

ST. JOSEPH COUNTY  
Union Township Trustee Advisory Board  
Meeting Minutes  
15 April 2025

**Public Present:** Approximately thirty-five members of the public were present. Board Secretary Ryan Schafer and Member Mike Wozney were present.

Called to order at 18:0 By Board President Trisha Carrico

**New Business: Water Supply for Fire.** Trisha spoke about two bills that were received from the Town Of Lakeville for water that was used by the Territory for a structure fire. Trisha believes that this should be covered with the maintenance portion charged by the town for water. The Town is requesting payment for 80,000 gallons of water and the Fire Department does not believe that this is correct. The Chief is going to look into this further.

A Bill was received for a water main brake. The understanding is that the water main brake was not near the location of the fire hydrant that was used, but approximately a half mile away. There have been several water main brakes over the winter, The township Attorney Marcel Lebbin believes that unless the Town can show that the Fire Department caused the water main brake, the Fire Territory should not be responsible. It is unknown if the Town exercises the Fire Hydrants annually. Trisha made a motion to Table the matter, Mike Seconded, motion passed.

**Old Business.**

Vote for Bond for providing Ambulance Service.

Trisha stated:

*It has been over a year since Union Township has provided a local ambulance service. The Board has definitely heard the concerns of the people. It is unfortunate that information docent comes from their Trustee or a Board member, but social media. We could get much more accomplished if there were more people who would attend meetings or reach out in person.*

*It was stated in the last meeting that we have not attempted to work with the Town and try to 'mend the fences' with the Town, and that is very untrue. (Gesturing at a stack of social media posts) It is disappointing when you start looking at all of these and you have the Town President who is calling us names, telling horrible things about us. I am open to suggestions as to how we can 'mend the fences' with this. Nothing has ever been given to us directly, it is always over social media.*

*At this point we understand the frustration when we left Union North Ambulance Service. That put people in a position of being terrified of how they were going to be served. We heard this, and now we are talking about the situation of bringing an Ambulance Service back. I feel we have come to a better solution based on the conversations that have been had on getting some funding for staffing and not necessarily placing the Ambulance in service. We will let the legal process deal with that.*

Mike stated that he is not in favor of putting the Ambulance back in service. The taxpayers are presently paying for a contract the County has with the City of South Bend to provide Paramedic Ambulance Service. We have firemen that are certified to the same level and an Ambulance Service. If necessary, He would rather add additional firemen than place an Ambulance in service.

Trisha agreed.

Ryan stated:

*I feel the biggest concern that we have is the unknown. I agree with Mike; the system we have in place currently is working. The Fire Department provides everything that has been provided in the past except for the transportation aspect. The County provides that.*

*I think property taxes in St Joseph County are crazy expensive. Much greater than Marshall County. The tax rate for the Fire Territory is approximately ten cents less than our neighbors to the south, and fifteen to twenty cents less than any other neighboring township with staffing. We are doing well with the dollars that are brought in.*

*It was brought to my attention yesterday that this Senate Bill 1 seems to be passing. This will give us a 6% reduction in our current funding. It also appears that some of the other avenues to fund emergency services are going to be taken away. This is a big problem.*

*My thought is if we go forward with this bond issue, but not exercise it, there is not a cost to the taxpayers. The original thought was that we would seek a 2M bond to provide two additional staff per day for three years, and to equip the ambulance. That total cost was 1.3M.*

*I don't think we want to do that. But I do feel we have a way to offset this potential reduction in funds. To hold status quo, we will lose 6% each year. I guess my question is, if we go ahead with the bond, but seek a smaller amount which would have a lesser burden on the taxpayers is that do-able? Is that in the actions that we are doing tonight?*

Trisha believes that she believes we figured a bond of 1M would cover additional staff and cover the reduction of funds.

Kelly stated that you could have a three-man crew and rely on a volunteer for the fourth person.

Ryan went on to say if we do nothing, we will lose 6% of our budget each year.

Trisha mentioned that the Government is tightening, and the sources of additional funding are going to be next to impossible to get.

Kelly mentioned that last fall there was great difficulty getting the tax levee increased to get funding, it was barely enough money for the current staffing. Right now, the budget for the Fire Territory is \$711000. That is barely enough for the current staffing for a year.

Ryan stated that this is a tough spot to be in. We need a safety net of knowing we have the funding to maintain what we have. If we go and move forward with a bond it would be a 1M cushion over three years to help cover the township's deficit.

Public Comment: It was stated that it was hard to hear and that the board was talking among themselves.

Trisha responded that there will be an opportunity for public comments at the end of the meeting.

The person mentioned that there is a lack of sharing of information, meeting minuets or meeting notices. She is concerned that there is not a common platform or way to get information.

Kelly mentioned that meeting notices are also posted on the township's website. She had called a person recently that loves to go to social media and spread misinformation. She had left a message to ask if they would meet. She received no response.

Marcel explained that this meeting was a continuation of the last meeting. The meeting was open for public questions or comment. There were several weeks for anyone to reach out to the Trustee or any board members to ask questions or talk about any concerns that you may have. There was no vote for anything. This meeting is the vote. The media outlets are here because they have seen the meeting posted.

Trisha stated we need to take this issue to a vote.

Ryan commented that he does not feel we need the original bond amount, and if we do a bond issue that it should be to bridge the gap that is expected with the 6% annual reduction of funding.

Mike reiterated that he does not feel we need to provide our own ambulance service. We may need to add firemen in the future.

Ryan agreed with Mikes thoughts, the problem he sees is that if we can secure some funding with a bond and ensure that we are fully funded for the next few years.

Trisha stated that this is actually a cheaper option than what Union North Ambulance Service proposed, which was \$464,000 a year to add full-time staffing.

*Public Question:* if we bond out this year, when would the next opportunity to take a bond out be. Marcel stated there have been a lot of changes at the state level and it is unclear if there will be another opportunity in the future and it might not look like this. Pam asked if it wouldn't be better for the area to take a little extra and not have to worry about the 6%. Trisha stated from the complaints at the continuation of this meeting, we are trying to minimize the taxes by going with the 1m. Ryan stated he does not like doing the bond and having unused funds.

There was a discussion among attendees regarding tax rates. It was stated that adding more people and getting the bond would make rates go up more. ?? feels that more effort needs to be taken to get volunteers and that at 350calls a year, it does not need to be a paid department. An argument ensued regarding paying taxes and volunteering for the fire department, Trisha called the meeting back to order. Discussion continued between 2 people regarding volunteering for the fire department. Trisha stopped the conversation and requested the meeting to come back to order.

*Public Question:* (A previous trustee) It was asked about the money coming from the landfill (Tipping Fees). Trisha stated that it was in consideration. Kelly stated that the 2 years prior to her being trustee, the money was never requested. When she took office, she called and was told she just needed to call to remind them to get the money. He stated that money went to the fire department, only for equipment. The man stated that he has not been aware of any previous meetings, he has not seen any postings, nor has it been put on the marquee at the fire station. He was asked how he posted his meetings, he stated at the facility, with the library and the post office. He stated he was ashamed of the township. Kelly stated the library would not allow postings and that it has been posted at the post office, but it must have been taken down.

*Public Question:* It was asked for a clarification on if don't get a bond and someone wanted to become a fireman, they would not be paid only volunteer. And that is what the bond would be for, not equipment. Ryan stated the fire department is always looking for volunteers, they support the paid staff very well. The reason for dedicated people at the fire station was guaranteed emergency response. We have a good base of volunteers, but we are always looking for more. Unfortunately, the requirements for paid or volunteer staff is identical. We are blessed with volunteer staff; the problem I am struggling with is we are unable to transport sick and injured people to the hospital. He explained how local fire departments are staffed along with ambulance service. The board heard the cry by residents that an ambulance is needed for the community, but the fire trucks carry the same equipment as the ambulance. The original request for the bond was for ambulance service but there was a lot of outcry by residents not wanting a tax increase so they were satisfied after understanding how things work. Ryan went on to explain the tax levy, the increase in fire territory and tax rates. He also talked about the potential problems in the funding due to the Senate Bill 1 that was passed, we could see a 6% reduction and another 6% in two years. Now the board is faced with is a decision to seek a bond of smaller value to bridge a gap for the 6% to ensure we are able to provide emergency services to this community. St Joe county taxes are almost double compared to Marshall because of things they do. It's painful because we all pay too much in tax.

*Public Question:* It was asked if the township has come up short on tax dollars. Kelly stated we've had to cut the emergency services because the fire territory didn't have a substantial amount of money. When we went for the maximum levy, we had to look back 20 years, and we notice where the monies were not being budgeted. General funds will always grow 3-4% whether you use the money. Unlike the territory funds, if you don't use the funds, the state will take it. It's very vital to this community that we have emergency services, but it costs money. We could go back to a volunteer service but there is no guarantee because the volunteers have other jobs. There was much discussion about social media posts and prior contracts that have been discussed at previous meetings. All the questions go back to does the community wants an ambulance service. And if you want the service, you have to pay for the service. Marcel explained, as discussed at prior meeting, the full amount of the bond was to get the ambulance up and running, to staff the ambulance in addition to the fire trucks. What in response to the community was discussed hiring an additional staff person so they could have 2 calls at the same time not needing an ambulance, make sure we have enough equipment on 2 trucks so a volunteer person could come in and we could still roll 2 calls at once with support coming down from South Bend. That is where the discussion was left at the last meeting. The feedback was not getting the ambulance up and running, make sure we have enough staff to run an additional truck and make sure it's fully equipped. That is what the board was discussing at the beginning here. If you want an ambulance, that goes back to full max levy.

*Public Question:* It was asked about mutual aide in surrounding townships. Ryan stated there is still an agreement, but they are having the same issues that we are. The man asked how much taxes will go up. Marcel said there was a sheet (at the last meeting) with the calculations on it, he said he could get that. It was asked if interest would be charged on the bond. Kelly stated it would be and that was the reason why it's hard to know what the tax increase would be. It was asked if there could be an itemized list for people to review and Kelly stated that there was breakdown completed in October. She stated things have changed, now we need personnel. There was much discussion on billing, the cost of operating services, and required qualification from the State of Indiana for firemen.

Trisha brought the meeting back to vote on a million-dollar bond, to maintain the current staff and possibly additional staffing and equipment. This has to be done by April 23<sup>rd</sup>, so this has to be done today. This is not a vote on the ambulance.

There were 3 1's and the vote passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 7:16PM.

**Public Comments:**