

The Village Special Board meeting was held at the Marshall Buehler Center and also set up as a Zoom meeting.

The agenda for this meeting was posted on the Municipal Building door, the entrance of the Police Department/Marshall Buehler Center, and at Nekoosa Port Edwards State Bank in Port Edwards, as well as on the Village website.

The Village Special Board meeting was called to order by President Mancl at 5:15 p.m.

Present: President Mancl, Trustees Grunden, McGregor, Moore, Radtke, Saylor & Zurfluh

Absent: None

Also Present: S. Stewart, D. Gau, D. Tremmel

Citizens: Becky Crueger, Doug Clement, Leo Thomasgard, Cary Smith, Bruce Diggles, Bruce DuPree, Jerry Zurfluh, Sandra Robinson, Juris Repsa, Donna Jicinsky, Jay Jicinsky, Bob Worden, Connie Worden, Matt Tranel, Del Stewart, Randy Moody, Rick Hess, Nick Dassow, John Daven, Matt Fletcher, Julie Sweeney, Mark Sweeney, Doug Berryman, Karen Berryman, Dennis Saeger, Tim Schmidt, Jason Worden, Tanya Callahan, Tammy Barstow, Jerene Sillars, Glenn Saeger, Brian Luebke, Karly Tellekson, Steve Hepp, Julie Hepp, Jim Anderson, Jody Hamin. Appearing via ZOOM: John Vanatta, Tom Bartlett, Deb Honeyager, Joe Terry, WAOW, David Osterbrink, Don Kitowski, Arne Nordstrom, Karen Madden, Susan Hatton, Calvin Grunden, Mariah Hart, Tanya Kubisiak, Johnson, Luke, Graci, Ashley, Admin, Angie.

Public Comment:

Interim Administrator Duane Gau – On March 13th he sent an email to the Fire Chief, Captains and the Board members instructing the Chief and Captains to meet on a certain date and time, and if they did not follow his direct order, he would have the police find them and bring them there. He was told he did not have the authority to do so, and the transfer of duties already occurred.

Becky Crueger – She inquired as to how many firefighters are needed to effectively run the fire department and how many are on the roster. She also inquired as to what duties each can perform and how this will affect her homeowner's insurance. She also asked where she could read the past and present bylaws.

Trustee Saylor responded to her inquiries. President Mancl stated that they will work on getting the bylaws on the Village website.

Doug Clement – Acknowledged that change is not easy, especially when matters are up in the air. He asked that when the Board addresses the items on the agenda, please consider the needs (present & future) of the community.

Juris Repsa – He stated the importance of firefighters and asked that everyone reassess their actions so we can move forward to a more productive fire department.

Matt Fletcher – He praised the group of firefighters and pointed out that not everyone on the roster is eligible because they have not taken the minimum required training yet. He stated that the Board, Administrator and Police & Fire Commission have no firefighter experience and should not be making decisions for the department.

Mark Sweeney – Acknowledged that it requires a lot of schooling to be a chief or captain and inquired if we have people qualified to be in those leadership roles.

President Mancl noted that Administrator Gau has a list of the firefighters and their training.

Dennis Saeger – He stated that the fire department has been around for over 100 years and has always worked fine until the last election. He feels the Board is responsible for firefighters leaving and they need to figure this out.

Jason Worden – He stated that he fully supports Brian Luebke and his skills. He received an email from a trustee asking him questions, but he is no longer an employee so he will charge for consulting services in the future. He recommended a promotion for a firefighter, but it was denied before the Police and Fire Commission even got involved. He pointed out several other matters for which he was disciplined. He felt whenever he tried to discuss the matter with members of the Board, he was written up. The Police and Fire Commission dismissed a complaint against him, and the former Administrator declared there was no wrongdoing on his part. But then the matter was given back to the Police and Fire Commission who recommended a third-party attorney review the matter. After thousands of dollars were spent on the investigation, the finding was that there was no wrongdoing on his part. He asked for an apology, but none was ever given.

Jerene Sillars – Her family had generations of firefighters, and she stated that with what is happening, the Village is losing other generations of firefighters. She stated that the Village was seeking payment from the Firefighter's Athletic Association to pay the increase in the ambulance service for this year.

President Mancel confirmed that the Athletic Association was never asked to give money to cover the increase in the ambulance fee.

Glenn Saeger – Came to the meeting to get more information on this matter. He stated that he knows recruitment is hard and there are many hours of training put in to become a firefighter. He hopes everyone can find some middle ground and if they cannot, find someone who can. 300 years of service to walk out the door is unacceptable.

Jim Anderson (former Fire Chief of Village of Port Edwards) – He is not happy with some of the past practices of hiring and non-promotion in the police department. He does not see the need for a Police and Fire Commission because the fire department was always able to handle these matters on their own. They had a very successful fire department in the past and even taught other larger departments how to use some equipment.

Tom Bartlett (former Fire Chief of Village of Port Edwards) – He stated that he made a 2 hour trip from Tomahawk to speak at a Police and Fire Commission meeting, but it did not seem to help. Everything the Village Board tried to do with the fire department; maybe some of it needed to be done but it was the way they went about it. They need to support the fire chief and not put unrealistic demands and timelines on him.

Susan Hatton – She has been in the Village for about a year now and does not like what she is seeing – Administrator misusing power, assessments and property taxes increasing, bad condition of streets, post office closing and no accessible police department. Now with the fire department situation, she is concerned her homeowner's insurance will go up.

Sandra Robinson – She stated that so many people are worried about their homeowner's insurance rates going up. She checked with her insurance company, and as long as you live within 1,000 feet of a hydrant or within 6 miles of a fire station, the rates will not go up. Everyone who is worried about their homeowner's insurance going up should do the research or contact their insurance company.

Tim Schmidt – As a Supervisor of the Town of Port Edwards, he is concerned about the Fire Contract that the Town has with the Village Fire Department. They had a paragraph added to the contract this year that in the event the fire department is dissolved, the Town will be reimbursed a prorated portion of the amount paid. The Village Administrator called the Town Chairman and asked if he heard rumors, which he did not. Felt this was an unnecessary call to be made regarding rumors. He thanked all past, present and future fire personnel.

Randy Moody – He is Chairman of the Town of Port Edwards and stated that Supervisor Schmidt did a good job of voicing the Town's concerns. They lost the Nekoosa ambulance and now are worried about losing their fire service. People mention the mutual aid with Nekoosa and Wisconsin Rapids, but the Town of Port Edwards has a contract with the Village of Port Edwards, and that is who they expect to come.

Discussion and possible action providing direction to the PFC on recruiting for new Fire Chief:

Interim Administrator Gau is looking for direction on the procedure for filling the position of the Fire Chief and to bring candidates to the Police and Fire Commission. Wants direction from the Board on how to start a recruiting process. It was pointed out that this is not the first Fire Chief hired since the Village has had a Police and Fire Commission. There was discussion regarding qualifications and how strictly they would be adhered to. It was concluded that advertisement for a Fire Chief will be done both internally and externally simultaneously.

Discussion and possible action of the structure of the Fire Department organization.

It was determined that this was premature and that it could wait until the new Board and committees are set. This matter will be on a future Public Safety Committee agenda.

Trustee comments:

Trustee Saylor thanked everyone for coming and voicing their opinion and encouraged everyone to continue to attend meetings.

Trustee Radtke thanked all the firemen (retired, resigned and current) and wished things could have been worked out before. He stated that the department heads need to be allowed to run their departments and hopes we can do that.

Trustee Moore thanked everyone for coming to the meetings. We need the public's input. We need to find middle ground and work together. She thanked Jason Worden and all the firefighters for their service.

Trustee McGregor stated that he did not realize until the mural was put up that last year was the Fire Department's 100th anniversary. Even though it is a year later, he still plans to recognize the 100 years.

Trustee Grunden thanked everyone for coming and hopes they continue to support the fire department. This year was a difficult time, but she appreciates everyone's support including her time spent looking for grants in support of the fire department. She appreciates Jason's time and will continue to support the fire department.

Meeting adjourned at **6:54** p.m.

Minutes taken by Diane M Tremmel, Village Clerk-Treasurer