

# RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of

Meeting

BABBETT BROTHERS

Form 6101

Held

## VILLAGE OF HEBRON

### SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

MARCH 15, 2022

6:00 PM

This meeting was held both remotely and in person.

#### CALL TO ORDER

Councilmember/Safety Committee Chair Kenney Nauer called the meeting to order at 6:00pm

#### ROLL CALL

Councilmembers in attendance: Council President Dr. Valerie Mockus; Councilmembers Stacy Stoner, Annelle Porter, Kenney Nauer, Rich Moore and Paige Seymour.

Others in attendance: Mayor James Layton, Village Fiscal Officer Deborah Morgan, and Village Solicitor Wesley K. Untied

Visitors: Randy Wolf, Chris Clancy, John Slater, Donard Myers, Brandon Morgan, Ryan Wyse, Whitney Wyse, and one other

Visitors via Zoom: Patty Costello, Leslie Sumner

#### Discussion:

Village Solicitor Wesley K. Untied said this is a Special Council Meeting and made a point of order that the only topic to be discussed is the Fire District.

#### FIRE DISTRICT DISCUSSION

Mayor Layton said there are options to consider relative to the Fire District, including:

- Keep the Fire District and try to pass a levy
- Hebron take over the Fire Department again and contract with Union Township
- Have another Fire Department, such as Heath or Southwest Licking Fire District, handle the Hebron Fire Department for us

Mayor Layton said he ran some numbers, and it would be difficult for Hebron to run the Fire Department again. He said Hebron has always been willing to support the Fire Department levies until just recently, and there is a group that does not support the Fire District. He said we need to find a way to gain their support.

Dr. Mockus said she feels one option that needs to be deliberated is Union Township being in charge of running the Fire Department, as it would help Union Township to see how helpful it would be if Hebron were the one running it. She said if Hebron removed the continuous levy and did not conform the boundaries, the Township would have to seriously entertain that they would need to provide service to the entire Township including Hebron, and what it would cost them. She said her concern is removing something from the table that reduces our negotiation power. Dr. Mockus noted that the residents of Hebron continue to pass levies that Hebron puts on the ballot; contrary to Mayor Layton's earlier statement that that has recently changed.

Mrs. Seymour asked if it is an option to have Hebron run the Fire Department in contract with Union Township as it was previously run, and Hebron residents who do not want to contract with Union Township can contract with Granville? Mrs. Morgan said previously, Union Township contracted with Granville for everything north of the railroad tracks on US 37, and contracted with the Village of Hebron for everything south of the same railroad tracks. She said she thinks an option would be to go back to that, but instead of everything south of the railroad tracks being contracted with Hebron, it could be contracted with the Fire District. So, the Fire District would remain; but it would just service the southern portion of Union Township, which may create an appetite to pass a levy, as any levy dollars collected north of the tracks would go to Granville and levy dollars collected south of the tracks would go to the Fire District.

Mrs. Morgan said budget figures from 2016-2019 were distributed, but they are relevant to the Hebron Fire Department; they do not reflect the Refugee-Canyon Joint Fire District as it has been operating for the past two years. She said many costs would need to be considered if the Fire District were to come back to the Village of Hebron, such as rebranding the Fire Trucks and uniforms, assuming any debt accumulated by the Fire District, unemployment, vacation time, comp time, etc.

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Mrs. Porter said she feels it is important that Hebron maintains possession of the equipment, as most of it originally belonged to the Village. She said if the equipment cannot be returned in the same manner, she hopes a lease or something may be worked out. Mrs. Morgan said the Village signed over all the titles to the equipment to the Refugee-Canyon Joint Fire District and they own all of it. She said at that time, there was no debt owed on any of the equipment. Mayor Layton noted the contract states if the Fire District dissolves before November 1, 2023, the equipment comes back to the Village of Hebron. Village Solicitor Wesley Untied concurred but cautioned he is referencing an unexecuted copy of the contract. He added that the contract states after that date, it falls to the discretion of the County Auditor.

Dr. Mockus asked Mr. Moore if he has done any calculations to see how many mills it would be for residents if the Fire Department were to be run by Hebron alone. Mr. Moore said to run a Hebron only Fire Department, he believes it would take 14-15 mills for Hebron residents, and that would be with reduced staffing.

Mayor Layton said 1 mill for Hebron only would generate \$83,412, so 15 mills would generate \$1,251,180.

Mrs. Morgan said other cost-cutting options to consider would be possibly reducing some fulltime positions to part-time and/or paying staff per run versus hourly wages. Mrs. Porter said there would need to be funding for at least a year until funds from a levy would come in.

Mr. Moore said we need to know how Union Township feels about the options regarding the Fire District. Mayor Layton read out loud a letter received from Union Township about their stance if the Fire District discontinues to function or is dissolved. The letter said "there is a significant majority of constituents within the Township that do not support the Refugee-Canyon Joint Fire District". It said "what's at stake is future attempts to maintain current funding and use it for Fire/EMS protection. The conclusion of the Board of Union Township Trustees is that our constituents are content to regain Fire/EMS services in semblance of the way it was prior to the formation of the Refugee-Canyon Joint Fire District."

## OPEN DISCUSSION

Mr. Wolf said Union Township would like to go back to the way the Fire Department was previously run. Mayor Layton asked if he feels the residents in the northern portion of Union Township would be content with that. Mr. Wolf said all indications they have at this point are yes.

Mrs. Seymour asked for Union Township's taxes prior to the formation of the Refugee-Canyon Joint Fire District. Mr. Wolf said it was 4.8 mills. Dr. Mockus said Hebron pays 6 mills. Mayor Layton said Hebron also pays Union Township taxes in addition to its own, so Hebron residents pay a total of 10.8 mills. Dr. Mockus said Mr. Wolf shared their current budget which is about 1.6 million, and that 1.6 compared to the old 1.6 has fewer firefighters, less reserve, higher cost of living expenses, and staff making salaries closer to average. Dr. Mockus said she feels strongly that the increased salaries the firefighters received were not inappropriate, but if we add more staff, to get back to what we had before the Fire District came into existence, we cannot run on 4.8 and 6 mills, so we have to pass a significant levy. She said we need to do the math and figure out what it's going to cost to run the Fire Department for five years and put that on the ballot. She said we currently have 4 mills continuous and 2 mills up for renewal, and we need to figure out how to also get more revenue. She said it is her understanding that Granville is putting a 2 mill increase on the May ballot, which means they will probably look for that effective millage from their northern township constituents; therefore, if the Township is willing to consider putting a levy out to raise all their millage to that level, it would give us significant funding to perhaps survive for five years.

Ms. Costello asked about the reference to needing 15 mills. She said the Fire District wanted to put on 8.5 mills and it failed by over 70% of the votes. She asked if the 15 mills is to enable Hebron to pay off the debt it owes on the Fire Station, and if that is what Hebron is expecting the entire Township to absorb. Dr. Mockus said the 15 mills dialogue is centered around Hebron having its own Hebron Fire Department and not working in conjunction with the Township. She said the discussion of the building has not come up and to this date, Hebron continues to pay for that building. Ms. Costello asked if there is something available that can show how the 15 mill necessity is driven. Dr. Mockus said 15 mills multiplied by about 80,000 will give the net value to bring in to the Village of Hebron from Village residents, and that's what is being used as the basis for discussion for running our own department without any help from the Township. Dr. Mockus said she thinks we need to document what it will cost to run the Fire Department as

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Hebron-only, as that is the fall-back position at this point. She said we need to document, as a whole Township, whether it is being run by Hebron or run by Union Township, what it will cost and then back into what the millage would be. She said the other concern is, as we talk to the Hebron residents, are we still going to support Hebron residents paying 6 mills more than the Township and if so, we need good messaging because we need to justify that. She said she does not feel a levy for Refugee-Canyon Joint Fire District will pass so the cost for rebranding will have to be a factor.

Mrs. Morgan said if Union Township is willing to contract with Granville for the northern half of the Township, and with the Fire District for below the tracks, any levy that the Northern Township residents would pay for would not come to the Fire District; it would go to Granville Township. She said even if the Fire District stays intact, if the Township was willing to consider that option, it appears they would be getting what they want and it would be better than what Hebron alone could provide. Dr. Mockus said if this scenario did come to pass, Hebron would could be in jeopardy of losing ownership of the equipment. Mayor Layton clarified that this option suggests the Township would have to pass a levy and the Fire District would still be governed by its Board of Directors which includes representatives from both the Township and Hebron. He said he sees this as the best option.

There was some discussion about passing a new levy versus not passing a levy, in the above scenario.

Dr. Mockus said she believes it would be a hard sell to pass a district levy. Mayor Layton said the question should be posed to determine whether the constituents north of the tracks would be willing to support contracting with Granville Township through Union Township, or through a levy through the Fire District, and have the Fire District contract with Granville Township for their coverage. Dr. Mockus said if the northern half of Union Township were to contract with Granville Township, Granville Township would be looking for 6 mills- but if Union Township would only bring 3 mills, the Fire District would have to find a way to make up the difference, unless we could get 6 mills north of the tracks.

Mr. Slater said all money that was generated north of the tracks was paid into the service they received for that area. Dr. Mockus said this was because the millage was the same but that is about to change because Granville is going to place a levy on the ballot. Mayor Layton said we could contract with Granville Township and agree to give them whatever dollar amount our millage creates in the northern area. Mr. Slater asked why Granville Township would be satisfied with that, as they are now collecting 6 mills in their Township.

## VISITOR COMMENTS

Ms. Costello said the three Township Trustees have said that the people in Union Township will not pass a levy unless they are out of the Fire District. She said people don't trust the Fire District, as it was forced on them against every person that appeared at a Union Township meeting or a Fire District meeting. She claimed even a 1 mill levy won't pass in the Township as long as they are part of a Fire District, and she does not understand why Hebron does not seem to grasp Union Township's opposition to the Fire District.

Dr. Mockus said she feels it is important to explore all available options, even the unpopular ones. She added that most Fire Districts function quite well and it is important to keep an open mind to the possible need for a Fire District in the future, and not confuse that with this particular Fire District. She said the point of the District is to pull resources and have leadership close by, as opposed to Hebron, etc, managing it a little distantly because that is not Hebron's only focus. She said Fire Boards work very closely to the District, the Firefighters, the Chief, etc.

Ms. Costello said though a Fire District may be needed in the future, Union Township residents do not support this particular Fire District. She said maybe in the future, they will listen to the residents, as they did not do so when this Fire District was formed. She said the residents feel betrayed by their Trustees and many feel that the Fire District was formed to help Hebron pay off its debt on the Fire Station.

Mrs. Morgan said Fire Station payment is budgeted out of the Hebron funds, coming from the General Fund, and has nothing to do with the Fire District; therefore, nothing to do with Union Township. She said if that were the case, Hebron would ask Refugee-Canyon Joint Fire District to pay the Fire Station payment this year, and we are not asking them to do so. Ms. Costello said she believes that is because a levy was not passed. She said the agreement states that if a significant levy was passed, the debt would become the Fire District's debt, not Hebron's.

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Randy Wolf, member of the Refugee-Canyon Joint Fire District Board, said there has been discussion about redoing boundaries and taking Hebron out of Union Township. He said he asked Mr. Slater what he thought the Township might generate. He said he feels 6 mills for Union Township and 8 mills for Hebron, for a total of 14 mills plus any residual, and then redistrict, would be very fair. He said unfortunately it would probably be best to get out of the Fire District because that appears to be the only way to get votes in the Township.

Dr. Mockus said 6 mills plus a 2 mill bump for Hebron, and conforming the boundaries, would not be enough to run a Fire Department—at least not the Fire Department we think we want. She added as soon as we conform our boundaries, we are on our own and we could be left trying to pass substantial millage to survive. She said we are stronger sharing the burden. Mrs. Porter concurred and said at this point, she cannot support conforming boundaries as it limits what can be done.

Mayor Layton said if our boundaries are not conformed and Union Township decides to leave us and contract with Granville Township, we are left with no recourse and paying their levy. Dr. Mockus said if we do not conform our boundaries and Union Township decides to contract with Granville Township, then Granville Township is coming to Hebron too, because we are still in Union Township.

Mrs. Porter said there has to be some kind of contractual agreement that brings the Village and the Township together.

Chris Clancy, Lieutenant for the Refugee-Canyon Joint Fire District, asked if there has been any thought about Union Township taking over the Fire Department. Mayor Layton said that is one of the options being explored.

There was discussion about possible levies needed for options relative to the Fire District.

Mr. Slater said if the attitude toward the Refugee-Canyon Joint Fire District does not change, the current funding for the Fire District is in jeopardy. He said time is of the essence.

Mrs. Seymour asked if a meeting has been set with Union Township. Mr. Nauer said not yet. Mr. Slater said Union Township is very receptive to meeting and discussing options, but this meeting and other things have to be in play, in order to determine Hebron's attitude which will help the Township find direction. He said they also wanted to hear the results of the information gathering committee. He said the way the Hebron Fire Department was run previously worked, and he feels Union Township and the Village of Hebron did get along even with some points of contention.

Dr. Mockus said can we put together a team to hammer out what the Village needs to effectively be, and I think that needs to be a sliding scale assuming what the Township and the Village are working together to support a Fire Department that is servicing everywhere except north of the tracks. She said the math has to be determined along with what the Fire Department should look like. Mrs. Porter said the costs need to be determined and then we can work backward to figure out the millage. Mayor Layton said he thinks we can get an opinion from the Fire District Fiscal Officer as to what she thinks it will take. Dr. Mockus asked if she would be able to tell us what the staffing should be. Chief Wyse said he has put most of this information together and he can crunch the numbers and share them. Mayor Layton said he will share the information with Council and then schedule a joint meeting.

Ms. Costello said it would probably serve well if the meetings are public meetings. Mayor Layton said all of the meetings so far have been public meetings and have been publicized.

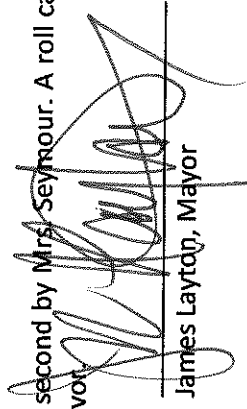
All agreed to discuss updates at the March 23, 2022 regularly scheduled Council Meeting.

**Adjourn**

Dr. Mockus moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:19pm, second by Mrs. Seymour. A roll call vote was taken with all Councilmembers present voting in favor.

Attest:

  
Deborah Morgan, Village Fiscal Officer

  
James Layton, Mayor