

Tuesday April 9th, 2024.

Meeting called to order by Aimee Newbauer at 7:00 p.m.

Members present on roll call: Jena Paquette, Jim Duncan, Len Manning
Others Present: Alec Adams, Don Ellefson, Kerry Bryan, Paul Gydesen, Mark Anderson, Kevin W. Christenson, Marc Ince, Tom Mabry, and Shawn Spafford.

Public comments: No Public Comments

Discussion and possible action on 2024 Fire Department Audit.

Kerry Bryan was in attendance on behalf of Apple River Township. Mr. Bryan noted, at this time the Apple River Township is not ready to transition into an association or joint Fire Department at this time. Mr. Bryan stated Apple River Township currently has a contract with Georgetown Township for Fire & EMS support. Contracting for services between both municipalities have been positive. The Price per contract is \$1,600.00 per section covered. Mr. Bryan stated Apple River Township and Apple River Fire Department would be interested in contracting services for 2024 with the Village of Balsam Lake based on average number of calls for a test year until all municipalities can agree on a joint agreement. Mark Ince was also in attendance representing the Town of Georgetown. Mr. Ince stated the Fire and EMS contract between Georgetown Township and Apple River Township has been positive. Creating an association would take creating bylaws, more paperwork, and a new entity. Concerns were heard by the Board regarding how much it would cost each municipality or residents if the payment support was based off of the tax base. Furthermore, some concerns were heard regarding how other associations formed their board of commissioners. One example of this was given where a local association has a fire commission made up of 7 members. 4 of the commissioners are from one municipality with a smaller fire protection coverage area and the other municipality has 3 commissioners on the board with a larger fire protection area. When voting on large items, one municipality feels like they are at a disadvantage.

Kevin Christenson was in attendance. Mr. Christenson is a member of the Allied Fire Department. Mr. Christenson stated Allied operates as its own entity, meaning they have their own 501C3 while maintaining 3 fire stations. The department has over 50 Fire/EMS volunteers. The entity completes a full budget and submits the budget to each respective board. The budget is based off of the municipal levies. The department operates by a joint board of commissioners made up of 3 members from each municipality. The department also hires a treasurer, secretary for the board and department.

Paul Gydesen and other representatives from the Township of Balsam Lake were in attendance. Mr. Gydesen reported the Village of Balsam Lake and the Township of Balsam Lake have always had a great working relationship for fire protection. It was stated there is joint disappointment in regards to the failed 2% fire department audit for

both 2022 & 2023. Both municipalities budgeted for the 2% fire protection revenue, so each municipality will have a net loss for that budgetary item. Currently the Village of Balsam Lake provides fire protection to 26 sections for the Town of Balsam Lake. Annually the Town of Balsam Lake pays the Village of Balsam Lake \$33,000.00 for fire protection services. Mr. Gydesen requested updated information from the Balsam Lake Fire Department and the Village regarding the annual contract and annual payment amount. Jim Duncan reported that the Village will review the annual contract and payment amount at their next Village Board meeting. Mr. Gydesen also asked Balsam Lake Fire Department members how they plan to improve after the failed audit in March. Tom Mabry was in attendance and is a member of the Balsam Lake Fire Department. Mr. Mabry stated a year from now, the department will be in compliance, "I will fix it". Mr. Mabry stated he will be in charge of fire department training moving forward. Mr. Duncan stated the importance of cross training between both departments and reiterated from a prior meeting that the Balsam Lake Fire Department stated they would be cross training with Apple River Fire Department. Mr. Mabry stated they are not currently cross training. The question on why they haven't been cross training and the answer was not defined clearly. Moving forward it was stated and jointly agreed upon that the Balsam Lake Fire Department will train Apple River Township on Fire support operations within the Village of Balsam Lake. The training will take place in May 2024. Alec Adams stated, the Apple River Fire Department will be buying hydrant bags and other hoses as in the township. Mr. Mabry stated the Balsam Lake Fire Department has hoses and bags to supply to Apple River Township.

Mr. Gydesen also asked both departments what their response time will be for the westerly sections of Balsam Lake Township, closer to deer lake. Alec Adams stated they have positive response times for that area and can be there in a timely manner.

Alec Adams stated, Apple River Fire reported to 38 calls within the BLFD district in 2023. Mr. Adams also stated the APRFD has an operating budget of \$105,000.00. Based on the total call volume for APRFD in 2023 of 184 calls, it could be estimated the total cost per call is \$574.00. Moving forward APRFD would be interested in assisting BLFD for fire calls only and mutual aid if needed for EMS support.

Mr. Ince stated a written contract might be the best option for the Village of Balsam Lake for fire support in 2024. A one-year contract could give the Village of Balsam Lake time to identify what the limitations are for the current fire department and work on a critical action plan to resolve the shortfalls. Mr. Ince stated the Village has a great facility, high inventory on trucks that are well maintained, and a high population density. It was stated breaking down the current department and building it back up to full capacity might be one option to review. Mr. Mabry stated the BLFD can't find volunteers and has seasonal EMS members. Mr. Mabry stated lack of membership it's a result of the economy and nobody wanting to volunteer any more.

Mr. Christenson stated Allied Fire Department has a very strong Jr. program with over 10 members. BLFD or other departments could apply for a FEMA grant to assist with payroll. Mr. Christenson stated Allied Fire Department pays its volunteers \$20.00 an hour for trainings. Allied Fire Department also provides retirement packages for their volunteers through the Wisconsin Retirement System. It was also noted, that there is a buy back

option for departments where they can pay members retirement for up to 15 prior years of service on the department. Mr. Mabry stated the Village wont work with BLFD on payroll as they only are paid \$20.00 per training night. Len Manning shared the Village of Balsam Lake is more than willing to work with BLFD on payroll hours and wages. One example Mr. Manning shared was through reviewing a failed audit from the state in 2023. It was identified BLFD did not want to conduct Fire Inspections because \$7.50 per stop was not enough. Mr. Manning stated after reviewing a contracted price, the Village and BLFD agreed upon \$20.00 per fire inspection and BLFD agreed to continue to do them. Mr. Mabry disagreed with that statement and stated it took a lot more work to attain the change is pay for fire inspections. The village also approved payroll hours for Fire Department members for working hours at the Fire Hall upon first request.

Mr. Ince asked if anyone looked into the new technology the Polk County dispatch has. That item has not yet been explored, however there is a chief's meeting coming up, so hopefully that can be discussed.

What next:

Apple River Township will draft a Fire Service contract for a one-year term for APRFD in hopes the Village can fix the situation within BLFD.

BLFD will contact ARFD to conduct joint training operations as well as show ARFD how to access fire prevention tools located within the Village.

APRFD is completing a grant for a new fire truck with the goal it will be located at the Georgetown Town Hall.

FEMA Grants should be reviewed for maintaining personnel. Why the application due date might have passed, it could be a viable option for 2025.

APRFD will cover fire calls within the BLFD district. EMS should be paged to BLFD first with a second page for mutual aid if needed.

The Town of Balsam Lake has agreed to fire protection services for 2024 on a probationary period. They would like to review the annual contract and payment amount first. Then if the department fails another audit, they will explore other fire protection services for 2025. If the fire department passes the audit, the Balsam Lake Township would like to explore a longer-term contract with the Village of Balsam Lake.

Motion by Jena Paquette to adjourn. Seconded by Len Manning. All in Favor. Carried. 7:45 p.m.

Unapproved Minutes

Amy VanDeBrake, Clerk Treasurer