

February 20, 2019

The Versailles Town Council and The Johnson Township Board of Trustees held the first of three public hearings on the proposed fire territory on February 20, 2019. Town Council president Steve Mathes called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. Steve asked that those in attendance listen to the presentation, and hold all questions until the end.

Fire Chief Ben Sieverding presented information on the Versailles Volunteer Fire Department. Chief Sieverding noted the cost to equip each member, the roster of the department, and the number of calls in 2018 for both the Town of Versailles and Johnson Township. Chief Sieverding's presentation can be viewed on the Town's website, Townofversailles.com. Chief Sieverding noted that the money collected from taxes currently is not enough to fund the budget. In fact, the department has gone without physicals because they can not afford to pay for them. It is very costly to replace equipment, and costs around \$3,000 to equip each member.

Mike Miesberger from Meisberger Insurance gave information on ISO ratings. Mike explained that ISO ratings are given to the fire department and can affect the cost of homeowner's insurance. Ratings range from 10-1, with 1 being the best possible rating. The Versailles Volunteer Fire Department is currently rated at a 5.

Paige Sansone from Umbaugh and Associates gave a presentation explaining what a fire territory is. It takes two joining, taxing units to create a fire territory. Creating a fire territory gives the fire department the opportunity to get additional funding for operating. If the proposed fire territory is formed, the service area of the local departments will not change. The Town of Versailles would be the provider unit responsible for preparing the fire department's annual budget. The current maximum taxing rate impact is 7.5% in the Town of Versailles and 11.2% in Johnson Township. Both the Town Council and the Johnson Township Board will vote separately on the proposed fire territory. If the majority of either board votes not to establish the territory, it will not be established. If they vote to establish the territory, the documents will be sent to the DLGF for review and final determination. The next two meetings will be held at the Versailles Town Hall on March 13, and March 26 at 7 p.m. Ms. Sansone's presentation can be viewed on the Town's website at Townofversailles.com.

At the conclusion of Ms. Sansone's presentation, Steve Mathes opened the floor for questions and answers.

Q: Who is the voting board?

A: The voting board consists of the three Township Board members and the three Versailles Town Council members. The Township Board will review first, and if approved it will be reviewed by the Town Council. If the Town Council approves, it will be included in the Town's budget.

Q: Is the Township Board elected?

A: Yes.

Q: How do we know they are good with money management?

A: The provider unit will handle all of the money and submit the budget. Fire Chief Ben Sieverding noted that his books are audited every year.

Q: Why wasn't this on the ballot?

A: The State statute prevents it from being on the ballot. Any concerns may be addressed to the DLGF.

Q: How many departments are in the township?

A: Two, Versailles VFD and Delaware VFD.

Q: Is there anything the VVFD can be doing better?

A: Chief Sieverding: "You mean fundraising? You want me to ask my volunteers to do fundraisers? We don't have time to do fundraisers."

Q: Why do they want it all up front?

A: The percentages presented are the maximum it can ever go. When the budget comes out for next year, it may not be the maximum. The percentage will be adjusted each year depending on the budget, but it will never exceed the maximum.

Q: How many runs the the VVFD have last year?

A: Over 500

Q: Don't they charge for each run?

A: It used to be that each policy had an amount you could charge. Now, if you do have coverage, the insurance company is billed, the public is never billed. The department collects on less than 3% of the runs. The department has never received payment over \$500, with the exception of a chemical spill. In that case, most of the money collected is spent cleaning up the spill.

Q: Where does the money go?

A: It is on the VVFD public financial statement.

Q: Why did we not see the budget in the presentation?

A: Ben will have a detailed statement at the next meeting.

Q: How was this advertised?

A: It was advertised in the newspaper.

Q: Why aren't you running the business efficiently? It should have never gotten to this point. What's next? If this would have been done 12 years ago, it would have only been a 1%-2% increase.

A: Steve Mathes: "We are all in the same boat. This is a plan for years from now, we are looking forward."

Q: How many of the firefighters go on every call?

A: A volunteer department can not send every member on every call, but they are required to remain active.

Q: Why can't this be a sales tax?

A: That is not a legal option.

Q: Why do the trucks go out for calls that aren't actual fires?

A: The trucks do not go out if there is not an actual fire. SOP is that the department is toned out for whatever the operator deems necessary.

Q: Why do you still go out when signal 9 is called?

A: Sometimes they ask for EMS to respond.

Q: When was the last ISO rating?

A: Last Summer.

Q: When will the next one be?

A: 1.5 years.

Q: How can you guarantee a level 5 ISO?

A: Chief Sieverding: "We will remain a 5. I'm not sure how we can get to a level 4. I will put in effort to make sure we remain a 5."

Q: So the maximum amount will never raise?

A: It is forever.

Q: How many runs last year were in Johnson Township, and how many in the Town of Versailles?

A: Ben will bring those figures to the next meeting.

Q: What is the point of these meetings?

A: The purpose is to get feedback from the public.

Q: Are you going to put together an action plan?

A: Steve Mathes: "We can't put together an action plan in two weeks.

Q: Can the VVFD charge?

A: Chief Sieverding: "We can, there is a schedule, but a lot of people just don't have the money. Anytime anyone wants to make a donation, they can."

Q: Are you billing for first responder calls?

A: Chief Sieverding: "We can't charge because we are a non-transport unit.

Q: Why is the tax rate in the Town of Versailles cheaper than Johnson Township?

A: Because the district tax rate is higher in Johnson Township.

Final comments from the public:

"We've had a volunteer fire department forever, and they have always found a way to get what they needed. I respect the fire department, and appreciate them for all they do."

“I work for a hospital and they would probably do your physicals for free.”

Final comments from Chief Sieverding:

“The department will continue to file for grants, but it is hard to count on that money. We are always here to help, and I pray that none of you or your families ever needs our service.”

With no further questions or comments the meeting was adjourned.

Sign in sheets will be retained at the Versailles Town Hall.