



ACME TOWNSHIP
PUBLIC SAFETY CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Tuesday, February 22, 2005, 7:00 p.m.
Acme Township Hall
6042 Acme Road, Williamsburg MI 49690

Meeting called to Order at 7:02 p.m.

Members present: P. Collins (Chair), L. Andres, D. Hoxsie (7:05 p.m.), J. Maitland, W. Mervau, D. Nelson, D. Smith (7:30 p.m.)

Members excused: None

Staff present: S. Corpe, Office & Planning Coordinator/Recording Secretary

A. Correspondence: None

B. Reports: None

C. Limited Public Comment: None

D. New Business

1. **Review background materials notebooks:** Collins prepared notebooks with information to assist the committee in advising the Township Board regarding public safety issues. Chief among them is participating in and funding for the Metro Fire Department. Collins took a few minutes to review the contents and provide history of the fire department. The department started with horses and a water tank at the barber shop. Later they bought a Jeep, and eventually a truck. It was housed originally near what is now the Thirlby Automotive building, and eventually the fire hall was built. The local fire department joined the county fire department, which eventually split into the current Metro and Rural divisions. At that time there were fears that service levels would drop, which were settled when the fire department purchased a full-page ad in the newspaper to publish an explanatory letter. Metro Fire is now trying to plan for fire prevention/suppression needs for the coming 5, 10 and 20-year periods.

A key issue at this time is that fire millages are collected based on taxable property values, but our contract with Metro Fire has us pay for service based on SEV. There is a 1 mill levy on real property only, and a half mill levy on real and personal property that started in 2000 and will expire after being collected one more time in December 2005. When the contract was initially negotiated, Proposal A had not yet taken effect to cap the amount by which taxable values rise each year, so generally property SEVs exceed property taxable values. Hoxsie observed that Metro Fire was asked if they would renegotiate the contract so that amounts would be payable based on taxable value, but they declined.

Metro Fire is run by a board composed of one representative each from Acme, East Bay and Garfield Townships. The County contributes some funding. The Metro Board does not answer to any other authority, although the three member townships must agree to/support the budget.

There was recently an article in the paper that created an impression that fire service might decline. Andres received some concerned phone calls.

Collins has provided information regarding the price of equipment, and noted that over the years focus has shifted from fire extinguishing to fire prevention education and inspections, which has had a positive impact on the number of fires. The education division recently received a \$37,000 grant.

The township's contract with Metro Fire shows that all of the fire equipment is owned by that agency. If a township decides to leave the consortium, it must either purchase the equipment or it will be removed from that jurisdiction.

Information regarding the township's current ISO fire rating shows that it improved over the last year, which translates into reduced insurance costs for township property owners and residents.

Historical documents regarding the history of millages in Acme Township, as well as the township-wide fire protection special assessment district in East Bay Township were provided. Garfield Township also has a fire district, their millage is currently 1.8; East Bay's is 2.15 and also provides for ambulance service which is free of service charge to residents. Mervau reports that Peninsula Township provides similar ambulance service. Any charges for EMS intercept service are billed to insurance. In those townships, there are more calls for service processed and a higher rate of provider burn-out, as well as expensive medical liability insurance costs. A new ambulance costs about \$100,000 unstocked. Acme has a current 1.5 total levy which will drop back to 1 mill after the 2005 tax year and no ambulance service. Garfield Township does not have an ambulance service, but they have more fire service calls than Acme. They have so many calls (1,000 – 1,500 last year) that they are trying to refer more rescue calls to the NorthFlight ambulance service. Acme averages about 30 calls for service per month. Garfield has some paid full-time and part-time staff; there are usually 2 people on call at all times. These positions are paid directly by Garfield Township, although in the future Metro Fire would like to bring that under its auspices. Acme has unpaid individuals who are on-call for a week at a time, with 14 currently-active firemen. A high level of basic and continuing education is mandated by the state to participate. Last summer Acme paid to have an on-call fireman 8 hours per day; many of the members took turns in this role.

There is a letter from James Christopherson, former township counsel to Mark Ritter, former Supervisor that was written in 2000 and provides a good overview of several different funding options available to the township. There is also a memo expressing many of the same concepts. At that time, the idea of a fire district was discussed briefly by the Board, but there were concerns about the idea of the Board being able to levy up to 10 mills without further vote by the public.

The actual ballot language from the 2000 0.5 mill request is in the notebook along with the record of votes cast (passed by a decent margin.) There is also a letter that was sent out to registered voters by the Board.

Dawn Plude, Assessor has provided some information regarding 2004 property taxable values and how much revenue various levels of millage could generate. She also demonstrated how much revenue the 1 mill assessment currently generates as compared to the expected Metro contractual payments for 2005. There is a spreadsheet for the years 2000-2005 that was prepared by Mark Ritter in 2000 that estimated the widening gap between tax collections and fire service payments. There are also sheets from the current year budget and audit showing the balances and past and expected expenditures in the township's Fire Fund. Information is also provided

for the Community Policing Fund. A policing millage is also in effect, under which the township is currently collection approximately 0.27 mills.

The 2005 Metro Fire Budget originally reflected a 22% increase over 2004. In part these increases include funds for land acquisitions and staffing increases called for by the Metro long-range plan. Due to the outcome of the November 2004 elections two of the three Metro Board memberships changed, and the new individuals representing East Bay and Acme Townships experienced "sticker shock." They are less familiar with Metro's strategic plan than their predecessors. Without substantial increases in the Metro budget, many of the strategic plans may not come to pass. The original 2005 Metro Budget was amended last month to substantially reduce the annual increase and allow time for further discussion about long-range plans.

Also included is information about Police and Fire Protection Act 33 of 1951 and the text of the act itself.

The township will need to come to a decision regarding whether to request a new millage or whether to form a fire district over the coming year. The latter option would provide flexibility, but the idea that up to 10 mills could be levied is as scary as it is improbable. Hoxsie felt that another option to be explored is a revision of the agreement between the township and Metro Fire. Maitland observed that when the agreement was written, the Proposal A problem didn't exist. If the agreement were to be revised, revenue to Metro Fire would drop. This would necessitate a reduction in the budget, when Metro is demonstrating the need to spend all funds currently being taken in and to increase that funding level. Hoxsie is concerned about resistance to amending the contract; Collins noted that East Bay Township has expressed similar concerns. The law changed between 1975 when the Metro Fire Agreement was written and 2000, but the agreement was not modified. Hoxsie feels that the agreement should be modified to match. In the 1980's when Maitland was supervisor, shortfalls were covered by withdrawals from the General Fund. Hoxsie recalls that the township asked in 2000 that the agreement be reviewed, but this has not occurred. To him, the agreement and the way taxes are collected ought to be in sync. Maitland observed that in years where a proposed budget increase would outstrip growth in tax collections a shortfall could also develop. He also suspects that over the years the amount that Garfield has paid in to the partnership has exceeded the amount of funds expended directly for its benefit.

Maitland asked what the timeframes would be for a millage request. Corpe reported that due to election consolidation laws there are only four possible election dates per year. In 2005 those dates are February 22, May 3, August 2 and November 8. Ballot language must be submitted to the County 70 days in advance of the desired election date.

Mervau asked to what extent the advisory would be asked to be involved in Community Policing issues; Collins is not yet certain what Kurtz's plans are. Maitland observed that as a Public Safety Advisory Committee the group should have an opportunity to provide input on that issue if it desires. Andres observed that some citizens aren't convinced of the value of spending additional funds for emergency services until they need a fire put out or someone to provide oxygen and CPR until the ambulance can arrive. He personally had a good feeling when Tom Henkel was with him after his heart attack until the ambulance could arrive.

2. **Select next meeting date:** The group would generally prefer to meet during a late afternoon or early morning. Collins would like each member to review the notebooks thoroughly and form a preliminary opinion as to a preferred method of fundraising. He will arrange for Deputy Chief Pat Parker to make a presentation regarding the strategic plan. Hoxsie asked that the presentation be no longer than 45 minutes; he can always be asked back if there are additional questions. The next meeting was set for Monday, March 14 at 8:00 a.m.

Collins mentioned that the average Metro Fire annual budget increase has been about 5%, with the highest increase being 9%. Nelson asked how much of the increased cost is to maintain baseline compliance and how much is for increased staffing and upgraded equipment. Explaining which costs aren't optional will be key to public education. Collins observed that Metro has made it a habit to pay cash for capital expenditures, avoiding finance charges and gaining a discounted price. Current trucks can cost between \$250,000 - \$750,000.

E. Public Comment/Other Business

Meeting adjourned 8:45 p.m.