevin Bissonnette stated that Chairman Holman forgot about another important natural resource – the volunteer firemen, who save Township taxpayers thousands of dollars each year. He added that the number of volunteer firefighters has been decreasing, resulting in less personnel to conduct fund-raisers.

Mr. Bissonnette stated that DFC's funds have already been exhausted for this year. He repeated that four municipalities contribute \$71,000.00 toward a \$177,000.00 budget and that DFC can't sell enough BBQ chickens to make up the difference. He noted that DFC has increased the number of its fund raisers, adding raffles, a stand at the Perry County fair, and joint ventures with PFC, among others.

Mr. Bissonnette stated that he will forward DFC's policy on usage of its fire police to the PTS, along with its response policy.

Mr. Bissonnette stated that he agrees that public opinion matters and doesn't like the fact that DFC doesn't have enough funding to do everything it would like for the public. He stated that DFC is involved in fund-raising and that all the municipalities need to pitch in with fund-raising.

Mr. Bissonnette stated that Reed Twp. is a sore point of his, also. He asked the PTS to remember, however, that Reed Twp. has 234 homes while Penn Township has over 1,300 homes. A one-mill tax in Penn Twp. equates to \$142,000.00, while a one-mill tax in Reed Twp. equates to only \$11,000.00.

Mr. Bissonnette then provided DFC's policy on fire police – fire police are not to respond unless dispatched by the officer-in-charge or the apparatus officer.

Mr. Bissonnette stated that the fire companies were told months ago that the PTS would provide a funding proposal, but have not yet received one. He stated that he was willing to yield his discussion time to listen to any proposals from the PTS. Chairman Holman responded that each Supervisor has his own idea on funding and that only two were present this evening. He offered that he supports doing something for the companies, but is looking for a compromise because he feels that the requested increase is very steep. Mr. Bissonnette stated that the fire companies are willing to start at a fire tax levy of .5-mill, increasing to 1-mill. He stated that, if this was too steep, the PTS should make a counter-proposal.

Chairman Holman stated that he would like to see the fire companies start a reserve fund, and feels that public opinion would also like to see it. Mr. Bissonnette replied that, as he stated at the last meeting, the fire companies are not opposed to a reserve fund, but need to know what funding they can expect, so that they know how much to put into reserve.

Chairman Holman again mentioned the disparity between the amounts given to DFC by Reed Township, compared to what is given by the other municipalities. He stated that there are residents who feel that the funds being given to DFC should be given to PFC, since it is funded solely by the PTS. Tom Patterson asked if those residents lived below or above the mountain and questioned why those residents were not at the meeting.

Upon questioning by Mr. Bissonnette, Supervisor Novinger stated that she had no concrete counter-proposal at this time. She stated that she cannot find a copy of DFC's 2009 budget. Mr. Bissonnette provided a copy at this time and the Secretary made a copy for Sup. Novinger. Sup. Novinger offered that she has a hard time supporting a fire tax. She stated that the taxpayers are not current in paying their taxes. If they were, there would be more funds available to give to the fire

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companies. She noted the current financial condition and asked how residents can pay additional taxes when they don't have the money to pay the existing ones. She added that she is also tired of hearing that Penn Township has endless funds. Mr. Bissonnette stated that, while she may have heard that, he has never made that comment.

Mr. Bissonnette noted that, at the January 2009 PTS meeting, a motion was made to have, "immediate and diligent talks with the fire companies for implementation of a fire tax for 2010." He stated that he understood that Sup. Novinger was opposed to a fire tax, that Chairman Holman supports the fire companies, and that Sup. Plummer was not in attendance. He said that it appears the parties are no closer to a fire tax than they were nine months ago. He said that presents a serious problem, in his thinking. He also stated that he sees no conclusion coming this evening and asked what to tell the fire companies and the tax payers.

Sup. Novinger noted a discussion several months prior concerning the formation of a council made of up representatives of the municipalities served by the fire companies. This council would control the funds received by the fire companies. She stated that, although no further discussion had been held on the issue, she was in favor of such a council. Mr. Bissonnette offered that he felt there would be little support from Reed Township but had no idea of how the idea of a council would be received by Wheatfield Township and the Borough. He added that a fire tax regulates how the funding can be spent and would provide for accountability of the funds, regardless of whether or not a council is established.

Mr. Bissonnette stated that volunteer fire companies save taxpayers money and the fire companies do not want to get to the point where they cannot afford to exist. He said that both DFC and PFC are heading in that direction.

Chairman Holman reiterated that he reluctantly supports a separate fire tax. He noted the possibility of taking a portion of the current .75-mill real estate tax revenue and dedicating a portion as a "fire tax" without increasing taxes. The portion taken would be disbursed by the PTS for accountability. The additional money requested by the fire companies has to come from somewhere, unless the PTS is willing to deplete its reserves. The additional funds come from increasing the real estate tax above the current .75-mill level, initiating a separate fire tax, or cutting expenses.

Perdix Fire Company (PFC)

PFC representative Monte Supko stated that the fire companies do not have the money to continue services that were provided in the past. He noted that PFC has cut out tree and downed-wire removal and traffic control services to Penn Township in an effort to survive. He added that the revenue from the lease of the scale house might not be available in 2010.

Mr. Supko offered that he felt a fire council would benefit DFC more than PFC in that Wheatfield and Reed Townships and the Borough are not served by PFC.

Mr. Supko noted that the economy was strong from 2003-2006, but the fire companies didn't benefit during those good times.

Mr. Supko corrected minutes of the July 27th meeting regarding an apparatus loan payment. He stated that there is a \$31,500.00 payment due on September 9th. After that the PFC will consider whether they can pay off the remainder of the loan and free up those payments towards other expenses.

Mr. Supko stated "for the record" that Shade Reidlinger, Ms. Rissinger, and himself are the only official spokespersons for PFC.

Mr. Supko referred Sup. Novinger to a cost-cutting calculator available from the national Volunteer Fire Council that allows the user to plug in acreage, population, volunteers, and pieces of apparatus and shows how much money is saved by the use of volunteer firefighters. He reported that, when he used the program, it estimated that \$123.00 per resident is saved with one volunteer fire company

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and \$246.00 with three stations. He stated that he would provide copies of the calculator/calculations to the PTS.

Mr. Supko stated that the PFC will not need the entire \$4,000.00 donation for diesel fuel in 2009 and asked what to do with the remainder. Chairman Holman told PFC to submit the diesel fuel bills until the amount reaches the \$4,000.00 and that it would not affect PFC's 2010 funding.

Mr. Supko stated that he hears residents' comments about the 50%-50% split of donations. He said that PFC would have no objection if it receives more funding than DFC. He explained that while the land area north of the mountain is greater, he feels that the property value south of the mountain is greater. He corrected a previous statement in which he stated that, if the fire tax is called a "fee", schools could be taxed. He explained that PFC's solicitor relayed this cannot be done.

Mr. Supko asked the PTS to inform him if the donation for 2010 is not going to be increased, so that PFC can decide which services can be continued and which need to be cut. He added that the \$27,000.00 donated in 2009 has been spent.

Chairman Holman stated that he has reviewed the Township's finances and noted that the \$70,000.00 to be transferred to Capital Reserve in 2008 was never done due to lack of funding, and has not been done this year, either. He stated that he would continue to analyze the finances and look for ways to cut expenses so that funding could be given without raising taxes.

Mr. Supko noted that there are residents who hate the fire companies and fire fighters who don't like some residents, but the fire companies do not discriminate when it is time to fight fires.

Chairman Holman stated his opinion that residents are in favor of a fire tax on a 2-1 basis. He suggested an option of the fire companies splitting the \$70,000.00 earmarked for Capital Reserve, and call it a fire tax with the PTS controlling the funds. He would also like to see some of the money put aside as a reserve for the fire companies.

Ms. Rissinger suggested that the reserve portion start out small the first year and increase each year, because the fire companies need more "front-end" money now for replacement of equipment.

Mr. Supko commented on the survey to be included in the newsletter and noted that it was contradictory. Ms. Rissinger felt that the residents would get lost in the verbiage.

Sup. Novinger commented on the request for public donations mailed to Township residents by the PFC. She felt that clarification was needed on the section that said "please help protect the future of the Penn Township fire company (Perdix Fire Company)". She voiced her concern that Joe Public will think that he is supporting two fire companies. She stated her concern over the first paragraph which said that the lack of volunteers "...is a direct result of...our municipal leaders." She said it makes it sound like the PTS is telling people not to contribute. She said that the "threats of no fire protection" did not come from the PTS. Mr. Supko stated they were letting the people know that there was a threat of no fire protection. Ms. Rissinger stated that she signed the letter and added her cell phone number so that residents could call her if they had questions about the letter.

Sup. Novinger stated that she will look for any reserve in the 2009 budget, but felt that all three supervisors need to be present for another meeting. The Secretary was requested to contact Sup. Plummer and ask for dates that he would be available. She will forward the dates to Mr. Bissonnette and Ms. Rissinger.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a Holman/Novinger motion, the PTS voted unanimously to adjourn at 8:42 p.m.

Susan E. Long
Recording Secretary