

**VILLAGE OF HEBRON
SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

May 11, 2022

6:00 p.m.

This meeting was held both remotely and in person.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Layton called the meeting to order at 6:10pm due to technical difficulties with the chamber equipment.

ROLL CALL

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

Others in attendance: Mayor James Layton, Village Solicitor Wesley K. Untied, Attorney Jarod Rose, Village Fiscal Officer Deborah Morgan, Police Lieutenant Richard Carson, Police Sergeant Anthony Oliver, and Clerk of Council/Administrative Assistant Christina Furbee.

Visitors: Randy Wolf, Clifford Mason, Rose Mason, Donard Myers, Jim Friend, Pam Friend, Connie Mason, Beth Walters, Marc Weely, Rick Stoner, Ryan Wyse, Chris Clancy, Lawrence Tittle, Gary Mockus

Remote Visitors: None

ACKNOWLEDGE VISITORS

Mayor Layton acknowledged the visitors and said he will let the Councilmembers and the visitors speak, and all statements will be entered into the minutes. He said the minutes will be reviewed so that further discussion and hopefully a final decision can take place at next week's Combined Council Committees Meeting. He said no decisions have been made yet; at this point, all that has been done is gathering information to determine the options that are available.

DISCUSSION

Fire District Options

Mayor Layton said the Refugee Canyon Joint Fire District is still our Fire Service provider but it has become obvious that some of the citizens are not in favor of continuing with the district. Comments and concerns voiced by the public, and the fact that the district levy failed along with two renewal levies for Union Township, are a clear indicator that we need to take a different approach.

Mayor Layton said he was asked by Village Council to look for different options to provide service. He said he was directed to contact West Licking Joint Fire District, the City of Heath, to investigate returning to having our own Fire Department and contracting with Union Township, and the possibility of having just a Hebron Fire Department.

Mayor Layton said Council President Mockus received a letter on March 3rd from Union township expressing the townships concern with the current Joint Fire District and lack of support for the district from their constituents, clearly indicated with recent election results. The letter stated Union Township residents would support returning to a similar Fire Service that was in place before the district was established. A representative from Union Township attended a meeting where Fire Service was the topic and provided additional information that included an estimate that they felt that 6 mills would be enough to provide fire service.

Mayor Layton said he and Safety Committee Chairman Ken Nauer, and Refugee-Canyon Fire District Council Representative Rich Moore met with the Heath Fire Chief and Mayor Johns to discuss plans. He said they expressed an interest and did submit a proposal, but it was not within our target budget.

He said Safety Committee Chairman Ken Nauer, Refugee-Canyon Fire District Council Representative Rich Moore and he met with West Licking Fire District Chief Todd Magers who said he felt West Licking would be open to Hebron Joining the district, pending West Licking Board approval. This would include a seat on the Board, our Fire Station Remaining with 3 firefighters on duty, accepting our Firefighters and possibly using the value of our equipment

towards assuming the remaining debt on the fire station. The cost to Hebron Residents would be WLJFD's current effective rate of 8.9 mills. The Board did approve Hebron joining the district if it was their decision, pending reaching an agreement for services.

Mayor Layton said Union Township is currently collecting only 3 mills at a current valuation of \$221,612,618.00 = (\$664,837.85) and they cannot put another levy on until November. He said if the levy fails again, they will only collect 3 mills in 2023 and that would be the amount paid in 2024. Mayor Layton said Trustee Slater stated that there were no additional funds available in the general fund to support Fire Service.

Mayor Layton noted that the amount it would cost Heath to provide service was more than our Target Budget.

Mayor Layton said a Hebron standalone Fire Department would require taking funds from the general fund at the expense of other departments in the village. He said at 9 mills we currently would collect \$750,704.38, and we would need to find an additional \$949,295.72 to have the estimated required amount of \$1,700,00.00.

Village Fiscal Officer Deborah Morgan said the Refugee-Canyon Fire District's Fiscal Officer informed 2020 expenses were \$2,020,987.84. Their expenses for 2021 were \$2,026,136.29. She said those amounts do not include the building payment. She said in 2019 when it was still the Village of Hebron Fire Department, including the building payment, was \$1,474,832.84. Mrs. Morgan said there has been discussion about funding the Fire Department from the General Fund. She said in 2021, the difference between the revenue the Village received in the General Fund, and the expenses from the General Fund, was only \$343,744.20, so even though the revenue was increased from income tax, the Village spent that, so it wasn't available to carry over to the next year. She said the Village budgeted 1.9 million dollars to be transferred out of the General Fund to the Police Department, Street Department, Fire Station building payment, parks, and the Library, so funding for all of those departments would have to be cut in order to add another department. Mrs. Morgan said she contacted the Licking County Auditor and was told in order for the Village to gain \$1 Million more, we would need 12 mills, which would be an additional annual cost of \$420 for \$100,000 home at market value. To generate \$1.5 Million, we would need 18 mills, which would increase the annual cost for the same homeowners by \$630.

Mrs. Porter said she feels there have been a great deal of negotiations that have taken place by members of Council, and everything she has heard is that all negotiations have been in the interest of the Village and its residents. She said all of the elected officials reside in this community, so anything that affects the residents affects us.

Mr. Moore said he was in agreement with the West Licking Fire District deal but after thinking long and hard about it, he said he hates the thought of giving up the taxpayers' property, i.e., the building and equipment.

Mrs. Seymour said she couldn't agree more with Mrs. Porter. She said the Village is taking all information to heart and trying to look at it very logically. She acknowledged that the Hebron Fire Department is sentimental, but she said at the same time, the Village needs to do what's best and logical.

Mrs. Stoner said she appreciates everyone's opinions. She said she knows things change-as the Fire Department went from mostly volunteers to paid employees, and in listening to Mrs. Morgan's numbers, she feels it is clear what is best for Hebron, but she looks forward to what everyone has to say.

Mr. Nauer said if the Village were to go to West Licking, we can do a rental process on the building and equipment and he thinks the Firefighters would receive an increase in pay. He said if we take money from other Village Departments to run the Fire Department, we would be going backwards. Mayor Layton said at the end of this year, the Village will owe an additional \$775,000 on the building. He said the discussion was that we would take the value on the equipment towards the building and the West Licking Fire District would assume the remainder of the loan on the building. He said this discussion is by no means approved or contracted, but that was the discussion. Mr. Nauer added that the equipment was checked out, and there is work that needs to be done to fix issues on the vehicles.

Dr. Mockus said she thinks the best direction for the Village of Hebron financially, based on the information we have, is moving forward with the West Licking Fire District, and changing our Fire District to the West Licking Fire District. She said there has been a lot of misinformation going around. She said the intention would be to still have Fire and EMS service in the same building located in Hebron. She said she believes Council is operating under the assumption that we would have most of the same staff as we have now, the same building and equipment, but under different leadership. She said the Village used to make the decisions for the Fire and EMS Services but that changed three years ago when the Fire District was formed, and there were very many passionate arguments as to why it was important to create a Fire District. Dr. Mockus said unless those arguments are no longer valid, that is why this is being considered. Everyone still wants the same level of service when they dial 9-1-1. Dr. Mockus thanked Mayor Layton, Mr. Moore, Mr. Nauer, and Mr. Wolf for their work on this issue.

VISITOR COMMENTS

Mayor Layton said we will take comments, record them in the minutes, let Council review them and have more discussion at the Combined Council Committees Meeting.

Chris Clancy, Refugee-Canyon Joint Fire District Lieutenant, said he and other Firefighters are concerned about the time frame for the Fire District. He said he noticed at the last Fire Board meeting, Mr. Sharps and Mr. Moore seem to have different thoughts about when a retraction from the Fire District can take place and they would like to get clarification.

Pam Friend, 708 W. Main Street, said it sounds like Council has already made a decision. She said it feels like they are taking comments from residents but are not going to do what they want.

Donard Myers, 103 Maple Avenue, said he wants his Fire Department back. He said he has been affiliated with the Hebron Fire Department since 1953 and his money and taxes have gone to this Village. He said he can't see giving the equipment to others, and he would like to maintain the Fire Department in Hebron. He suggested Hebron put a levy on the ballot and see if people will sponsor it. He encouraged Council to find a way.

Clifford Mason, 125 Dennison Street, said he sent an email to Council, the Mayor, and the Clerk of Council, outlining his thoughts about moving forward. He said he understands it is not an easy decision, but he still believes there is a way to make the Hebron Fire Department work. He suggested Hebron sit down with Union Township Trustees and have more discussion. He said he heard that Union Township will only support 6 mills. He said if Union Township will support 6 mills, and the Village's 4 mills is a continuing levy, maybe Hebron residents would support an additional 3-4 mills. Mr. Mason said over 40 years went into developing the Fire District, and he hates to see it go away just because some people do not support it. Mr. Mason encouraged the Village to work with the Union Township Trustees to try to salvage the Fire District. He said he heard Mrs. Morgan's numbers and thinks it is important to note that in 2020, 2021, and so far in 2022, there eight people on duty, the fuel expenses were much greater because they had two fire engines and one or two ambulance running. He said staffing less people could be a consideration. He strongly encouraged a citizen's committee, similar to the citizen's group the Township put together, as he feels there is a very small representation of the Village at tonight's meeting. Mr. Mason said there is no dire emergency on the Village's behalf as we will collect taxes until 2023. He acknowledged that there is a time frame to putting something on the ballot to possibly collect in 2024 and he thinks the Village would be surprised at what could happen and how much the residents will support. He encouraged the Village not to do what's easy, but to do what's right for the entire community. He said the Village is growing, and with that comes additional revenue. He proposed putting a levy on to pay for operating the Fire Department, and then a bond to purchase new equipment.

Marc Weekly, 118 Dennison, said he supports Mr. Mason and Mr. Myers' address to Council.

Jim Friend, 708 W. Main Street, encouraged Council not to give the equipment or the building away. He said if you give it away, you will have nothing and will be left with nothing to bargain with. He said right now, the Fire District is running on 9 mills. He asked why it can't be run on the same millage without the name "District" on it. He said if the Village has built up its departments and scales it back down in order to support the Fire District, he does not see that as backtracking, he sees it as prioritizing Fire Service.

Ryan Wyse, Lancaster, said the Village will get a letter from him outlining his thoughts. He said he cautions Council on deciding solely based on fiscal problems. He said when the Fire District was created, residents of Union Township fought against it and it did not stop the Fire District from being formed, so they spoke up by not voting on our levy. He said this could create a similar situation with Hebron residents and as we've seen, the people can speak very loudly. He said look at what the people want.

Dr. Mockus said the contract that formed the Joint Fire District has a ticking timebomb in it. She said if this issue is not resolved by this fall, the Village will lose ownership of the equipment so she has been operating on the assumption that we need to move quickly in order to pass a levy so that we do not lose the equipment. Mayor Layton said after November 1st, if we don't leave the district, the Auditor will make a decision once the District dissolves.

Ryan Wyse said the date in the contract is 2023. Mayor Layton said there are two dates in the contract. He said he will address it and discuss it at the Combined Council Committees Meeting.

Dr. Mockus said she is very clear on her position, as that is her obligation as an elected official. She said if she is not transparent about that, then she doesn't know how residents will make their arguments to help her understand their side. She said receiving emails that say "save Hebron Fire" do not help her; she needs more information, she wants to know why and what conditions and concerns residents have, so that she can address them.

Mrs. Seymour said she appreciates all who came to this meeting and their comments. She said she got multiple emails and comments and will take them to heart as she wants to make the best decision for her vote.

Mayor Layton said the Combined Council Committees Meeting is next Wednesday at 6pm. He said we will get the minutes together and sent out to Councilmembers for review. He said if anyone has additional comments, email Councilmembers or come into the office and meet with him. He said we have a great Fire Department and he wishes the District would have stayed, but there's no chance of that happening so we need to move on and take a different direction.

Dr. Mockus moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:51pm, second by Mrs. Seymour. A roll call vote was taken with all Councilmembers present voting in favor.

_____(on file)_____
James Layton, Mayor

Attest:

_____(on file)_____
Deborah Morgan, Village Fiscal Officer