

**SOUTH STRABANE TOWNSHIP
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS BUDGET MEETING**

October 17, 2019

APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

The October 17, 2019 Budget Meeting of the South Strabane Township Board of Supervisors (Board) came to order at 6:00 p.m. in the Mae C. Reynolds Meeting Room of the Municipal Building (550 Washington Road).

The following were present:

Board of Supervisors: Rich Luketich, Chairman, Bob Weber, Vice Chairman; Bracken Burns; Thomas Moore; and Laynee Zipko.

Also, present: Township Manager Brandon Stanick; Assistant to the Township Manager Patrick Conners; Fire Chief Scott Reese; and Financial Analyst Marie Coffman

Four visitors were in attendance.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Luketich stated the Board allocates a period of time during this item for those individuals who would like the opportunity to address the Board on any matter. Each person addressing the Board is asked to limit their comments to a maximum of three (3) minutes.

Mr. Joe Thomas and Ms. Alexandria Sakalic, representing Freedom Transit, came before the Board to highlight many of the services and transportation routes that the organization provides to South Strabane residents and other Washington County patrons. Mr. Thomas stated that Freedom Transit offers both bus service and ADA compliant van service with fixed routes, as well as a shared ride service that drops patrons off directly at their requested destination. He next discussed heavily used bus routes including the Walmart and Tanger Outlets service stops. Ms. Sakalic reviewed fare rates, highlighting that senior citizens and disabled veterans qualify for discounted rates. Mr. Thomas reported that many different groups of South Strabane Township residents use the services offered by Freedom Transit. Chair Luketich inquired if patrons are categorized by their respective municipality. Mr. Thomas stated that Freedom Transit recently conducted a ridership survey which could be provided to the Township. Mr. Weber inquired how many people use their services. Mr. Thomas reported that in 2018 Freedom Transit provided transportation services to over 100,000 riders for the first time.

Mr. Burns inquired about routes servicing Presbyterian Seniorcare facilities. Mr. Thomas reported that currently those properties are not serviced; however, routes are always under evaluation and are subject to expansion. Mr. Burns also inquired about transit service to the Washington Hospital complex, specifically regarding the service times. Mr. Thomas stated that earlier service times were added to the Washington Hospital route with service beginning at

7:30 a.m. Mr. Burns next inquired regarding access to the South Hills Village T-Station route. Mr. Thomas discussed the complications and inefficiencies regarding linking the two services.

Mr. Thomas reviewed Freedom Transit's funding sources and emphasized the need for local match dollars in order to qualify for greater federal and state grant funding. He highlighted that in addition to South Strabane's contribution, the City of Washington and Washington County also contribute annually. Chair Luketich inquired if businesses contribute. Mr. Burns stated that Freedom Transit should seek contributions from its heaviest users such as Walmart, the Meadows Casino, and Tanger Outlets. Mr. Thomas stated that such an idea could be considered. Mr. Weber inquired how much of the organization's revenue was directly linked to fares. Mr. Thomas stated that fare rates paid directly by riders contributes between 10% - 20% of overall revenues. Township Manager Stanick concluded by stating that the Township could help facilitate discussions with local businesses and Freedom Transit moving forward.

3. REVIEW OF PLANNED EXPENDITURES FOR 2020 Fire Department

Fire Chief Reese reviewed the proposed Fire Department budget. He highlighted insurance costs including worker's compensation for the paid firefighters' policy through MRM Trust and the Pennsylvania State Workers Insurance Fund Trust (SWIFT) policy for the Volunteer Department. Chief Reese next discussed the annual contribution made by the Township to the South Strabane Township Volunteer Fire Department. Mr. Fred Allen and George Thomas came before the Board to outline the Department's request for funding. Mr. Allen reported that since 2005 the Township has contributed \$110,000 annually to the Volunteer Department to assist in operating costs. He highlighted that since 2005, the contribution has not changed. He stated that on a yearly basis, expenditures vary between \$225,000 - \$250,000 to maintain fire service operations and facilities. He stated that in addition to the Township's contribution, the Department generates revenue through weekly bingo, grants, and solicitation events and drives. He reported that in 2018 the Volunteer Department purchased a new tanker engine, highlighting the purchase was paid in cash. Mr. Weber inquired regarding the "Fill the Boot" fundraising drive. Mr. Allen stated that specific fundraising event is for the Muscular Dystrophy Association and all proceeds are sent directly to that organization. Mr. Allen concluded by asking that the Township continue its annual contribution in the amount of \$110,000 in addition to paying all annual insurance costs.

Mr. Weber inquired about annual expenses incurred by the Volunteer Fire Department. Mr. Allen stated that large yearly expenditures include maintenance and upkeep of the fire equipment, apparatus, and fire hall upgrades. Mr. Burns inquired about the income trend for the Department. Mr. Allen stated that income varies and is very hard to predict. In response to questions from Mr. Weber, Mr. Allen advised Bingo generates approximately 120 participants weekly and the number of volunteers serving as firefighters within the department currently stands at 12. He also highlighted that 3 new volunteers were recently voted in by the membership. Chief Reese reported that the Department's brush truck did not pass inspection and will need replaced soon. He discussed a replacement truck, highlighting its availability with Co-Stars pricing. Mr. Allen advised the truck has 40,000 miles with a rotted undercarriage. He noted that all vehicles will be undercoated prior to being used in the future.

A discussion regarding the Township partnering with the Volunteer Department on purchasing a new truck ensued. Mr. Allen stated that he would need to bring such a proposal to the

membership to be voted on. He reported a silent donation was made in the amount of \$25,000 which was to assist in the purchase of the brush truck. Mr. Allen expressed concern that the purchase would affect the remaining contribution as well as next year's contribution made by the Township. Township Manager Stanick stated that the Volunteer Department should look to the Township as a strategic partner for future capital purchases, highlighting that career staff also uses the equipment. Mr. Allen sought clarification regarding the Township's financial contribution to the Volunteer Department in 2020, specifically asking if the amount of \$110,000 would remain. The Board stated that matter would need to be discussed in the future. Mr. Allen stated that members of the Department have a great sense of pride in being able to purchase vehicles without the assistance of the Township. He concluded by stating that he could not speak on behalf of the entire Body and would need to know the specifics of the proposal prior to having it brought before the body for a vote.

Township Manager Stanick inquired of any planned upgrades to the Fire Station. Mr. Allen stated that Station No. 2 (172 Oak Spring Road) recently had the roof and HVAC system replaced. Mr. Allen reviewed various projects, including new restroom facilities, upgraded kitchen amenities, and a new floor in the rental hall. Mr. Thomas expressed his pride in the Volunteer Department highlighting that very few departments can state that they paid cash for a fire engine. Township Manager Stanick reported that there has been poor communication between the Township and the Volunteer Fire Department in the past. He shared plans with the Fire Department that the Township would like to conduct a strategic planning initiative with them to improve the relationship between the Volunteer Department and the Township. Ms. Zipko stated that members of the Volunteer Department should come to Board meetings and provide brief reports to the residents in order to keep them updated on the Department's actions and programs. Township Manager Stanick cited that a greater understanding of the Department's capital planning for large purchases would be helpful in renewing the Department's partnership with the Township.

Mr. Thomas stated that when the Township became more involved in the Department's business a rift began to develop. Mr. Allen highlighted that from the Department's viewpoint it appears that the Township is trying to take over the Volunteer Fire Department. He cited similar historic circumstances in North Strabane's and Peters Township's Departments. Mr. Thomas stated that the Volunteer Department provides the paid firefighters with a place to work.

Chair Luketich stated that the Township expects to be a busier, more dynamic community over the next 5-7 years. He stated that it is essential for the public's safety that the Fire Department grows and develops in partnership with the Township. Township Manager Stanick stated that the Fire Department and the Township need to start moving in the same direction to ensure services can continue. The Board thanked Mr. Allen and Mr. Thomas for attending.

Fire Chief Reese continued discussing the Fire Department's Budget, highlighting that with the influx of new staffing at this time there will be an increase in uniform and equipment expenditures in 2020. Chair Luketich inquired regarding fire hydrant inspections. Chief Reese reported that the fees associated with hydrant access cover replacement, maintenance, and inspections. Mr. Burns inquired if the Township had access to a comprehensive list of fire hydrants within its borders. Fire Chief Reese explained that through Active 911 software, all

Fire Department Vehicles have access to GPS/GIS based coordinates outlining the location of nearby hydrants at the scene of a fire. Township Manager Stanick cited that Pennsylvania American Water has experienced staffing issues that have contributed to the slower pace of hydrant inspections.

Township Manager Stanick reported that the Township has exhausted the list of potential firefighter candidates, highlighting that Staff will need to re-advertise the position to build the candidate list for future openings. Mr. Weber inquired where the posting would be advertised. Fire Chief Reese stated that many online forums are used, specifically citing access to colleges and universities with recent graduates. Fire Chief Reese briefly discussed the shortage of firefighters available, particularly during off shifts (after 11:01 p.m.). He stated that career staff is essential in ensuring the Department functions daily. He highlighted that they no longer simply supplement the Volunteer Department.

Mr. Burns stated that it is the duty and responsibility of the elected officials of the Township to provide effective fire service to the residents of South Strabane. Mr. Zipko stated she is in favor of providing funding for the new brush truck in addition to funding the Volunteer Department at the annual \$110,000 rate if it helps facilitate a greater working relationship moving forward. Mr. Moore voiced his frustration regarding the historic lack of communication between the Township and the Volunteer Fire Department.

3B: General Government and Administration

Assistant to the Township Manager Conners and Fire Chief Reese discussed the Code Red emergency alert system. They explained that it would allow the Township to communicate directly with residents who sign up for alerts during an emergency. Assistant to the Township Manager Conners stated that 4 different software systems were researched and after demonstration and evaluation, Code Red was the superior product offering the most value for the cost. He stated that when developed, the Township will have the ability to reach all residents with landline telephones and will have the capability to develop a user-based database allowing the Township to communicate general and emergency messaging through text messaging, email, and phone calls. He highlighted that the most challenging part will be to encourage residents to sign up for the alerts. He briefly discussed pricing, highlighting the cost of the service is \$3,000 per year and illustrated the ease of signing up for the system. The Board reached a favorable consensus to pursue the program.

Township Manager Stanick discussed the projected administrative expenses including updated computer software and hardware, a service time block package, park rental software through CivicCMS, and the establishment of a quarterly newsletter delivered to each home. Fire Chief Reese briefly discussed a proposal for updated video equipment to produce a more professional broadcast for Board of Supervisor meetings. He also highlighted that the Township would be phasing out its partnership with U-Stream in favor of establishing a YouTube Channel to broadcast meetings. Township Manager Stanick continued advising funds are allocated for a feasibility study of the Municipal Building. He concluded by stating the 2020 Budget also includes \$100,000 for the Township to begin its Pollution Reduction Plan (PRP) required by the current MS4 Permit.

4. NEXT BUDGET MEETING

Township Manager Stanick reported the next Budget Meeting is scheduled to take place on Monday October 28th at 6:00 p.m.

5. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Luketich moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Weber seconded the motion. The motion passed on a unanimous voice vote and the meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brandon J. Stanick
Township Manager