

Village of Peoria Heights
Board of Trustees
June 27, 2023

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m.

Everyone stood for a moment of silence and the Pledge to the Flag.

Upon calling roll, the following Trustees were present: Sarah DeVore, Jeff Goett, Mark Gauf, Matthew Wigginton, and Brandon Wisenburg. Trustee Elizabeth Khazzam was absent. Others present included Mayor Michael Phelan, Village Administrator and Chief of Police Dustin Sutton, Village Clerk Stephanie Turner, and Village Counsel Attorney Mark Walton.

Mayor Phelan explained there were questions at the last meeting, and the Board had requested information from various resources which led to the special meeting.

Mayor Phelan opened the meeting to public comment.

Ms. Becky Kelton, 4431 N Monroe Ave, came forward to express support for the Peoria Heights Volunteer Fire Department. She noted the Village is in a better financial situation and questioned hiring additional staff. She also mentioned the previous internship program with the school district.

Mr. Norm Reichert, 5016 N Glen Elm Drive, came forward to urge the Board to exercise caution. He noted once the Peoria Heights Fire Department was disbanded it would be difficult to reestablish. He stated the Village could find itself in a difficult situation once the initial contract had expired since there's limited service providers. He requested the Board consider a ballot measure on the issue.

Hearing no additional public comment, Mayor Phelan closed the meeting to public comments and moved on to new business.

Mayor Phelan noted Attorney Walton had been tasked with reviewing the process of creating a fire protection district. Attorney Walton explained the process is initiated by a referendum. The referendum must be initiated by a petition of 50 electors and then approved by a judge. If it's approved, then it would put on a ballot. The process must be completed at least 122 days prior to an election which would be November 2023. The soonest it could be put on a ballot is March 2024. Mayor Phelan noted that a private citizen could initiate the process, and Attorney Walton agreed. Assuming the referendum was approved, the fire protection district would be created and be governed by three trustees appointed by the Village of Peoria Heights Board of Trustees and Mayor. The Board of the fire protection district would need to levy funds because it wouldn't have any assets. If it could complete the 2024 levy process, the soonest it would receive any funding would be in 2025. Attorney Walton noted the full process would take a minimum of 2 years.

Mayor Phelan asked Attorney Walton to address advisory referendums. Attorney Walton noted that the Board and even private citizens can petition to have an advisory referendum added to the ballot. Unlike the previously mentioned process, it doesn't have binding effect, but can be used to gauge public opinion.

Mr. Tom Baker, President of Advanced Medical Transport, came forward to speak. The organization is a 501(c)3 that was set up by the local hospitals in order to ensure quality emergency medical services are provided to the area. It's governed by an independent board as well as the local hospital systems. The organization has multiple locations throughout the state of Illinois as well as locations in Iowa. Mr. Baker explained AMT is dispatched by the City of Peoria dispatchers. The dispatchers go through a series of questions which determines what vehicles respond. All AMT rigs contain both a paramedic and basic EMT. AMT has responded to 550 calls year to date. The vast majority of calls were routed through 911. Mr. Baker noted that AMT prides itself on their quality service and cooperation with other agencies. He spoke to the agency's training, accreditations, certifications, and awards. He noted the agency also prides itself on being a good corporate citizen citing its involvement in the local trunk or treat, prom events, and a mentorship program. Trustee Wisenburg asked Mr. Baker what communities they provide service to. Mr. Baker stated Chillicothe, Peoria Heights, Pekin, and the City of Peoria. Trustee Wisenburg asked if AMT's relationship with the City of Peoria was good. Mr. Baker stated it was. Trustee Wisenburg asked about charges for services. Mr. Baker stated there are agreements which include charges to the municipality. Mayor Phelan clarified the Village does not pay fees. Trustee Wisenburg asked if there were plans to charge the Village, and Mr. Baker stated there were not currently discussions. Trustee Wisenburg asked if AMT charges for lift assistance. Mr. Baker stated they do not. Trustee DeVore noted the current contract requires the Village to provide first responders to calls and asked if the Village were to change that practice if it would affect the contract. Mr. Baker noted the contract may need to be renegotiated.

City of Peoria Fire Chief Shawn Sollberger came forward to provide a presentation of City of Peoria fire protection services. Fire Chief Sollberger noted he had been tasked to provide a proposal by his boss, Mr. Patrick Urich, the City of Peoria manager, at the request of the Village. Mayor Phelan clarified Chief Sutton had requested the information at the behest of the Board of Trustees. Fire Chief Sollberger noted he and Chief Sutton had conversations regarding the needs of the Village, and the City of Peoria is willing to have additional conversations. Fire Chief Sollberger provided detailed information on the stations, personnel, locations, equipment, and services the PFD provides. He provided information and examples of response models as well as clarification on the pricing proposal given to the Village. Fire Chief Sollberger emphasized the PFD is not trying to push its way into the Village. He noted that there is a difference between a paid, professional service and a volunteer service. He spoke about the decline of volunteerism in general. Fire Chief Sollberger noted the City of Peoria is rated as ISO 2 noting the positive impact for the residents and businesses. Mayor Phelan asked for a clarification of the ISO rating. Fire Chief Sollberger explained it's an independent review of the fire response including location, equipment, personnel, and water supply. ISO ratings impact insurance rates. Mayor Phelan thanked Fire Chief Sollberger for the presentation. Trustee DeVore thanked Fire Chief Sollberger for educating the Board on the topic. She asked if there's a maximum number of times for using MABAS. Fire Chief Sollberger explained the jurisdiction asking for aid needs to have sustainability and there aren't unlimited requests. He noted that the Village is putting professional fire fighters at risk by not calling first and not having internal resources. Trustee DeVore asked how many times in 2022 the PHFD used PFD aid. Fire Chief Sollberger didn't know, but offered to get the information. He explained the Village would be a priority and receive the same response as the City describing how PFD handles multiple calls. He stated the response time for 93% of Village territory would be 4 minutes or less. Fire Chief Sollberger went on to describe the training and certification CFD firefighters receive. Trustee Wigginton asked about the relationship between the PFD and the PHFD. Fire Chief Sollberger stated it was respectful, but there isn't a relationship. He noted there had been isolated occurrences and the PFD had felt some resentment regarding jurisdictions. Trustee Wigginton and Fire Chief Sollberger discussed the specifics of call responses. Trustee Wisenburg asked if most communities are volunteer. Fire Chief Sollberger

stated he believes most are volunteers. Trustee Wisenburg asked specifics about the cost estimates with Fire Chief Sollberger providing more explanations for the costs. Trustee Wisenburg noted the City of Peoria had instituted a fee because the fire department was spread thin and questioned staffing levels. Fire Chief Sollberger explained CFD had hired additional firefighters. Trustee Wisenburg asked about future price increases. Fire Chief Sollberger noted there's always internal analysis, but it's unlikely to double or triple in cost. Mayor Phelan asked if Fire Chief Sollberger had reviewed the water system as part of the proposal. Fire Chief Sollberger noted he hadn't reviewed it, but the City of Peoria has infrastructure issues as well.

Trustee Wigginton questioned Attorney Walton about state statute which prohibited cessation of a fire department without referendum. Attorney Walton explained there's no precedent, and it lies in the definition of what ceasing operation means. Trustee Wigginton stated he doesn't support the discontinuation of the PHFD suggesting the Village could continue to use the assets of the volunteer department and the City of Peoria.

Trustee Wisenburg expressed his support of the PHFD as professionals in need of resources. He expressed concern over the administration of the City of Peoria.

Trustee Gauf noted there are financial questions beyond what the Village can project. He noted the Board feels public safety is the most important. Leaving finances out of the question for the moment, he thanked the volunteers for talking to the Board. He noted the PHFD has morale issues at the current call volume. Trustee Gauf noted the number of volunteers has fallen over the last year and a half. He expressed appreciation that the PHFD has tried to recruit more volunteers, but it's a situation where seconds count. He noted the City of Peoria has stated they can respond in 4 minutes. He emphasized separate of financial concerns the idea the City of Peoria can respond so quickly is appealing. He noted the Board needs more clarification of the statute's effect on the issue.

Trustee Goett stated support for the PHFD and a tax increase. He suggested the Village hire a fire chief.

Trustee Wigginton acknowledged Fire Chief Sollberger's comment that the Village is pushing the limit. He suggested PFD working in conjunction with the PHFD. It would be more expensive but provide the Village with dual coverage. It would honor the contract with AMT, and it would be legal. Trustee DeVore asked for numbers for a hybrid duty crew. Chief Sutton noted it was the third time the Board has reviewed this information after complaints were recorded. The PHFD asked for a hybrid model in 2018, and the Board provided 2 paid positions. The hybrid model didn't work according to the outgoing fire chief. Chief Sutton asked the Board for specifics of a hybrid model and noted he was waiting for direction. He noted if the Board provided clarification on the specifics of a hybrid model he could put together information. Mayor Phelan agreed the Board needs to provide direction. The Board discussed Trustee Wigginton's proposal. Fire Chief Sollberger noted it would not be a unique situation, and other areas have a similar set up. Chief Sutton agreed noting that a similar model had been discussed previously. Fire Chief Sollberger emphasized that the City of Peoria wants to help.

Trustee Wisenburg expressed support for hiring part-time positions. He noted local communities hiring part-time positions. Trustee Wisenburg and Fire Chief Sollberger discussed MABAS with Fire Chief Sollberger explaining MABAS agreements have a predetermined response, and PFD wouldn't send all its resources. He also explained if a department is consistently using MABAS then a municipality can refuse. Chief Sutton noted Fire Chief Sollberger was protesting calling communities farther out rather than PFD. There were instructions to change procedure, but it appears those weren't followed.

Assistant Fire Chief Schadt clarified mutual aid was separate from MABAS. Trustee Gauf noted using mutual aid the PHFD could skip PFD and then use MABAS to call them later.

Trustee DeVore asked Attorney Walton Walton if the fire protection district referendum would be a binding referendum, and Attorney Walton agreed. Trustee DeVore asked questions about the specifics of missed calls and lift assists with Assistant Fire Chief Schadt providing answers. She also asked for more information about PHPD's assistance with lift assist calls with Chief Sutton clarifying that AMT responded to calls and PHPD provided assistance with lifting.

Trustee Goett asked for clarification of the referendum process. Attorney Walton stated that any registered voter in the Village could organize a petition for referendum. The individual doesn't have to be sanctioned or sponsored by the Board.

Mayor Phelan thanked the Board for the thoughtful comments and discussion.

Retired Fire Chief Norm Reichert came forward to speak about the impact of paid departments on volunteer firefighting. He noted that many volunteer fire fighters had come through Peoria Heights to go on to work in the City of Peoria.

Mayor Phelan encouraged the Board to think and speak to Administration. Trustee Wisenburg requested the Village post the paid fire chief position to start collecting applications. Mayor Phelan stated the Village will begin the process again, but the Board need to come to a consensus soon out of fairness for applicants. Mayor Phelan noted that cost should be a factor, but the focus should be on public safety. The Village should provide the best public safety it can. Mayor Phelan noted the issue was emotional while thanking the Board for the good dialogue. Mayor Phelan noted he had invited Congressman Sorenson to visit the Village, and there are tentative plans for afternoon of July 6, 2023.

Assistant Fire Chief Dalton Carlson asked to speak. He equated the situation to the ambulance service provided in the past. Assistant Fire Chief Carlson stated the PHFD had presented numbers on hybrid models. Additionally, there have been fire incidents that the PHFD had enough personnel to handle itself. He spoke about services, certifications, and training noting the PHFD follows standards. Trustee Wisenburg asked Assistant Fire Chief Carlson about regulations regarding response time for volunteers. He answered standard response time NFPA recommends a force of 8 personnel on scene within 8 minutes of dispatch. PHFD typically has 6-8 personnel responding within 8 minutes. Assistant Fire Chief Carlson stated the PHFD wants to see the hybrid model to grow and provide the best service they can. Trustee Wigginton asked about interactions with PFD, and Assistant Fire Chief Carlson stated most of the time there were no issues though there had been incidents regarding jurisdiction. He suggested it was a result of years of hatred between paid and volunteer staff, but it's gotten better of time as both parties are on scene to fight fires.

Trustee Goett made a motion to adjourn, and Trustee Wisenburg seconded the motion. The Board of Trustees voted 5-0 to adjourn at 3:09 pm.

Michael Phelan, Mayor

Stephanie Turner, Village Clerk