

Village of Peoria Heights
Departmental Meeting
August 25, 2020

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

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

Upon calling roll, the following Trustees were present: Sherryl Carter, Diane Mariscal, Beth Khazzam, Jeff Goett, Brandon Wisenburg, and Sarah DeVore. Others present included Mayor Michael Phelan, Village Administrator and Chief of Police Dustin Sutton, and Village Clerk Stephanie Turner.

Trustee Goett made a motion to approve the minutes from the departmental meeting on July 7, 2020, and Trustee Khazzam seconded the motion. The Board voted 6-0 to approve the minutes.

Clerk Turner read a letter from Mel and Dawn Yurkovich praising Chief Sutton and the Village for their assistance. The Yurkovichs expressed their appreciation of Chief Sutton's time and attention.

Mayor Phelan opened the meeting to public comment.

Mr. David Marfell came forward to express his opinion as a resident to the Board of Trustees. He expressed appreciation for the past firefighters volunteering their service while noting volunteerism had declined in the community. He cited the importance of public safety in deciding the issue of fire service. And stated the Peoria Fire Department would be the best option. He noted that contracting with the City guaranteed the response of professional, trained firefighters. He said finances were the next biggest concern, and the options discussed for the PHFD would increase costs. He expressed concern for low income households or elderly who would have to pay for the increases or face Village services being cut. He stated that the Village shouldn't increase its costs. He asked that the Board investigate specifically how many volunteers were responding to calls and why the recruitment issue was only recently raised.

Ms. Jeanette Hillyer, 800 E Marietta Avenue, came forward to support the Peoria Heights Fire Department. She stated she feels secure that if her house were on fire the volunteers would respond to the call. She stated her concern that the City of Peoria was discussing a cut in service for the Fire Department. Ms. Hillyer expressed concern that the cost of contracting with the City of Peoria would increase until it was unaffordable.

Ms. Becky Darche, 1229 E Lake Avenue, came forward to speak about a gaming and liquor license being requested at 4303 N Prospect Road. She stated there are multiple locations nearby that serve liquor, and she picks up trash regularly from their patrons. She stated that Peoria Heights is an upcoming location with a lot of life, and she doesn't think that the gaming café and liquor store fits the location.

Ms. Mary Bair, 5016 N Clarendon Place, came forward to express her support for the Peoria Heights Fire Department. She understood finances were a consideration. She asked if a nonbinding reformation was an option. Chief Sutton stated that it was and noted that tonight was the last night to add a referendum to the fall ballot. Trustee Wisenburg asked if the Village could vote on the issue this evening, and Chief Sutton stated it could. He noted that he had consulted with Village Counsel, Attorney Mark Walton, to confirm it would be allowed under new business.

Ms. Jean Stimeling, 726 E Marietta Avenue, came forward to express that people making comments should always report their name and address. She also expressed support for the PHFD.

Mr. Fred Darsche added to Ms. Darsche's comments saying he was concerned another liquor sales location would add to disarray to the Village. He noted he regularly cleaned up messes in the alley.

Mr. Fred Wombacher, 5300 E Glen Elm Dr, came forward to express that the Village did not need an additional liquor sale location. Mr. Wombacher added he originally supported contracting with the City of Peoria, but he had concerns after the recent news of the City of Peoria is considering cutting fire services. He also stated his son was in a baseball league, but he was frustrated with the lack of facilities for playing baseball in the area. Mr. Wombacher stated he would be making a personal effort to find land and organizing a baseball diamond with an end goal of creating facilities for tournaments. He stated he hoped he would have the Board of Trustees' support in the endeavor.

Hearing no additional public comment, Mayor Phelan moved on to old business. He announced the issue with construction on Lake Avenue had been resolved. Hearing no other old business, he moved on to new business.

Mayor Phelan introduced the discussion of a video gaming café liquor license request for 4303 N Prospect Road. He asked Mr. Grawley, owner of the property, to come forward to speak. Mr. Grawley wasn't present. Mayor Phelan asked if anyone was present to explain the concept. Hearing nothing, Mayor Phelan noted he had put the idea on the agenda, though he was not in favor, so the concept could be presented. Since there was no one to speak, the Board moved to the next agenda item.

Mayor Phelan invited Ms. Tanisha Cayson forward to speak about her idea for a voter registration event. She stated multiple political parties would be present to allow everyone to feel comfortable registering. Ms. Cayson noted safety was a concern so there would be social distancing, masks required, and hand sanitizer available. She emphasized she wanted to encourage all people to vote. Mayor Phelan thanked her for organizing the event. He said he had contacted the Republican and Democrat county chairs to send representatives. Mayor Phelan noted that Trustee Wisenburg was working to have a representative from the Libertarian party as well. Trustee Goett made a motion to approve a voter registration event in Tower Park on Saturday, September 5, 2020. Trustee Wisenburg seconded the motion. Trustee Goett asked that the event be allowed to move into Village Hall if there was inclement weather. Chief Sutton agreed. Trustee Wisenburg asked if attendees would be able to register on a computer at the event, and Ms. Cayson said they would. Trustee DeVore asked about hours, and Ms. Cayson answered the event would be from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm. Trustee Wisenburg suggested Ms. Cayson provide information about polling places for new voters as well. She agreed stating she had planned to have that information as well as voting dates. Trustee Khazzam asked if Ms. Cayson needed any volunteers, and Ms. Cayson said that would be very helpful. Chief Sutton noted that Ms. Cayson had previously organized a peaceful march in the Village. The Board voted 6-0 to approve the voter registration event.

Trustee Wisenburg began the discussion of the Peoria Heights Fire Department by stating that contracting with the City of Peoria was a financially irrational decision. He cited the City's financial struggles over the last several years as well as cuts to the fire department which were being discussed by the City this evening. He stated that the recession is estimated to last the next two years, and he questioned the City's ability to provide services in the future. He emphasized his belief that the Village

should hire a full-time fire chief. Trustee Khazzam stated she agreed that the Village needed to make a decision, but she stated that the Board must figure out to pay for the cost of their decision. She noted the Village had only recently reversed its financial position thanks, in part, to Chief Sutton so it was important for the Board to find funding for any additional expenses they created. Trustee Wisenburg replied he had identified \$22,000 worth of expenses that could be cut by reviewing two months of bills. Trustee Khazzam noted some of the expenses he identified generated revenue. Trustee Wisenburg disagreed stating marketing was not the job of the government. Trustee Khazzam explained that marketing brought foot traffic into the Village and increased sales tax revenue. Trustee Khazzam expressed concern that hiring a paid duty crew was possibly financially unattainable. Trustee Wisenburg pointed out the Village had approved the cost of the Village comprehensive plan even though it was unbudgeted. Trustee Khazzam noted that the Village had funds at the time, and the comprehensive plan is a one-time expense. Chief Sutton told Trustee Wisenburg no one is throwing the PHFD out. He reminded the Board the issue is under discussion because Fire Chief Walters is retiring which would affect response time. Chief Sutton noted hiring staff for the fire department required a funding source to pay for the cost. Chief Sutton said he was aware the City is considering cuts to fire service, but he noted the Village has a dispatching contract with the City, and there's been no concern they will not continue to provide those services per the contract terms. Trustee Khazzam stated the cost estimates under consideration were so high that she didn't feel comfortable making a decision without a referendum from the community. Mr. Marfell asked to make another comment. Mr. Marfell noted the Board was primarily discussing the cost of a full-time fire chief which would not solve the problem with volunteers. Trustee Carter noted the Board had a lot of mixed emotions, and there was a sense of nostalgia which meant a lot of people didn't want to see the PHFD go away. Trustee Carter stated she had concerns about public safety, but she couldn't vote to contract with the City of Peoria. She recommended a referendum as well. Trustee Carter agreed the Board should hire a fire chief though she didn't believe the salary needed to be \$80,000. She expressed the decision didn't need to be made immediately citing mixed emotions. Trustee Wisenburg stated he would also support a nonbinding referendum. Trustee DeVore said she would support a referendum if the Village were to mail out non-biased information to every residence as well as making it available on the Village's website. Trustee DeVore asked if the Village got to choose the wording for the referendum. Trustee Wisenburg said he had spoken to Attorney Walton and the Board did choose the wording though it should be neutral. Ms. Bair approached to comment offer support for a referendum and hiring a fire chief for a one year contract. Trustee Wisenburg made a motion to include a nonbinding advisory question of public policy on the November 3, 2020 ballot: "Should the Village of Peoria Heights outsource fire protection to the City of Peoria?". Trustee Mariscal seconded the motion. Trustee Wisenburg noted that Attorney Walton had advised on the wording and emphasized that the wording must be neutral. Trustee Carter stated that the question was misleading because it doesn't reference a tax increase. Trustee Wisenburg stated that the Board didn't know if there would be a tax increase so it should not be referenced on a referendum. Chief Sutton explained the Village's most recent referendum regarding ambulance service had referred to taxes. Chief Sutton noted the discussions with Village Counsel had originally been for the April ballot which would allow more time for gathering information. Trustee Carter stated that the Board already knew the answer to the question that was proposed, and she was not in favor of a referendum with the proposed question. Trustee Carter stated that the Board needed to know if the residents were willing to pay an increase in taxes. Trustee Wisenburg protested that would be a leading question. He insisted the question on the referendum should be simple. Chief Sutton noted there was precedent for asking two questions, one regarding contracting and one regarding funding. Trustee Mariscal asked if there would be time to gather all necessary information to provide to the citizens for a November ballot. Chief Sutton stated there would be. Trustee Mariscal asked if there were items that could be cut in the current budget. Chief Sutton stated the Village was already reducing cost which had

placed it in its current financial position. The Board continued to discuss the wording of the ballot referendum without a consensus. Trustee Carter stated she supported putting a referendum on the April election. Trustee Mariscal noted a decision had to be made prior to the referendum regardless of the date because Fire Chief Walters would be leaving in November. Trustee Mariscal expressed support for the referendum in April as well. Trustee Carter said the PHFD had already elected a new chief to replace Fire Chief Walters, and the PHFD would continue to operate in the interim. She emphasized the importance of taking time to consider the decision. Mayor Phelan stated that he liked the idea of a referendum, but he was concerned that it was being rushed. He acknowledged there was a sense of urgency but recommended taking additional time to consider the wording of the question. Trustee Wisenburg agreed. Trustee Wisenburg withdrew his motion, and Trustee Mariscal withdrew her second. Mayor Phelan thanked the Board of Trustees for their discussion. Trustee Wisenburg noted he wanted to continue to discuss if the Village was hiring a fire chief. Mayor Phelan said Administration had job descriptions. He noted that Chief Sutton could advertise the positions to see what options were available to the Village. Mayor Phelan stated he was in favor of reducing the salary. Trustee DeVore requested the Board be provided the job descriptions prior to advertising the positions. Trustee Wisenburg noted the Board appeared to be in consensus in moving toward hiring a fire chief. Trustee Khazzam clarified it was in the interim, and Trustee Wisenburg agreed.

Mayor Phelan asked for miscellaneous business.

Trustee Wisenburg asked what the options there were to prevent semi-truck trailers from traveling Forest Park Hill. Trustee Wisenburg asked if a flashing sign could be installed. Trustee Goett asked if there was a fine, and Chief Sutton stated there was a fine. Chief Sutton noted the situation was similar to the question of how to stop speeding. He said there are signs in place, and the Police Department is aware of the issue. Trustees Khazzam and DeVore noted that it might be possible to reach out to digital map companies to let them know the route isn't appropriate for vehicles over a certain weight. Mayor Phelan requested Superintendent of Streets, Mr. Michael Casey, look into the issue and report back.

Trustee Goett made a motion to adjourn, and Trustee Wisenburg seconded. The Board voted 6-0 to adjourn at 7:29 pm.

Michael Phelan, Mayor

Stephanie Turner, Village Clerk