

THE CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF OSHTEMO
Township Board Minutes
Special Meeting
December 29, 2015

The Oshtemo Township Board held a special meeting at the Oshtemo Township Hall. Supervisor Heiny-Cogswell called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

PRESENT:

Supervisor Libby Heiny-Cogswell
Clerk Deb Everett
Treasurer Nancy Culp
Trustee Nancy Carr
Trustee Dusty Farmer
Trustee Zak Ford

Also present were Township Attorney James Porter, Fire Chief Mark Barnes, Lt. Troy Faulk, Police Specialist Jack Shepperly and 10 interested people.

2016 POLICE PROTECTION

Jack Shepperly, Police Specialist and member of the Police Committee reviewed the Board directives approved at the July 14, 2015 board meeting which have been met and noted results of the community survey conducted in 2013 regarding public safety.

Jim Lefler, 8644 Hathaway, commented the survey asked if raising taxes would be supported to maintain the current level of policing noting law enforcement and public safety were not number one, roads were. He further commented he attended the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners meeting and was disappointed no Oshtemo representative was there. He also commented the consultant hired by the Board felt the current contract does not fit the Township's needs and the Township should consider getting out of the police business; the budget for police protection has increased 100% in six years, has there been a reduction in crime that would warrant the increase. He commented he feels the Township should take a step back and evaluate real crime data, not calls for service or workload.

Malcolm Blair, 3349 Hathaway, commented he agrees there is not data on which to base the level of policing but part of new contract was it would be developed; the Township needs to look forward and hopes there will be cooperation with the County and Sheriff's Office, with the amount of growth in the Township decisions made need to look ahead to the future.

John Taylor, Chair of the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners, commented he recognizes the situation with the Township's growth, the contract before the Board can be amended; recent meetings have been productive in moving forward as a team, not competitors and he is committed to working toward the future.

Rick Fuller, Kalamazoo County Sheriff commented he is proud of the work in last several months with the Township Board and police committee. He further commented looking to the future his department has started working toward having the ability to provide the requested data; the County team is committed and has scheduled weekly meetings for the next ten weeks.

Supervisor Heiny-Cogswell commented she wants to continue the hard work of the last six months to come to an agreement; there is more need for police protection and she was glad to have conversations with the Sheriff, County Board Chair, and new County Administrator, we are midstream in the work that needs to be done and she would like to continue the three way partnership with the County and Sheriff by continuing discussions on an amended contract but in the meantime assure police protection for the citizens by signing the existing County contract template. She commented the Board has received reports of calls for service, the Lieutenant is developing a new format to look at the data; in comparing the Township to other comparable units, the Township's index crime rate is higher. She also commented she would like to see progress and amendments in a shorter timeline and is cautiously optimistic an agreement can be reached by the end of the second quarter and a establishing a timeline is on the agenda for next group meeting. She further commented she felt the County Board did not have time to review the Township's proposal prior to their meeting and were not aware of the work that had been done.

Trustee Carr inquired if under the current contract the Sheriff can place the Township deputies elsewhere how would that be different if the Township did not have a contract since we already have county services. She commented as to the speaker who stated the Township is growing, she does not see the growth in residential but in big box commercial and they could get their own security if needed. She further commented part of the presentation was what do the citizens want, that could be put it to a vote. She also inquired if crime was reduced or increased in 2015, how did the Township benefit in hiring the Lieutenant, there is less incentive to negotiate if the Township signs the contract. She commented much time has been spent on this issue, we should step back, go into 2016 to work out the contract, the County could take care of deputies laid off and continue discussions until there is an agreement.

Attorney Porter advised there must be a need for the Sheriff to call the Township deputies elsewhere, if there is no contract the Township would not have dedicated deputies operating in the Township on a regular basis which would likely result in increased response times. He also advised he looks at monthly reports and would say the crime rates for 2015 appears about the same as previous year, we need data to show what is happening and where so recommendations can be made to be proactive, the Lieutenant and Police Specialist can provide this; having the Lieutenant provides direct contact with the Board and he has the ability to organize better how the deputies are utilized, and the Lieutenant has more access to data and details in communicating with the deputies, detectives and others in the Sheriff's Office. He also noted as a charter township we are required to provide police protection either through a contract or having a police department; if not the Township would be open to annexation. He further noted the existing contract has a 90 day out clause for both sides.

Trustee Farmer commented she is disappointed going into the same contract; the only positive has been the addition of the Lieutenant. She also commented if the Board were to move forward with same contract we have promises from all involved to continue to work together it would be important that we see we see progress in the form of contract amendments and the Board should be updated monthly regarding the negotiations to evaluate the progress made in order to prepare for the future to move in a different direction if needed.

Clerk Everett commented her concern in approving the contract is there is no language in it addressing continuing negotiations and once signed the incentive goes away. She further commented the deputies do a good job, the addition of the Lieutenant is a definite plus but the contract language seems one sided and she would like to see a definite timeline for continuing the process. She also commented the Township's request for accountability is not unreasonable, and she still has concerns regarding the scheduling which at times leaves no deputy on duty.

Trustee Ford commented he felt it would be reckless to leave citizens without police protection, he would like to move forward signing the contract and continue negotiations to have amendments by the end of the first quarter; all at the table are committed to working out the differences.

Motion by Farmer, second by Ford to approve the 2016 contract, direct the Supervisor to provide monthly updates and the Board will evaluate the progress at the end of every quarter. Carried 5-1 will Carr voting no.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Supervisor Heiny-Cogswell advised Attorney Porter received notification that the Michigan Supreme Court granted leave to appeal on the ITC transmission line matter relating to the Township ordinance regarding installation of utilities underground .

There was no further business and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 5:10 p.m.

Deborah L. Everett
TOWNSHIP CLERK

Attested: Elizabeth Heiny-Cogswell
TOWNSHIP SUPERVISOR