

Watab Township 2015 Annual Meeting Minutes

The Annual Meeting for Watab Township was called to order by Clerk Pat Spence at 8:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 10, 2015 at the Watab Town Hall. Those in attendance were: Bryon Marketon, Steve Wollak, John Olson, Tracy Schumann, Paul Jacobs, Gene Kivi, Sandra Saldana, Jerry Kostreba, Chuck Rau, Jason Krueger, Wayne Larson, Mary Lepinski, Kevin Reiter, Eileen Saldana, Phillip Nelson, Michael Barringer, Ed Kacures, Janel Vaillancourt, Maureen Graber, Geno Beniek, Ed Popp, Guy Spence, Bob Raveling, Pat Spence, Lloyd Erdmann, Craig Gondeck, Lucy Palmer, and Donna Poganski. Following brief announcements and the Pledge to the Flag, Clerk Pat Spence called for nominations for a Moderator. Steve Wollak nominated Sandra Saldana; there were no other nominations and she was appointed by unanimous ballot.

Sandra Saldana asked for any additions to the printed agenda. Additions were announcements by Supervisor Craig Gondeck and a donation request from the Benton County Agricultural Society by Tracy Scapanski-Schumann. Motion was made by Bob Raveling, second by Lloyd Erdmann, and passed to approve the agenda with these additions. Motion was made by John Olson, second by Bob Raveling and passed to approve the 2014 Annual Meeting Minutes as printed.

Supervisor Craig Gondeck made the following announcements: (1) The Township will have better coordination with the Benton County Sheriff's Department on fire calls. If you have a burning permit, be sure to activate it with the DNR so that if a phone call comes in about a brush fire on your property, the sheriff's department will check first to see if you have an active burning permit before calling out the fire department. (2) The township has residents who call 911 to get a ride to the emergency room, because they don't have a ride to the doctor; many of these people do not pay their bill for First Responder Medical calls, so Craig asked for volunteers who could give these people rides; this would be a cost saving to the township. (3) SCORE Grants have recently been approved for 2015. The township has been approved for \$15,000 for Clean Up Day and \$2,500 for Adopt a Highway. (4) Craig will be promoting history information about Rumors, Pirates Cove, and Seekers; if anyone has information, please contact him.

Clerk Pat Spence presented information about the township: (1) population is 3,200, which is larger than the City of Rice or City of Foley; (2) is an Urban Township; (3) has 8,596 acres with more than 50 platted developments; (4) has nearly 40 miles of township roads; and (5) has no full-time staff but is served by the elected town board members. She then presented the 2014 Financial Report as audited by the town board in January. A power-point slide showed the audited statement, and a handout contained a more detailed breakdown of income and expenses for each fund. Kevin Reiter asked if the township receives the same amount for gas tax as in the past; Pat responded that the county kept a similar formula so revenues have stayed the same.

Supervisor Craig Gondeck announced that the township is applying for a \$35,000 grant for a second outdoor warning siren. During 2014 the township saved about \$20,000 by utilizing the STS Crew for Crack Filling 15th Ave NW, the town hall parking lot, and part of Hemlock Road. The remainder of Hemlock Road will be completed when the weather is suitable. The STS Crew can vary in number between four and ten crew members. If anyone has a road that they think needs crack filling contact a supervisor. Supervisor Lloyd Erdmann was called on to give the remainder of the 2014 road report. He announced that the board is currently seeking bids for the Frost Road Quiet Zone. Supervisor Ed Kacures was asked to give the information about the future railroad crossings and quiet zones. He said that the

contract for the Frost Road Quiet Zone will be awarded at a special meeting at the town hall at 7pm on March 24th. He described the diagnostic team meeting that took place on February 18th with representatives from the Federal Railroad Authority from Chicago, MNDOT, BNSF, township residents, board members, town engineers, and Ed Popp. Approval was given to move ahead with the project. The 95th and 105th Street crossings are in the planning stages; approval was given at the 2014 annual meeting to start the design work. He called on town engineer, Jon Bogart, to present more detailed information. Jon stated that he brought the plans and estimates for the 95th Street NW improvements. The estimated cost is \$158,152 with a 10% contingency for a grand total of \$173,967. The higher amount would include doing both wear course layers. Paul Jacobs asked Jon how much of the cost is for making it a Quiet Zone and how much is for other improvements. Jon said he did not have that breakdown, but if you used the cost for doing County Road 79, which was about \$50,000 to make a Quiet Zone, you could transfer that to this project. \$50,000 would be for the Quiet Zone and the remainder for making it a safer crossing, widening, and removing the "hill." Paul said that he was upset that the town board spent township money on a county road and that the donations didn't begin to cover the expense. Maureen Graber expressed her appreciation for having the Quiet Zone near her home and also had hoped that donations would cover the County Road 79 project. Lloyd said that the board is still accepting donations and thanked those who had donated in the past. Pat Spence explained the expense in 2014 for the Lakewood Shore crossing planks due to BNSF sending the bill so late; work was done in 2013. Ed Kacures said that Sauk Rapids Township has met with us about the process to get the crossing on County Road 55 near Benton Drive made a Quiet Zone. They are in the process of working with the City of Sartell on it. Bob Raveling said that he heard the county engineer estimated the cost at \$750,000. Jason Krueger asked about the proposed crossover in the township. Pat Spence said that BNSF is making a crossover north of the Saldana pit to expedite train traffic through the township. They don't want trains sitting across any tracks and believe that this will help the trains move through more quickly.

Pat Spence presented the 2015 and 2016 budget information. \$538,154 is budgeted for income in 2015 and \$515,229 is budgeted for expenditures. \$562,649 is the budget for income in 2016 with \$590,745 budgeted for expenses. She explained that the 2015 budget is based on the tax revenue that was authorized at last year's annual meeting. The main sources of income for the General Fund are property taxes and building permits. In 2015, \$60,000 is budgeted for road repairs and \$77,500 for railroad crossing work; in 2016, \$40,000 is budgeted for road repairs and \$170,000 for the 95th Street NW project. The income for the Fire Districts was established by dividing the levy according to the percentage of net tax capacity coming from each district. 34% of the NTC is in Fire District 1 served by the Rice Fire Department, and 66% of the NTC is in Fire District 2 served by the Sauk Rapids Fire Department. The contract amounts for the two departments are \$21,365 for Rice and \$31,835 for Sauk Rapids. Sauk Rapids does the billing for any calls in Watab, and 100% of those bills were paid last year. Watab is charged \$350 for each first hour of calls by Rice; annual average is forty calls. About one-third of those receiving service pay their bill, so the difference has to be budgeted. She announced that the town board is very pleased that the Rice City Council approved a two-year contract for the township at the 2015 rate, which greatly helps the budget process. Also, the township received a check for \$2,054 this week from Rockwood Estates LLC, which covers the difference in tax capacity charged by the City of Rice to Watab (2.6%) versus the rate charged the other two townships (2.35%). Pat also explained that the township receives revenue from Benton County for property taxes in July and December, so the board needs to maintain year-end balances sufficient to pay the contract amounts which are mostly due prior to July. The township has to levy to cover the debt. \$45,000 of principal will be paid this year on the road projects debt and \$20,000 on the town hall debt.

Sandy Saldana then directed the audience's attention to the board recommendations for the levy amounts for each township fund. The board was recommending \$90,000 for the General Fund, which is a \$10,000 increase over 2014. Pat Spence explained that this is to maintain a recommended reserve at year end. Jason Krueger said that he appreciates the board's efforts to maintain healthy balances. Motion was made by John Olson, seconded by Maureen Graber, and passed to set the General Fund levy at \$90,000. Sandra then moved to the levy for the Road and Bridge fund, which the board recommended to be set at \$190,000, which is a \$20,000 increase over 2014. Lloyd Erdmann said that to keep up with road maintenance he would like to see this amount increased to \$220,000. Maureen Graber said that she would like to have it increased by \$40,000, because everyone wants good roads. Kevin Reiter said that some roads are beyond repair and need to be replaced, such as the one by his home. Pat Spence explained that due to the 6.5 million dollars in new construction in the township in 2014, the county assessor told her that the township could raise the levy about \$65,000 and residents would not see an increase in the township portion of their taxes. Maureen asked Sandy about the impact of delayed maintenance on the roads. Sandy said that the longer you put off maintenance, the more the work will cost. Paul Jacobs disagreed with the board spending money on County Road 79 and said all expenditures should be for township roads. Jerry Kostreba asked about snow plowing expenses and if the township would be getting money back. Lloyd Erdmann explained that the township has a flat-rate contract so it doesn't depend on the amount of snow fall. Jason Krueger commended the board for their patience in working with the railroad. Motion was made by Maureen Graber to set the Road and Bridge levy at \$210,000; it was seconded by Guy Spence and passed. Motion was made by John Olson to set the levy for Fire District 1 at \$42,000; it was seconded by Maureen Graber and passed. Motion was made by Maureen Graber to set the levy for Fire District 2 at \$32,000; it was seconded by Lloyd Erdmann and passed. Motion was made by John Olson and seconded by Guy Spence to set the levy for the Town Hall Debt Service at \$20,000; motion passed. Motion was made by Craig Gondeck and seconded by Guy Spence to set the levy for the Road Projects Debt Service at \$56,000; motion passed.

Before receiving donation requests, Moderator Sandra Saldana read a statement that said that votes tonight on the donation requests are advisory to the board. They are reviewed at the April board meeting for conformance to legal authority for the donation, use of past donations, and the 2015 budget, which is \$2,700 for donations. The first request was presented by Chuck Rau on behalf of the Little Rock Lake Association. He was also representing the Benton County Soil and Water Conservation District. The request is for funds to facilitate the commercial netting of carp in Little Rock Lake; because the market fluctuates so much for selling carp, the netting company wants the carp tagged so they can be monitored, know where they are schooling, and then come in to net them. Chuck said that the appropriate licensure and people to do the work are in place. He stated that common carp are considered an invasive species, and that the carp stir up the mud at the bottom of the lake which releases phosphorus, and that causes algae blooms in the summer. He said that it isn't a major contributor of the algae, but it is a contributor. Total cost of the project is \$35,000. The lake association is giving \$5,000; \$10,000 is coming from Benton County's invasive species fund; \$10,000 is allocated from the Rice Sportsmen's Club; and up to \$5,000 will come from the Initiative Foundation. Chuck said that he was hoping to receive \$2,500 from the township and that his brother Jim was requesting the same amount from Langola Township. He said that he would be happy with whatever the township could donate. Jason Krueger asked about the procedures. Brian Erdmann said that the cost of the tagging was too high. Lloyd Erdmann said that it sounded outrageous. Sandy Saldana asked Chuck about the process after the fish are tagged. Chuck said that the fish would be tagged and netted yet this winter. He added that the DNR is not a huge proponent of this because of the lake's connection to the river and the carp will repopulate the lake; it is a temporary fix. Guy Spence said that he feels this project is too expensive for a temporary fix and the tagged fish could swim down the river and not

school in the lake; he said that he is not impressed with the project; Chuck responded that there is strong support from the lake association members at the meetings. Jerry Kostreba asked how long ago carp netting was done in the lake. The response was that it was done about ten to twelve years ago and there were problems with someone cutting the nets. Maureen Graber said that the cost of \$35,000 is for implanting radio tags in ten fish; she said she doubts that any members of the lake association who voted for the project actually read the proposal from the firm out of the Twin Cities. She said that if the ten fish don't pool together, they won't be netted so she doesn't support the project. Sandy asked about the history of funding for the lake association from the township. Gene Kivi asked Chuck if the fish will be netted; Chuck responded that the commercial fishermen will come in if the fish school and do the netting; otherwise they won't. Maureen Graber added that the commercial fisherman doesn't know if there will be enough fish to make it cost effective. Sandy asked for a motion, and Janel Vaillancourt made a motion to donate \$2,000. Paul Jacobs responded that if the township gave \$2,000 to the LRLA there would only be \$700 left to donate to Rice Recreation and the fair. Lloyd Erdmann said that his thoughts are that the cost is scouting work for a business but maybe the township should only go in a small amount. Janel withdrew her motion. Lloyd Erdmann made a motion to donate \$500 when the project is moving ahead; it was seconded by Craig Gondeck, and the motion passed.

Tracy Scapanski-Schumann introduced herself as a Benton County Fair Director. This year's free fair is August 4th through 9th and everyone is invited. Last year's donation from the township was \$1,200 and used as the township directed. \$600 went for military day and \$600 for the children's barn. The fair board's goal is to provide agriculture education; she shared a story about a teacher who didn't want to bring her students to a dairy farm field trip because she thought the cows had to be sawn in half to get the milk. The fair will be bringing in a "talking cow" that will give agricultural facts and show how a cow produces milk. Cost for having the "talking cow" at the fair is \$9,000, and the fair board has applied for grants to defray the cost. This year's fair will also have the Viet Nam Wall, which costs \$14,000. Fund raisers and grant applications are used to raise funds for this. Cost is for shipping and guarding the exhibit. Tracy thanked the township residents for the past partnership and good working relationship. She also asked residents to offer their assistance as volunteers at the fair. Motion was made by Guy Spence that the township donate \$1,200 as last year with \$600 going toward the military exhibit and \$600 for the children's barn; motion was seconded by Craig Gondeck and passed.

Bryon Marketon, Rice Recreation Director, appeared to request \$2,500 from the township. He described changes to programming to save costs and to get more parent involvement and increased participation. He is trying to get cooperation from the school district to allow indoor walking in the school in Rice. There were some problems with access to records in the Rice City Office, so he wasn't certain that the numbers presented included everyone. According to the records he could obtain, Watab had forty-two of the total of 130 youth participating. One of the major expenses is for busing students weekly to Sauk Rapids for baseball games. The participation fees do not cover all of the expenses. Kevin Reiter asked why the parents can't transport their children; Bryon responded that most of the parents would be working during the day. Another large cost is the Rice skating rink, which costs the city \$4,800 and there are no fees. Jerry Kostreba said that his wife walks at the school during the winter months at 5pm. Maureen Graber made a motion to donate \$1,000 to Rice Recreation; motion was seconded by Lucy Palmer. Craig Gondeck thanked Bryon for his excellent work. Lloyd Erdmann asked how the budget amount for donations was set; Pat Spence responded that the township supervisors set the amount when creating the 2015 budget, and it was approved at the January meeting. He said that he would like to see the township give more. Maureen said that she would amend her motion to give \$2,000 if it can be found in the 2015 budget; Craig Gondeck seconded this motion; after a comment by Ed Kacures about parliamentary procedure, Lucy Palmer agreed to second the amendment to the original motion.

John Olson clarified the motion as the township donating a minimum of \$1,000 up to \$2,000 if the board can identify the funds in the 2015 budget.

Ed Popp, Benton County Commissioner for District 2, came forward to give a report. He asked, "Isn't township government good when citizens can decide how much money to spend? Townships have good morale because people are involved in making the decisions." He spoke about how Benton County's levy decreased by the largest percentage of any Minnesota county, but the county is still number seven in the state for a high tax rate. The county board is looking into economic development. Miles Seppelt left the county's part-time position for a full-time position at Hutchinson; when he left, he said that Benton County needs a full-time director. The county board has visited with Carol Anderson, Director of Morrison County Economic Development, about the model they use. It is a private, non-profit 501(C6). He said that the county board is going to move slowly to get things right. County department heads are all recommending economic development. The county board has a request before the State Legislature for funding for Up the Hill project in Sauk Rapids. The project is not in the Governor's budget at this time. Homes will need to be purchased and moved or demolished. He said that in meetings with the department heads, they are hoping to have a better relationship with county residents. They are involved with the LEAN movement to make government for efficient. Commissioner Popp said that he has had a big learning curve the first two months in office. He feels good about the fund balances; the jail made money last year; human services is a huge, mandated expense. Licensing has made the county money. A question was asked about how the license fees are paid. When Watab residents purchase licenses at the Stearns County courthouse, Stearns County keeps the fees. Kevin Reiter asked about the number of roundabouts for the Up the Hill road. Jason Krueger said that more people would attend the county board meetings if they were held evenings. Bob Raveling asked Ed if the county offices could be open some evenings and Saturdays so they would be more accessible to working people. Other counties do this. Ed said that he would look into this. Lloyd Erdmann said that eight to ten years ago you could come to a county board meeting and be allowed to speak, but now the county board has restricted people to the open forum. Craig Gondeck added that you need to get permission from your county commissioner to be on the agenda and feels that these controls are too much. Commissioner Popp agreed, and said that people should be able to make a request directly to the county administrator to get on the agenda. Lloyd Erdmann asked about remaining debt on all the buildings that the county built; Commissioner Popp said that the debt will be paid in full this year by using excess funds. Kevin Reiter asked if the county would put money toward railroad crossing improvements. Commissioner Popp said that he didn't think the board would do so and that he was impressed by the effort of Watab Township in the complex process of creating the quiet zones. Jason Krueger asked for more information about Benton County's ranking in tax rates. Commissioner Popp asked for discussion about having a regional railroad authority. Suggestions were made that it would be better to try to get government subsidies for the St. Cloud City Airport than to make it a regional airport. John Olson asked if the county would be better off by supporting light rail. Commissioner Popp responded that since he has been on the board there hasn't been much discussion. Chuck Rau said that there would be a huge economic benefit to the St. Cloud Area if we had a regional airport only if there is reliable service. Brian Erdmann recommended recruiting Speedy Delivery to locate near the airport. Jerry Kostreba recommended that the county put tighter controls on welfare. Sandra thanked Commissioner Popp for his report.

Preliminary results of the 2015 election were presented by Clerk Pat Spence. They were a total of 35 voters with 35 votes for Lloyd Erdmann for a three-year term as Supervisor and 34 votes for Eileen Saldana and 1 write-in vote for Sandra Saldana for a two-year term as Treasurer. Pat thanked the election judges who were Head Judge Donna Poganski, Lucy Palmer, Clara Knettel, and Maureen Graber.

Sandra Saldana then invited residents to express any ideas or concerns. Maureen Graber thanked the board for all their hard work. She added, "We love our town hall." Jerry Kostreba asked how the City of Rice could force medical services on the township residents, when we didn't want it. There was further discussion. Board members suggested that if residents feel strongly about it they should attend the Rice City Council meetings; the council needs to hear from the people rather than just the board members. Steve Wollak asked why Supervisor Gondeck's wages last year were about \$11,000 when the other two supervisor's wages were about \$4,000. Pat Spence said that the board delegates the duties to him and includes sign installation, MS4 inspections, opening and closing the town hall, hall maintenance, lawn mowing, most snowplowing complaints, culvert mapping, training on illicit discharge, coordination of clean-up day and adopt a highway, contacts for the SCORE grants, coordination of the STS crew for crack filling, and tree and brush cutting. She said that the board members are paid \$25 per hour, while having a paid employee would cost more because of benefits that would have to be offered and additional insurance costs. Hiring contractors would also cost more. For example, the MS4 inspections would be done by Wayne Cymbaluk at \$95 per hour. The engineering technician is paid \$90 per hour. Pat said that when Lloyd Erdmann did all the railroad construction inspections it saved the township \$65 per hour. Maureen Graber thanked Craig for always being available and having a smile on his face. Jason Kruger said that he wanted to be on record as being pleased that Watab doesn't have organized garbage removal; he added that it looks like a good cost saver but it really isn't. Bob Raveling asked if there are any more locations for dry hydrants; Lloyd Erdmann responded that there really aren't any at this time. Bryon Marketon recommended that the township not accept the lowest bid for snowplowing and said the thought it was horrendous; he lives on 107th Street. Geno Beniek said that the snow plow scraped up a lot of sod on Sanbur Trail. Craig Gondeck said that when the board goes on the road tour, they will make notes and have the snow plowing contractor make the repairs. Geno asked that the board remember his request for fog sealing of Sanbur Trail. Mary Lepinski said that the contractor put rocks on her lawn rather than black dirt. Steve Wollak defended the snow plowing drivers saying that it is impossible not to scrape up sod when the first snow fall comes before the ground is frozen. Lloyd Erdmann added that it also doesn't help when people's lawns are higher than the road surface. Craig Gondeck said that it would help by Bryon's house if people staked the edge of the road. Bryon said that Craig has been very helpful in addressing their neighborhood snow plowing issues. Kevin Reiter announced that it looks like the township residents will have road construction all summer on Highway 10. Pat Spence said that new concrete will be placed in the northbound lanes of Highway 10 south of County Road 33 beginning in April. Beginning in September, two inches of bituminous will be replaced from County Road 33 to Rice.

Motion was made by Maureen Graber to set March 8, 2016 at 8pm for the Annual Meeting with polls open between 11am and 8pm. Discussion followed about changing the time for the Annual Election to hours between 5 and 8pm. Lloyd Erdmann said that he would like to keep it the same with polls open from 11am to 8pm so that people who go to work at 3pm can still come and vote. Maureen's motion was seconded by John Olson and passed.

Craig Gondeck thanked Steve Wollak, who works for the City of Rice, for his good maintenance of the shared wood chipper (Rice, Langola, and Watab).

Motion was made by Craig Gondeck, seconded by Maureen Graber, and passed to adjourn the meeting at 10:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Clerk Pat Spence