

BALDWIN TOWNSHIP SPECIAL WORKSHOP MEETING

November 23, 2009

Present – Supervisors Larry Handshoe, Jeff Holm, Bryan Lawrence, Jim Oliver and Jay Swanson.

Call to Order – The November 23, 2009 Baldwin Township workshop meeting was called to order by Chairman Jeff Holm at 7:30 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance – All present recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Discuss Elections Versus Appointments

Swanson – I'm for elections. Per attorney it may have a liability issue.

Lawrence – What would it take for this board to support his chief, or a future chief? This is as much an issue as elections. What is it that puts this board behind the leadership of the department?

Swanson – I don't think I ever said 'if' this board gets behind the chief. This board "has to" stand behind the chief ... bottom line. We get pushed around by the rank and file ... then we begin to flip-flop. If it's the position of the chief to go by appointment or elections, we must stand behind that person. When we reversed a decision, we went about it in the wrong way. It's not wise to make decisions during a meeting without first talking to the chief. What we need to do is right now is stand behind the chief with the rules and regulations. Whatever they get changed to ... there it is. We are going to stand by them. When the firefighters want to talk, listen to them, but then talk to the chief before we make a decision. It'll take a commitment by the board members to talk to the chief. It has nothing to do with what the rules are.

Lawrence – Does everyone understand the process we have?

Torborg – The selection process takes the burden off the chief. The biggest liability is on the chief. I want a process that assures him that he is getting the most knowledgeable people for the jobs. If our process was hindered, or not perfect, it was our first time. Given a score and then given a consensus score, we might be tweaking that process. The interview process gives the chief a piece of mind. People are meeting the standards and are knowledgeable. Maybe we could come up with better questions. All in Sherburne County use the selection process. I understand the reasoning behind either selection or election. I want to know that I have the best candidates. We can't get there with elections. It can't be a popularity contest. The board appoints the chief. The chief appoints the assistant chief. The captains were done by a panel. There's a board member and two firefighters on the panel. The firefighters are scored on the questions. The board came up with a consensus on the scoring. There are ways to tweak that. Elections put a lot on the shoulders of the chief.

Swanson – A good candidate is the one to make tough decisions.

Lawrence – We had elections.

Oliver – There are problems on both sides ... appointment or elections. The appointment process was not good. The reason is because of the problems we are having with the assistant chief. He was on the committee. The rank and file had a meeting before. The rank and file wanted the evaluation of each candidate by the fire department weigh heavily on this appointment process. There's a sheet there by the firefighters that should have been included.

Lawrence – Then it would not be a selection process. It's an election that is hidden under a selection process.

There was discussion regarding the firefighter's sheet.

Swanson – In the election process you will have nominations. Will they accept nominations? I'm not seeing a lack of abilities in our leadership. I'm seeing a captain saying "I know I will get in trouble and I don't care." I have a problem with that.

Lawrence – What is going to stop 40% of the firefighters doing what they are doing now? We still have the individuals who are upset that they didn't get their way. The process we did use, if you break the fire department into its differences of opinion even with the appointment process, are people who had different perspectives who were put on as officers.

Holm – Dive into Troy's comments. It's clear that Troy highly recommends that we make the proper changes necessary if we want to make changes. (Holm puts forward an argument from the league of MN cities.) We need to make changes in policy first, and then we need to involve Gilchrist in the process. There still is the argument about discrimination, and the argument that Chief Torborg is making about having the best people in place. This is going to take time whether you prefer one way or another. The review of the handbook will have a lot to do with the elections.

Torborg – If going through the election process the minimum standard for officers should be upped. It's been 7 years. The minimum standards were set when we were a three year department.

Holm – What about pay?

Torborg – In Minnesota there are only 2 volunteer fire departments. We are paid on call.

Oliver – Whether election or selection does it still has to be approved by the board?

Lawrence – I would recommend that.

Torborg – With the selection process it doesn't come back to the board for ratification.

Oliver – No matter what happens, it comes right to the board.

Lawrence – The board could ratify the appointment process.

Holm – This is just one other thing saying that we don't trust the chief.

Oliver – If the board okays everything, then it's legal.

Holm – Ultimately everything comes to the board. Otherwise we change the policy first than take action.

Torborg – We did do a selection process that had term limits. If changes are made, is there any recourse for the current officers?

Lawrence- When a term is up, why not have them have the same time line if it goes to elections.

Oliver – If it's a liability issue, and the league has an opinion, they should be saying 'carte blanche', everyone has to go to appointments.

Lawrence – We need to look at a selection process as the future decision of making of departments. We don't want to make a knee jerk decision.

There was discussion regarding a "hybrid" selection process, and an assistant chief selection process.

Lawrence – We need to consider making a decision based on the current state of our department. It needs to be based on what is the best future of the department.

Swanson- I've heard from the majority of the rank and file that they would like to see elections.

Lawrence – Why are department moving away from elections?

Torborg – We were the first ones to move to selection.

Holm – Give us a brief snapshot of moving to the selection process.

Torborg – The discussion started with Warren Jorgenson. We followed his guidance. He gave his evaluation to the board.

Holm – Jim, in your mind, is there a way that the appointment process can work?

Oliver – A more rounded committee is needed. The firefighter's input should have more of an impact on the process. The assistant chief should also be appointed by the selection board.

Torborg – I agree with Jim that the assistant chief needs to be interviewed and appointed by a panel or board. Selection is the future. Yes, the process needs to be tweaked. Changing the selection process would be good. The firefighters are not 100% against the selection process.

Oliver – The elections could also be tweaked.

Torborg – I've never heard of having forums when dealing with elections. The only person who should be on an agenda should be the fire chief.

Lawrence- The vision was using the assistant chief to get the captains able to step up on position. The vision for the firefighters were to be able to step into a captain's position.

Holm – Basically leadership development. How come it's perceived in this appointment process that you have kind makers? A group is in control. Where is this perception from and what can be done to eliminate it?

Torborg – The perception was that we were not an open book with me appointing the assistant chief. There was no other candidate for the assistant chief, and that has caused us to be where we are now. The department could not forgive, and will not. They clash with the assistant chief no matter what. People are trying to fault with many areas to cover up one area.

Holm – The conclusion I have made is that there are a lot of rumors, and there are 2 sides to all of them. There are a number of little issues such as when changes are made to the SOP's. We need to come up with a good set. The SOP's need to be cleaned up and carefully proceeded from there. Whatever we decide to do for the next step is the answer is not in front of us yet. There is not enough information yet on how we are going to come to the answer. I agree with Bryan. It needs to be a lasting decision.

Torborg – I agree with Jay. Once it's done, it's done. It's hard changing all the time.

Swanson – The ability by the rank and file to change the rules should be completely striped. It's a long and lengthy process to change it. The fire department should never make any changes again. We have to stand by rules and regulations.

Lawrence – I don't think we'll find a lot of issues with the SOP's. The majority of the small issues fall under other things.

Holm – I would like to draw this out into some workshops with a subcommittee to determine where these issues fall.

Lawrence – Are there certain equipment items that the firefighters are required to purchase on their own, and why?

Torborg – There is no equipment required by the firefighters to purchase on their own. 100% is supplied by the department.

Lawrence – Is there anything lacking? Is the gear of good quality?

Torborg – Nothing lacking, and yes. There are some individuals who buy their own stuff. Top of the line stuff. Helmets and gloves.

Holm – I would like to hear from the 2 firefighters in the audience. Chuck Nagle and Mary Beth Torborg.

Nagle – With the last 4 years of board minutes, what the board approved was revised by Ruppe. In looking at that is not the case. On the hybrid issue, I'm right on with that concept. My suggestion is to let the selection process based on qualifications continue and let the firefighters ratify it before it comes to the board. Communication, in my opinion, is the biggest problem the department has. I've not received an answer to many of the things on my list. We need some type of handbook.

Mary Beth Torborg – I feel like not much was done tonight. It was mainly just hashing things over. Look at the pros and cons of selection, and what the pros and cons are of elections. Take the personal feelings out of it.

Holm – The million dollar question is how to proceed. We have more research to do.

Oliver – The first thing we have to get is the SOP straightened out before any decision is made.

Swanson – At the next meeting we need to review the rules and regulations. Everyone should come up with a doctored form of this and determine what it should say. It's the best place to start.

Lawrence – We are checking into mentoring a program for probies.

Oliver – The appointment process and the election process can be an easy decision based on homework. The SOP may not be an easy process. I suggest a task force would be in the best interest of the fire department.

Swanson – The board is coming up with disciplinary actions for the SOP.

Oliver – The majority of things are very small corrections.

Lawrence – We need to look at Ruppe's and Gilchrist's.

Nagle – On June 5, 2007 the Ruppe version was approved.

Torborg -= The motion stated with the approval of the new attorney (Gilchrist).

There was discussion regarding holding additional workshops.

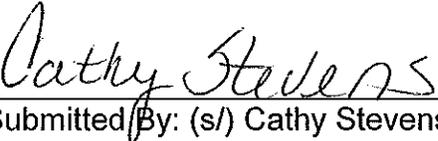
Holm – What in addition to workshops do we need to do?

Lawrence – The board needs to get through it first, and then ask that question.

Review Fire Department Handbook - See above

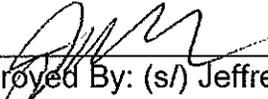
Discuss Fire Issues - Schedule fire workshop on December agenda.

Adjourn – Lawrence/Swanson unanimous to adjourn at 9:38 p.m.



Submitted By: (s/) Cathy Stevens

Clerk/Treasurer
Baldwin Township



Approved By: (s/) Jeffrey Holm

Chairman, Board of Supervisors
Baldwin Township

Attendees: Brian Torborg, Mary Beth Torborg, Chuck Nagle