

Westfield Fire Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
10-28-09

The meeting was called to order at 7:08 p.m. with Jim Likley, Greg Oakes, Rick Robbs and interim Chief Mike Carson present. Guests included Mayor Tom Horwedel, Squad Captain Dawn Buchwald, Vicky Brunenmeister, Ron Oiler, Trustee Carolyn Sims, Trustee Tim Kratzer, and Councilperson Pat Edington.

Interim Chief Carson provided a packet including the monthly run report and monthly departmental expenses (bills) for September; and, EMS billings from LifeForce for September and year-to-date.

Jim Likley called for a review of the monthly bills and Interim Chief Carson provided explanations to several line items in the summary. Rick Robbs moved to approve the bills as presented; with a second from Greg Oakes. Jim Likley called for a roll call vote (Robbs, aye; Oakes aye; Likley, aye).

Heather Sturdevant arrived at 7:15 p.m. (additional guests Russ Zupanic, Dan Grabowski and Tim Brunenmeister arrived at differing times throughout the remainder of the meeting).

Jim Likley called for approval of the minutes from the September 30, 2009 meeting, and itemized several additions/corrections to the minutes. Following discussion, Greg Oakes moved to accept the minutes as amended, with a second from Rick Robbs. Jim Likley called for a roll call vote (Sturdevant, aye; Robbs, aye; Oakes, aye; Likley, aye).

Interim Chief Carson gave the Chief's report, including a summary of the September run report, and commented that all seven daytime calls during the month had been covered. He explained that unit #162 caught fire on the evening of Monday, October 26 on return from a training exercise in Wayne County – the brake calipers on one wheel locked up and overheated, causing a fire that was quickly extinguished. The truck was later repaired and serviced by World Truck, and it was noted four new tires will be necessary within the next month due to normal wear.

The new fire truck is on schedule. The chassis will be finished on time in November and the original delivery date of January 10, 2010 is expected per the estimated 365-day build. Department member Eric Martin, who works at Mack Industries, recently recruited an architect from that company to provide an opinion of the necessary structural modifications to the station house required to accommodate the new, longer truck. In addition to the removal of several courses of brick fascia to the rear wall of the bay, a steel header will need to be installed to support the wall. Interim Chief Carson indicated the modifications can be done "in house" in time for the arrival of the new truck.

Dawn Buchwald and Interim Chief Carson are working on the 2010 departmental budget and expect to have the draft completed by the second week of November. The line item for salaries will reflect the largest percentage increase year-over-year due to the recently implemented daytime staffing program (duty roster). Two versions of the budget will be presented; one with daytime staffing of two persons, and one with daytime staffing of three persons. Dawn Buchwald opined that three EMTs available for daytime coverage is preferred due to squad requirements regarding patient care and transport. Two EMTs are required to roll; and, in the event of a cardiac arrest or similar circumstance in which patient care is required during transport, three squad members are necessary due to the requirement that two EMTs must ride in the back with the patient while the third drives. Jim Likley indicated this opinion will be taken under advisement when the budget is reviewed.

Jim Likley provided copies of a bill from the Medina County Sanitary Engineers in the amount of \$5,491.84 sent to Mayor Horwedel for repairs to water line leaks in the Village sustained during hydrant flushing on October 1 and October 2. Discussion ensued as to the allegations from the County that improper opening/closing of the hydrants caused a water hammer event that ruptured the lines. Jim Likley will contact Jim Troike from the Medina County Sanitary Engineers to obtain all documentation from the County that may exist regarding notification to the Village that all hydrant flushing be handled by the County following their purchase of the water system in the Village. Prior to that transaction, the Westfield Fire Department handled all regularly scheduled hydrant flushings in the Village, and there is concern that the Village was not properly notified of when this responsibility was to have been assumed by the County (if ever).

Anecdotal evidence suggests there is inconsistency among the towns and villages throughout the County regarding which entities are performing hydrant flushing (municipalities versus the County). If this is true, and if the Village was not previously notified in writing to halt regularly scheduled hydrant flushings; then, there may be grounds for contesting the bill for damages, particularly given that negligence on the part of the Fire Department is debatable.

Trustee Kratzer and Dawn Buchwald offered opinions as to the mechanics of opening and closing hydrants – that it is impossible to open or close them rapidly thereby charging the water line with excess pressure (as the County alleges) because the valves in the hydrants combined with the threaded fittings can only be opened/closed at a slow rate. In other words, they are designed to prevent rapid opening or closing which can lead to charged lines. Jim Likley will report back on his progress toward obtaining the County's documentation, policies, and protocols. Based on these findings the Village will contest the billing for repairs outright or negotiate a mutually acceptable sharing of the cost.

Trustee Sims inquired as to whether the Village's liability insurance policy would respond if a claim were to be presented. Greg Oakes will refer the question to the Village's insurance agent, Jay Hutchison of Wichert Insurance in Cuyahoga Falls, for an opinion.

The matter of the damaged lines was one of three topics within a letter to Interim Chief Carson dated October 15, 2009 from Mayor Horwedel and Trustee Likley regarding recent incidents within the department. Copies of the letter were provided by Jim Likley and an extensive discussion occurred with opinions shared by committee members and guests. Dawn Buchwald expressed concern over the tone and content of the letter and indicated an implication of blame has had a negative affect on morale within the department (the letter having been shared within the department by Interim Chief Carson). Chief Carson concurred.

The intent of the letter – to provide Interim Chief Carson with feedback and to support his efforts to address any known areas of concern – was explained by Mayor Horwedel and Trustee Likley. Likley explained that two of the issues in the letter were discussed in an executive session of the Fire Committee following the September meeting and represented concerns of the committee and its collective opinion that Chief Carson be supported in addressing the issues within the department – and not to be confused with a reprimand of the department as a whole.

Greg Oakes and Rick Robbs provided insights from the Village Council's perspective, indicating the Village Council, in their September meeting, supported a suggestion from the Mayor that he and Jim Likley meet to discuss the situation and to send the letter to Chief Carson over joint signatures as a means of showing support for his leadership in addressing the issues contained in the letter.

Trustee Carolyn Sims offered for the record that she had not been consulted on the matter and objected to the action taken by Mayor Horwedel and Trustee Likley without the issued being vetted through the Township Trustees. Jim Likley countered that he had in fact made his fellow trustees aware of the situation and had accepted Mayor Horwedel's invitation to meet with him to discuss the matter and to compose the letter to Chief Carson, describing the matter as a Fire Committee issue and therefore not requiring a formal hearing of the Township Trustees. Greg Oakes concurred, stating that any perceived communication issue among or between the Township Trustees should be discussed at a future Trustee meeting and that the Fire Committee meeting was not the appropriate forum for that discussion.

Heather Sturdevant indicated she had not been advised of the letter or the reasons for it being sent and expressed frustration over not having been notified. Russ Zupanic offered that witnessing the preceding debate was a poor showing of leadership and did little to motivate or inspire him as a member of the department. All such comment and opinion noted by the committee.

The next meeting is scheduled for Sunday, November 29<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. at the Fire Station. Greg Oakes stated that he will be absent due to vacation. Interim Chief Carson indicated that he, also, has a conflict, and will submit his monthly reports in advance of the meeting if unable to attend.