

Bloomington Township Working With Benton and Washington Townships Form the Northern Monroe County Fire Protection Territory

Bloomington, Benton and Washington Townships jointly placed a public notice in the Herald Times on February 12 to announce their intention to form a fire territory. The leadership of the three Townships believe that this is the best way to provide their residents and businesses more reliable, effective, consistent fire and emergency medical services. The public notice announced a proposed maximum tax rate for the new fire territory and the dates and locations for three joint public hearings on the proposal.

Township Responsibilities & Resources

Townships, their boards and trustees, are charged with ensuring that their residents receive fire and emergency medical services. The townships receive a portion of property taxes, called fire levy, to do that. By coming together, Bloomington, Benton and Washington Township Boards and Trustees can provide more and better fire and emergency medical services than we could provide alone.

The townships plan to fund a fire department with three fire stations which are fully staffed and strategically located. We will be able to shorten response times throughout the northern part of Monroe County. This means that firefighters and EMTs can get to each fire or medical emergency faster – saving valuable time in order to save lives and homes.

Through this funding mechanism, the Townships can better use taxpayer dollars to more effectively serve all their residents. Setting up a fire territory allows the townships to combine their fire levies, set a new increased tax rate, and make it equal across all three townships. Together, our tax revenues can buy more than each would on its own. We can convert our shared responsibility into a shared benefit.

Improving Fire & Emergency Services to Bloomington Township Residents

The fire territory is one of few mechanisms the Township has available to raise the funds needed to provide the professional and expert fire and emergency medical services its citizens have come to expect. Forming the fire territory with three staffed fire stations will overall improve fire and emergency response times and service in Bloomington Township.

Because of the fire territory, we will be able to locate a new fire station in Washington Township to better serve the western side of the new I-69. We will be able to reduce response times and help improve service to the western side of Bloomington Township, which has been cut off by SR 37 and now I-69.

With staffed stations in Benton and Washington Townships, we anticipate that response times in the unincorporated area of Bloomington Township will be improved as these stations will be available to quickly respond to calls for help if Station 5 has been called out on another emergency.

In order to keep a minimum of three paid full-time firefighters per shift at Station 5, Bloomington Township must participate in the territory. Currently, Bloomington Township can afford nine paid firefighters because Washington and Benton Townships contract with us to provide their residents fire and emergency medical services. Their contracts have been increased over the years, but continue not to fully fund their share of the costs for service. Without this funding mechanism and the opportunity it

provides them to increase revenues sufficiently, these townships do not have the capability to contribute more toward the expense of this necessary service.

Setting the Maximum Tax Rate for the New Fire Territory

To ensure that the territory has room for growth into the future, the townships are proposing a maximum tax rate of .7888. This will be the ceiling for this new tax entity, in perpetuity. The tax rate can never exceed this number. The annual budget, which is prepared and adopted each summer and fall, must fall under that ceiling.

We arrived at the ceiling by drafting a \$5.4 million budget for a three township territory with three stations staffed around the clock by four paid firefighters. This budget reflects optimal best practices for fire departments. After much deliberation, the township boards and trustees decided to move forward with this proposed tax rate as the maximum.

A second estimated budget was drafted with reduced, but acceptable, staffing at each of the three fire stations as a starting place for the new territory. For Bloomington Township taxpayers outside the city limits, the fire territory formation will likely mean an increase in their fire levy – or the property taxes paid toward fire and emergency services. We don't know what the increase will be year to year, because it depends upon the proposed annual budget. We will know better when we finish 2017 budget preparation this summer.

Here's How You Can Learn More and Provide Input

The proposed draft agreement and resolutions and other materials are available for your review. They are posted on the Township's website and the Bloomington Fire Department's website.

To learn more, you are encouraged to attend the joint public hearings scheduled for February 23, March 8, and March 29. All of these hearings will start at 6:30 pm. The hearings will include presentations on the territory, financial impact analysis, and opportunity for questions and answers. The same information will be covered at each hearing. Immediately following the third meeting, each township board will convene to approve and adopt a resolution to establish the fire territory.

Public Hearing #1

Tuesday, February 23, 2016 at 6:30 PM.

Benton Township Volunteer Fire Department, 7606 E. State Road 45, Unionville, IN 47468

Public Hearing #2

Tuesday, March 8, 2016 at 6:30 PM

Bus Depot, 8111 Lee Paul Road, Bloomington, IN 47408

Public Hearing #3

Tuesday, March 29, 2016 at 6:30 PM

Bloomington Township Fire Dept. Station #5, 5081 N. Old State Road 37, Bloomington, IN 47408

We are available to answer questions. Please contact Lillian Henegar, Bloomington Township Trustee, lhenegar@btfire.org, 812-336-4976.