

## **MINUTES OF JOINT MEETING OF THE BLOOMINGTON & WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP BOARDS**

**April 23, 2019**

**Station 5, 5081 N. Old SR 37, Bloomington, IN 47408**

**Bloomington Township Board Members Present:** Barbara E. McKinney (Chair), Lorraine Merriman Farrell, Martin C. Spechler

**Washington Township Board Members Present:** Kenny Bryant (Chair), Jerry Ayers, Pat Slabach

**Present:** Barb Ooley (Washington Township Trustee), Kim Alexander (Bloomington Township Trustee), Lisa Myers (Bloomington Township Deputy Trustee), and Joel Bomgardner (NMFT Chief).

The meeting of the Bloomington and Washington Township Boards was called to order by Bloomington Township Board Chair Barbara E. McKinney at 6:00 pm.

### **Review & Approve Agenda**

Lorraine Merriman Farrell moved to approve the agenda for the Bloomington Township Board, Martin C. Spechler seconded the motion, and all were in favor; Jerry Ayers moved to approve the agenda for the Washington Township Board, Pat Slabach seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

### **Discussion regarding expansion of the Northern Monroe Fire Territory**

McKinney began the discussion by explaining that the meeting was a work session and public comment would not be allowed.

McKinney addressed the list of questions provided by Washington Township to Bloomington Township prior to the meeting.

**Q:** Are there potential tax savings due to the expanded number of people and Benton's higher property values paying into the Territory?

a) Possibly, McKinney answered. We'll get a better handle on the numbers if we decide to start the process of considering expansion of the Territory.

**Q:** Are there potential costs and tax increases for Washington Township residents?

a) This seems unlikely, but again, we will have a better idea on this down the road, if we start the process.

**Q:** How much work will be needed to upgrade the Benton station and equipment?

a) If staffed, some minor modification to the station will need to occur to accommodate personnel living quarters. Equipment and apparatus will need to be surveyed for their current condition, but normal maintenance and replacement schedules would be applied.

**Q:** Will the Territory need to bring additional personnel to the roster?

a) It depends on whether we have a station in Washington Township that needs to be staffed. If we don't, the firefighters currently working out of the temporary station could be located in Benton. If we do, we would likely need new staff at the Benton station.

**Q:** With this expansion, can we increase the volunteers and if so, how?

a) The Territory is always working to increase the number of volunteers we have. Having a larger territory might raise our visibility and lead to more people wanting to volunteer.

**Q:** Will the Territory receive LIT funds from Benton Township and the Bloomington/Washington Township on a regular basis?

a) McKinney stated that in 2019, Bloomington Township contributed more than \$815,000 of LIT funds. In 2018, Bloomington Township contributed more than \$975,000.

- Q: What are the common issues of our rural townships?
- a) The age and the populations are similar, with 65% of the population being either under 18 or over 50. Rural townships tend to have more EMS runs.
- Q: Are there any outstanding fire or emergency service issues currently in Benton to be addressed?
- a) Not that we are aware of.
- Q: How should the Territory Executive Committee be reorganized to ensure adequate representation for all townships?
- a) McKinney stated that the composition of the Executive Committee can be determined as we move forward. The goal would be that all townships have adequate representation. Bryant commented that he is dissatisfied that both Deputy Chiefs' employed by the Territory live in Benton Township.
- Q: How do we handle the votes of the Executive Committee if the Territory expands? Currently Bloomington and Washington both have two (2) votes. If the Territory expands, two (2) townships can force an issue with a 4 - 2 vote.
- a) McKinney responded we have input into how the new committee is formed, but the fact that majority rules is an inherent risk of democracy. Two (2) representatives from the same township may not always agree, so the vote count is never guaranteed.
- Q: What do Bloomington and Washington Townships gain from the proposed expansion?
- a) Currently the Territory is subsidizing Benton Township to some extent. By Benton joining the Territory they will be able to raise their tax rate, and thus contribute more equitably to their fire protection services. If the Territory ends up with more firefighters and equipment, that is better for everyone.
- Q: How will the expansion affect taxes rates, etc.?
- a) Currently we do not know. That is part of the process of establishing a territory.
- Q: How do we handle the Benton Trustee situation with her husband being employed by the Territory?
- a) McKinney stated there is no legal conflict. Bryant and Ayers commented that because the Executive Committee appoints the fire chief and votes on salary increases, there is a perceived conflict. Slabach suggested that the Benton Trustee abstain on those votes.
- Q: What kind of funds do we foresee Benton needing to enter into the Territory?
- a) McKinney replied that would be determined as part of the process moving forward.

McKinney then addressed the questions to Washington Township from Bloomington Township.

- Q: Where are you on evaluating the INDOT property?
- a) Still in progress, Bryant reported.
- Q: When do you expect to have the information on that property – availability, suitability, price, utilities, zoning, etc.?
- a) Bryant reported they have no idea when more information will be available. McKinney pointed out that there is a deadline to build on the former Cook property. Bryant stated that he will never vote to build on that property, and he is unconcerned with losing it. Ayers stated they aren't sure when they will be able to buy the INDOT property. Slabach questioned having to buy it. Bryant stated it could be a dollar transaction but they don't know yet.
- Q: Do we know that a septic system can be placed on that property?
- a) Bryant replied the property had a septic there before I-69 construction.
- Q: If the INDOT property is suitable and affordable, how is it better than the free property we already have?
- a) Ayers stated it is a better location. Bryant stated the INDOT property is located in the center of Washington Township. Ayers commented it has better East/West road access to get to Benton or Bean Blossom Townships. Bryant commented that he doesn't want to spend money on a station that may revert back to Cook if county wide fire protection becomes a reality in the future. Ayers

and Bryant want to ensure Washington Township retains ownership of any building funded by Washington Township tax dollars that the Territory uses as a fire station.

McKinney opened the table to questions from either board.

Ayers asked what the advantage is to Bloomington and Washington Townships for Benton to join the Territory. Ayers questioned why we should add Benton when we have something that works. McKinney stated that fire protection for Benton is being subsidized by both Bloomington and Washington Townships. Benton joining the Territory would enable them to pay their fair share. Ayers stated he only sees an advantage for Benton Township. Spechler commented that there is always an advantage in providing better fire protection which saves property and lives. McKinney stated that having a station and personnel in Benton Township would benefit the whole Territory. Slabach agreed that having full time personnel in Benton is going to benefit everyone. Ayers stated that he doesn't know if the Territory tax rate will increase, but he doesn't expect that the rate would decrease by adding Benton to the Territory. McKinney replied that the numbers will be determined during the formation process. Slabach stated that the discussions have to happen to determine all the details. Bryant stated that he was disappointed that Bloomington Township didn't have more information. McKinney pointed out that we are not deciding on the expansion at this point, but on having discussions regarding the expansion. Until the discussions occur, the questions can't be answered. Spechler stated that saving lives and protecting health should not be undervalued. Farrell directed attention to the letter distributed by Benton Township which estimates that Benton would be able to contribute over \$812,000 in revenue to the Territory at the current tax rate. All board members agreed that they prefer not to increase the Territory tax rate.

Ayers asked that public comment be reconsidered. Spechler stated that members of the public can speak with the board members at the conclusion of the meeting.

#### **Adjournment**

Both meetings were adjourned at 6:46 pm.



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**Kim Alexander, Bloomington Township Trustee**