

WATERSMEET TOWNSHIP BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
SPECIAL MEETING  
February 10, 2020  
12:00 PM  
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A special meeting of the Watersmeet Township Board of Trustees was called to order by Supervisor Rogers at 12:00 PM.

Members Present: Mike Rogers, Paul Kempainen, Bill Neumann, Alan Piel, Julie Mathiesen  
Members Absent: None

Others in attendance: Yvonne Clark, Russ Diethert, Sharon Bushwitz, Paul Runcie, Thomas Mantsch

Agenda changes/approval: Supervisor Rogers added an item to the agenda regarding a second deputy clerk. Julie Mathiesen indicated she also had an addition to the agenda regarding recently discovered deficiencies in personnel paperwork for the Township Police Department. She felt that issue was of some urgency and should be discussed prior to discussing new hires for the Police Department. Debate ensued during which Julie indicated the Township does not have a formal contract or other documentation specifying the terms of employment for the Township Police Chief. She questioned whether the Board should interview and consider additional employees without first formalizing the terms of hire for the Police Chief, and then developing contracts or hiring agreements for subsequent employees. Since the police officer candidate had made the effort to attend the meeting, it was decided to proceed with the interview, then address the other matter. A motion to accept the agenda with the proposed additions by Bill Neumann and supported by Alan Piel. Motion carried.

Special Business:

1. Interview Police Officer Candidate – Thomas Mantsch was introduced to the Board by Chief Runcie. The two became acquainted while working together as EMTs for Aspirus in Iron River. Mr. Mantsch's resume was provided to the Board and he summarized his work experience and explained the certifications, licenses and awards listed on the resume. In addition to working with Aspirus, Mr. Mantsch also works as a part time firefighter in Iron Mountain. He has worked as a firefighter, first responder and EMT in a number of nearby communities in both Michigan and Wisconsin. Mr. Mantsch does not have law enforcement licensing or experience. But he is willing to attend training and pursue Michigan Commission On Law Enforcement Standards (MCOLES) licensing as many small communities are moving towards employing public safety officers capable of responding to both law enforcement and medical/fire calls.

Supervisor Rogers indicated Mr. Mantsch's EMT experience would be beneficial for the Township efforts to have an ambulance stationed in Watersmeet, since a certain number of EMTs would need to be available to justify placing an ambulance in the Township. Bill Neumann noted that Fire Chief Jim Pittsley should have been invited to the meeting/interview. Supervisor Rogers expressed willingness to pay for Mr. Mantsch's training through the police academy at Northern Michigan University (NMU) in Marquette and noted that the next class begins in early May, with registration required by February 21<sup>st</sup>, requiring the Board to make a decision about hiring Mr. Mantsch at this meeting or early next week. Chief Runcie provided additional information about the NMU

Academy. The course lasts 16 weeks (800 hours), beginning May 3<sup>rd</sup> and ending August 21<sup>st</sup>, background checks of candidates are conducted as part of the registration process (saving the Township that expense), and following completion of the course, the candidate would need to apply for MCOLEs licensing. The candidate would be able to work as a law enforcement officer following licensing. Yvonne Clark asked Mr. Mantsch if he would be willing to commit to working for the Township for a specified period of time, if the Township were to fund his training. He answered he would be willing to do so.

The Board having no further questions, Mr. Mantsch opted to leave the meeting as he was not feeling well. Supervisor Rogers again emphasized the benefits to hiring an EMT and the need for the Board to act quickly on a decision. Supervisor Rogers made a motion to hire Mr. Mantsch, seconded by Alan Piel. Additional discussion ensued, during which concerns were raised about the pressure to make a quick hiring decision, the financial investment in someone that would still be an inexperienced officer, how the position was advertised and whether there should be formal postings in local papers and on law enforcement websites, and what the actual costs would be to the Township. Supervisor Rogers and Chief Runcie both noted that law enforcement positions are difficult to fill in small communities, with some positions remaining open for a year or more. When questioned, Chief Runcie estimated the cost to send a recruit to the NMU Academy would be around \$8000 to \$10,000. He also noted that he committed to pay Mr. Mantsch \$15.50/hour while Mr. Mantsch attended the academy. Upon graduation and receipt of MCOLES licensing, the pay would be increased to \$17/hour, with gradual increases as experience was gained. Paul Kempainen noted that factoring in the proposed hourly pay for attending the academy would raise the cost above the estimated \$10,000 and wondered what other costs needed to be considered in determining the total cost to the Township. Julie Mathiesen questioned whether it would be better to spend that money on a benefits package that would attract more experienced officers, noting that it might take someone with experience to address the discontent that currently is being voiced about the police department. She asked whether some of the officers who left the LVD Police Department might be willing to work for the Township, specifically referencing two individuals. At this point, Russ Diethert asked to comment. He believes law enforcement coverage has decreased in the Township with the establishment of the Township Police Department, citing an example of delayed response to a neighbor's security alarm and noting that regular security checks on his business had ceased. Mr. Diethert further noted residents were paying more for less coverage and that did not sit well.

The conversation then turned again to the lack of a formal employment contract for Chief Runcie and the need to rectify that situation. Julie Mathiesen noted that he is in the payroll system as a salaried employee paid on a biweekly basis. She had been informed by the former Clerk that at the time of hire, it was agreed Chief Runcie would be paid a specified salary and available "as needed" to establish the Township Police Department. Paul Kempainen and Alan Piel indicated they have a similar recollection of those discussions; Bill Neumann was out of town at the time. However, Chief Runcie recently informed Julie that he is an hourly employee, based on labor law specifications, and that he has been awarding himself compensatory time for any hours worked above 40/week. There is no documentation to support this in the record and Chief Runcie has not been submitting timesheets documenting work or comp time hours. Julie feels this needs to be addressed from a liability and audit standpoint, has discussed the matter with the Township Attorney, who has provided copies of sample contracts for a township police chief. Julie again recommended that the Board focus on this matter before others. Bill Neumann noted that times have evolved so that "handshake agreements" are no longer sufficient and the Township needs better documentation.

Yvonne Clark commented that in her experience, an “at will” contract, as opposed to a “for cause” contract, would be the better fit for the Township.

Supervisor Rogers indicated the contract issue for Chief Runcie could be addressed at the end of his one-year probationary period in March. He asked whether the Board could make a decision next week re: hiring a new officer and rescinded his motion to hire Mr. Mantsch. Paul Kemppainen moved to table the until additional research into the costs of the academy could be conducted and a contract developed specifying the terms of employment specific to a recruit. Alan Piel seconded. Motion Carried

2. Dash cams for police cars - Supervisor Rogers reintroduced the need for better video surveillance systems in the police cars and the request to purchase Wolfcom systems. Bill Neumann indicated he had time to research the camera systems and was comfortable with moving ahead on the purchase. Julie Mathiesen made a motion to purchase the Wolfcom systems for the two patrol cars, Bill Neumann seconded. Motion carried.
3. Approve Board of Review (BOR) Dates – The dates proposed by the Township Assessor are: Organizational meeting on March 3rd, Board of Review March 9<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM and March 10<sup>th</sup>, 3:00 PM to 9:00 PM. Julie noted the Presidential Primary election is on March 10<sup>th</sup>, so there will be some overlap. She also noted one of the Election Inspectors is also on the Board of Review. Supervisor Rogers indicated that had been considered and the Election Inspector position would take precedence, as there were BOR alternates. Bill Neumann made a motion to approve the BOR dates, seconded by Paul Kemppainen. Motion carried.
4. Approve Veteran’s Administration (VA) Appropriation for Watersmeet Township – Supervisor Rogers stated the VA Appropriation for fiscal year 2020 – 2021 is \$6,640. That’s the amount the Township pays the VA to have a representative available to discuss VA matters with veterans. Bill Neumann made a motion to approve, seconded by Alan Piel. Roll call vote – all ayes. Motion carried.
5. Second Deputy Clerk - Supervisor Rogers informed the Board that Julie had appointed Jill Mansfield as her second Deputy Clerk, and asked Julie to provide some additional information. Julie indicated that Jill would be serving primarily as an election assistant, helping to distribute and collect absentee voter (AV) ballots. The state of Michigan has relaxed the requirements for obtaining AV ballots, so more requests were expected. Julie also was still attending elections training and Jill would be able to fulfill AV requests in her absence.

As there was no further business, Bill Neumann motioned to adjourn, supported by Alan Piel. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 1:05 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Julie Mathiesen, Clerk  
Watersmeet Township