

Watab Emergency Services Committee Meeting

The first meeting of the Watab Emergency Services Committee was held on Monday, May 15, 2017 at 7:00 p.m. at the town hall. Committee members present were: Craig Gondeck, Todd Waytashek, Maureen Graber, Pat Spence, Lloyd Erdmann, John Olson, Jason Krueger, Roxanne Wilson, and Rob Jacobs. Dick Raveling and Doug Boser were unable to attend. Also present were Tate Mills, Fire Service Specialist with the State Fire Marshal Division of the MN Department of Public Safety, and residents John Baune, Bob Raveling, Ray Thompson, and Jerry Kostreba.

- I. Town Board Chair Craig Gondeck called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. followed by the Pledge to the Flag.
- II. Introductions: those present gave their names.
- III. Discussion about Purpose of the Committee: Information was shared about the current contract costs and comparisons between the contract with Rice and the one with Sauk Rapids. Costs are approaching \$100,000 per year. Craig gave an update on the status of the township's fire contract proposal to the City of Rice. Mayor Rogholt told him that the City Council is voting on it this evening, and he expects that they will vote against it as well as against his proposal for a flat-rate contract. They are not prepared yet with a counter proposal. Craig requested a response by the township's June regular meeting.
- IV. Dialogue with Consultant, Tate Mills
 - A. Tate Mills explained that he works with local units of government and fire departments on contract disputes and planning for emergency services. He cannot tell the committee what to do, but rather he presents facts, information that is requested, and contacts with others who have had similar situations. Most importantly, he said his opinion is that boards should look out for "what is best for Mrs. Marshall on her worst day." In dealing with a contract between the township and city, try to negotiate on the type of calls the city will respond. If the city won't negotiate in good faith, you need to do something else. Starting your own fire department is very expensive. To make yourselves eligible for grants, you first need the basic equipment and a place to store it. People to man those trucks is a challenge today. We are seeing a statewide trend of people that don't want to give up their time. There are benefits of lower property insurance, a better ISO rating, and industrial properties see a huge difference if you invest in your own department, so it can pay off for you. But, starting from scratch can be very expensive. He suggested looking at whether the township has options to work with another fire department.
 - B. Residents Bob Raveling and John Baune talked about response times between the Sauk Rapids and Rice Fire Departments. Roxanne Wilson offered that Rice department members have more training in medical response; Pat Spence agreed.
 - C. Tate addressed the training to be a firefighter; you are required to be trained for the specific job you are going to do; certifications are not mandatory.

- D. Craig asked what other townships who are having similar contract problems are doing. Tate said that townships are making a stand this year at what they are willing to accept. A few have shopped around to different departments, and some have set up their own departments. Local government units are not required by law to provide fire and rescue service, but it is important to residents and infrastructure protection.
- E. Discussion ensued about dispatching, equipment, a building, etc. Radios are \$2,500 to \$3,000 each. Pumper trucks need to pass an annual inspection. The total cost is different for every geographic location in the state, but you need to consider the cost for training, gear, and ongoing costs. Training is about \$1,500 per person, turnout gear is \$1,500, air packs are \$8,000 to \$10,000 per person.
- F. Tate recommends a phased approach with a satellite station to get the firefighters trained, then phase in a building and equipment.
- G. Tate suggested hiring a consultant to assess our specific situation and then to give the township options on what is best. He described a program with the state asking for funding from the Fire Service Advisory Committee to offer grants for consultants. They will find out if they are funded in August and are seeking to revise the guidelines so that local units of government can apply for these competitive grants. Most other grants from the state are only available to existing departments.
- H. Tate will send a list of potential consultants to Craig for the committee's consideration. Hiring a consultant can also be expensive (between \$20,000 and \$60,000) depending on the services requested. If hiring a consultant, develop a specific list of what you want them to address. He will also provide a list of the grant criteria in case it is funded.
- I. A question was asked if Tate knew of other successful departments where the population was like Watab's at 3,200. He said that there are many; population is not a set factor. He believes there should be no problem recruiting fire fighters in a community our size.
- J. Tate asked if the township had looked at putting together a First Responder Service. Jerry said that the township residents had voted to drop First Responder Medical Service because of the coverage by Gold Cross Ambulance. Jerry said that Watab has been arguing with Rice over the fire contract for over forty years. Pat said that Rice won't give Watab a contract without medical First Responder Service. The Attorney General's Office called following a resident complaint, and said that the township should not be requiring redundant service. Pat explained that most insurance will not cover First Responder Services; they only cover the ambulance cost.
- K. Ray said that he talked to the Rice firemen, and they say that they have offered the same contract to Watab that the other townships have already signed. Pat said that is not true, because Watab has a higher Net Tax Capacity Rate and Graham Township has had their rate cut. Ray believes that Watab should keep a contract with Rice because we need to cover people's emergencies. He added that we've had a controversy with Rice for many years.
- L. Another option discussed was offering Gold Cross a satellite station at the town hall.

- M. Jason asked Tate if he thinks Watab is being bullheads in asking Rice for too much. Tate responded that he didn't think so, since the township is paying the contract and should be able to set what you want for the service.
- N. Cost to build a substation averages about \$5 per square foot. 2% of homeowner's insurance goes into firefighter's relief association fund, and that is the reason firefighters want more territory.
- O. Watab would need a minimum of six to 10 firefighters.
- P. Tate recommended sending out a letter to residents to determine if there is interest in serving as a firefighter, availability, limitations, experience, etc. It is important to give as much information as possible and to ask specific questions. Tate will send a sample survey. We will consider using an online survey such as SurveyMonkey. Roxanne will assist Pat in developing the survey.
- Q. Tate will send a set of guidelines for communities our size along with training requirements. This will help with the planning.
- R. Craig will set up the next meeting for late June or early July with a representative of Gold Cross Ambulance.
- S. Todd discussed planning strategies to develop a course of action. It was requested that Maureen and Pat put together five years of data on costs and calls for the next meeting. At the next meeting, the committee will also brainstorm for courses of action.
- T. The letter and survey will be sent out to all residents. Pat will contact the owner of Rockwood Estates to give them an update on failed negotiations with Rice and request their assistance.

Board members thanked all the residents for coming to offer their input, and the meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Pat Spence