

Public Safety Committee meeting minutes – Oct. 20, 2005

Members present: Jennifer Williams, chair; Connie Malcolm; Paul Casey; Chief Harold Rodgers; and Becky Lottes

Members absent: Toby Slunaker

Others present: Jeff Silvey, McCordsville Fire Marshal; Major Paul Casey, McCordsville Police Department, Tonya Galbraith, town manager.

Jennifer called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m

Jennifer introduced Becky Lottes, who is a new member of the committee. Becky is a physical therapist and lives in Bay Creek Estates.

The first order of business was the discussion of the County Emergency Management Plan. Tonya explained what she knows about the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, that being that the Town is under the umbrella of the County's Plan. Chief Rodgers explained the town's role in the process. He added that he didn't feel that we needed to adopt our own plan since we are under the County's umbrella. He added that he or Paul serve as the PIO when there is an emergency. Paul explained that in a small town, the emergency officials are usually part of the response, unlike a bigger city, where they have specific people designated as coordinators at various sites. Jeff Silvey said that the way the Fire Department operates, for example in the case of a fuel spill, the Fire Department would dike up the spill until someone from Hancock Emergency Management or the State comes to take over. He thinks it would be reinventing the wheel to formulate our own plan. Harold said that there are already procedures in place for critical incident command when there is an emergency. However, procedures for critical incident response cannot be written because all emergencies are different. Harold informed the committee that the McCordsville police and the Fortville police train together so they are all doing the same things. He added that they have starting training with the Lawrence Police Department. Connie Malcomb said that even though we request two access points in subdivisions under our Master Plan, there is only one access point in Cardinal Woods and Deer Crossing.

Tonya asked how emergency response will be coordinated with the new school. Harold says it will depend on resources. Further, he said that the school hasn't said what they want or expect from the police department. It was suggested that Tonya should invite someone from the new elementary school to the next meeting to indicate what they would like to see from the police department in the way of emergency response.

Jennifer asked how the police are notified when there is only one officer on duty and it was explained that everyone has pagers and dispatch can notify everyone. Jeff said that we really need to look at a new warning siren, but they are so costly. The council needs to look at these types of needs. He said the one that is in use can sometimes barely be heard.

Jennifer said the other issue is the whole fire department issue – whether it can be made bigger, go to paid, etc.? Jeff said there is no figure or set run number to use to know when it makes sense to go to a paid department. So far this year there has been 156 fire and EMS runs. He said he really didn't know when we could go with a paid department. (He did add that we had a fire rating done recently -- we were class 9 and after the fire rating we are now a class 4, which is beneficial to the town). Jeff suggested it will cost millions of dollars to go with a paid department. There would be about 3 acres needed for a new fire station, there are 4 people per shift and there are three shifts, plus equipment and uniforms, and benefits. It was explained that the township and town entered into an agreement where we waived our rights for collecting the tax and the township picked it up and is responsible for providing all fire services. Harold said that one thing that could mandate a paid department would be commercial and industrial development because then there would be the need to have fire personnel on staff 24/7. Jeff also mentioned that in time we are going to need taller ladders. Jeff said they just got a FEMA grant to get state of the art air packs. The ones they have are 25 years old. Connie asked who most of the volunteer firefighters are? Some are farmers, the fire chief is retired, some are people who live in town but work somewhere else and the rest live out of town. Harold added that Fire and Police Departments are having a hard time recruiting because of all the mandated training. Jennifer said one of the other issues she's heard as a concern are the train tracks and the amount of time it may take for a response. Harold said that rarely happens but if it did there is a police officer who can alert Fortville or Fishers to respond.

The next topic of discussion was the exploration of setting up a 501(c) 3 for fundraising and grant purposes. Tonya explained a bit about how it works – it would be totally outside of government functions. The group would be formed with a president, vice president and secretary/treasurer and would include an advisory board. People, corporations, foundations, etc., which contributed to the group (for discussion purposes The Friends of McCordsville Police Department) would get a tax deduction. Also, some foundations will only give money if the group is a 501(c) 3. Harold thought it was a good idea and worth exploring.

The next topic of discussion was various Police Department issues. Harold informed the committee that he has budgeted for an 8th officer for next year. He said his is still battling with Wabash Scientific on what the population threshold should be for adding a new police officer. If the population of McCordsville is 3,800, not counting the Villages at Brookside, the new section of Deer Crossing and the new Bay Creek, we are where we should be now, but we need to be ahead of where we should be because it takes a year to get an officer on the street. Harold added that the Wabash Scientific figures usually don't take into consideration support staff. Many other municipalities have civilian staff, not just sworn staff and that it is getting to the point where they are really starting to get busy. He said that it's hard to get administrative things done because they are busy doing investigations, etc. Harold said they are looking at hiring a civilian employee on an average of 20 hours a week, but that will need the public safety committee's support.

Jennifer says that no one on the council feels that they should be following Mike Shaver's recommendation on the needs of the department over the Chief's.

Harold went on to explain that they are out of room in the evidence room and that as a whole they are seriously cramped for space. The civilian employee will basically do data entry, answering phones, etc., -- not any police functions. Paul said he was not sure how much longer it will be efficient to work the way they are working now. The room gets very hot and there is no air flow. However, he said he didn't know what the solution was. Harold reiterated that the town really has to invest in the building at sometime.

Harold went on to discuss capital assets. He said he was going to request 3 new patrol cars for next year and they would probably get rid of one old vehicle. Jennifer asked what the policy is on take home vehicles. Harold said that officers have full personal use of the auto and they can drive to any of the counties surrounding Hancock County or Marion County. The officers can also drive the cars for longer distances for police training and business. If the car is used for personal use the officer has to pay for the fuel.

Harold then brought up the idea of having a town court. When asked what the benefit would be, Harold responded that the money for tickets would stay in town instead of going to Hancock County. They are continuing to research the issue.

Harold then informed the committee about Special Incident Response team issues. He said they were ordering shotguns, and some officers will be trained on assault weapons. Harold said it was similar to a SWAT team, but it does more. They are doing the Special Incident Response training along with the Fortville Police Department, which will make them both stronger. They are currently trying to rule out some of the liability issues on mutual aid and workout who takes responsibility, etc.?

Harold updated the committee that the county commissioners approved the school speed limit ordinance as we requested. He also said he was working with SARC (special operations resource) and examining it as an additional funding resource.

No old business.

Under new business, Jennifer Williams appointed Jeff Silvey, representing the McCordsville Fire Department, as a member of the committee.

Next meeting is Dec. 8 at 7:00 p.m. Tonya will invite Dan Denbo from the McCordsville elementary to attend.

Meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.