
MINUTES OF SYMMES TOWNSHIP FINANCE & AUDIT COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
OCTOBER 24, 2019

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. Members of the Committee present were: Rik Vonderhaar, Mike Tranter, Pete Sayles, Larry Harte and Meena Maddali.

Also present: Administrator - Mrs. Kim Lapensee, Township Trustees –Mr. Ken Bryant and Ms. Jodie Leis.

Mrs. Lapensee stated that most of the business we will discuss tonight is all related to the potential levies for the March ballot in 2020. She stated that all the items listed under new business she will breeze over and that are included in the packet for information only.

Mrs. Lapensee stated that there are three potential levies for the March ballot. She stated that we will discuss the policy levy, safety services levy and the road levy.

Mr. Harte asked what is the expectation is for tonight’s meeting? He stated that we received over 100 pages to review and only had a short time to review them. Mrs. Lapensee stated that in the previous meetings from August and September, the committee discussed that we will have two levies that will be falling off at the end of 2019 (last collections in 2020). She stated that we have a .9 mill road levy (7-year term) and a 1.5 safety services levy (5-year term). She stated that the committee is aware that the 1.5 mill safety services levy is not enough to support the current services that are provided by the township for safety services such as police, fire and EMS. She stated that we will need to not only renew what we have but increase them as well. Mr. Bryant stated that we could also cut the services that we provide. Mrs. Lapensee stated that she gave them a spreadsheet that shows what our current spending levels are and when we will run out of money to provide the service. She stated that in her opinion, we will not have enough money to pay for the current contract that the Hamilton County Sheriff’s office is requesting in their new contract for services beginning in April of 2020 and ending in March of 2023 for services that we currently provide which is two 24/7 cars and two power shift cars. She stated that we will need to figure out how we are going to continue to pay for the service whether we pay for it through the Safety services levy or put on a new police levy to pay for the increases. She stated that if we continue to pay for the police services through the Safety services levy, the money will run out by the end of 2022. She stated that if we do remove the police from the safety services levy and put on an additional police levy, we will still need to put on some type of levy for safety services because the money will run out by 2023.

Mr. Bryant added that the police contract ends in March of 2022 and the fire contract with LSFDF runs out in December of 2019 (renewal of personnel costs).

Mr. Harte asked when this decision must be made? Mrs. Lapensee stated that she will have to put something on the Trustees next meeting in November due to the timing of the March primaries (instead of May). She stated that the filing deadline for a levy with the BOE is December 17th. Mrs. Lapensee explained the levy process and how to file a levy and that the first step is to ask the Auditor to certify the funds which depends on the millage the township requests. Mr. Harte asked what the Board is looking for from them. Mr. Bryant stated that this is an advisory board and they are looking for a recommendation.

Mr. Vonderhaar stated that this committee has not met for a whole year and that this is a lot of information to digest. Mr. Bryant stated that we did meet in August two times to discuss the budget. Mr. Vonderhaar stated that we have known about these levies since last year and yet we have not had any meetings to talk about any of this material until now. He stated that now we want them to hurry up and decide. Mr. Harte stated that this is all very frustrating that we are always told of the need but never provided any information until the last minute and asked to make a last-minute decision. Ms. Leis stated that getting a quorum of this committee has also been a challenge to get everyone together.

Mr. Vonderhaar asked if there were going to be any other provider bids for us to consider. Mrs. Lapensee stated no. She stated that she talked to Indian Hill, Montgomery and Loveland and they all declined to bid for the service. She stated that she also asked them to consider only serving a third of the township each. They all declined. Mrs. Lapensee stated that we only have the Sheriff's Office contract to consider or we create our own police department.

Ms. Leis stated that this last year has been difficult and usually we are more organized, but we have struggled and are doing to the best we can with what we have. Mr. Tranter agreed and said that we could either give a recommendation to the board that we don't have enough information, or we can give a recommendation with the information we have at hand. He stated that he recommends that we give a recommendation with the information that we have.

Mrs. Lapensee stated that we will start with police since it is part of the safety services levy. She went through the finance sheets with the committee pointing out our revenues and expenditures. She explained the rollback (12.5% received from the state), renewals vs replacements and how new levies work after 2010. Mr. Tranter stated that we had talked about replacing all levies with just one levy in the past, but due to the 12.5% rollback going away they decided not to do that. Mrs. Lapensee restated that if we remove the police expenses from the safety services levy that levy will still run out of money by the end of 2023. Mr. Harte asked what would happen if we did not put on a police levy and did not use any safety services money to pay for those services. Mrs. Lapensee stated that we would not be able to provide two 24/7 police officers anymore dedicated to Symmes Township and we would not be able to pay for dispatching and any other expenses that come with running that department. She stated that if we add a police levy, we would need to put on an additional 1.5 mill levy to just pay for the current level of service.

Mrs. Lapensee read through the different millage scenarios for the safety services levy (without the police), when the projected balances run out, and how much carryover would be associated with that millage. She explained how and when we receive money (twice a year March and August) and how we need to have a certain carryover going into the end of the year because we won't receive our next property tax collection until March. She stated that we have a 1.7 continuous levy and will need to renew the 1.5 current levy and put on an additional levy. She stated that she was unsure how to articulate that to the public.

Mrs. Lapensee read through the different millage scenarios for the safety services levy with leaving the police in the fund. There was a discussion over whether to keep the police services within the safety services levy or should it be separated. It was agreed by the committee to keep the police expenses within the safety services levy and put on one new levy with an amount to be determined. Mr. Sayles stated that he felt we should keep it simple and not have to always go back if one expense increases over the other. Mr. Sayles stated that the safety services costs seemed to equal the revenue for 2018, but in the future they are projected to increase faster than revenues and we need to look at overall spending to see where we can save money or provide different ways to continue the service.

Ms. Leis asked the police department to explain why the costs are going to go up so much. Major Chris Kettelman explained that the Sheriff has had a contract with Symmes Township for over 40 years. He stated that the Sheriff has always provided services that the township has not had to pay for in the past such as the Lieutenant for District 3 and other employees (clerk and sergeants). He stated that the Sheriff's Office by law must recoup their costs to provide the services to the townships. He stated that he is not in this to make money, but only to break even. He stated that we are only paying for boots on the ground. He stated that we only have two officers on duty 24/7 with two power shift cars. He stated that currently Symmes Township does not pay for the power shift hours when the power shift car is not staffed. He stated that this is not a way for the township to protect its citizens. Major Kettelman went through the stats and how we are geographically broken up into three separate sections which makes patrolling difficult. Major Kettelman explained how the Sheriff also has RENU agents stationed along I-71 in Symmes Township because there are many drugs that pass through this area. He stated that the State Patrol is out occasionally writing tickets for traffic, but the Sheriff's Office is the one that responds to accidents and gets sent with the fire department to all their runs in case of assistance. He stated that Symmes Township is a very nice place, but two patrol officers 24/7 is not enough to police this township anymore. He stated that if you look at all the numbers, we are roughly 17% under what the budget projections

were for the contract year of 2019 and the only reason we are under is because they are not billing us for the power shift when not in Symmes. He stated that the 18% increase is just to recoup our costs for the patrol officer (power shift cars) that are assigned to our township (with benefits). He stated that there are no frills added into that number, it is simply just to recoup the actual cost to provide the service. He stated that contract service is the best way to go and no one can touch their level of service because of all the additional personnel they have and would shift to our township if needed (homicides, drug investigations, etc.). He stated that the 18% increase is not that large of an increase if we had paid the full projected amount as was negotiated in 2016. He stated that when there are court cases that require the patrol officer's presence, they need to be compensated for their attendance. He stated that the health care always goes up and never goes down.

Ms. Leis stated that at the last meeting, one of the members brought up writing more tickets to increase our revenue. Major Kettelman stated that \$22.00 dollars of every ticket cost goes back to the township. He stated that much of the money collected goes to the state of Ohio. He stated that this is all well and good, but it needs to be balanced. Ms. Leis asked if that is because we only have two cars most of the time. Lieutenant Tory Smith stated that the police on duty now only have time to chase calls. They do not have time to write tickets. He stated that the real reason to write tickets is to improve safety and correct driving behaviors. He stated that he felt that it does not matter how many tickets you write, that it won't be enough to impact the budget. Major Kettelman stated that the return is not enough to send officers out on the highway.

Mr. Vonderhaar asked if Sycamore Township should be paying to occupy a portion of the building that everyone is housed at on Weekly. Lieutenant Smith stated that he does not have an opinion on that issue. Major Kettelman stated that they only have one Lieutenant for district three which is Symmes and Sycamore Townships. He stated that all the police cars that come to that building every day must drive through Symmes Township which creates a larger police presence here. He stated that he feels that Sycamore Township would just say that's fine and more their cars and officers down to Sycamore Township. Ms. Leis stated that we have talked to Sycamore Township about that and was told the same thing. She stated that we would be splitting the Lieutenant in half. Lieutenant Smith stated that the Sheriff's Office cannot afford to create another district and staff another location. He stated that he would prefer to stay in one location.

Mr. Bryant stated that right now we are not paying for the power shift cars when they are not in service and with the new contract language, we would pay for those people whether they are here or not. He stated that this is a huge contract change for the township. Mr. Kettelman stated that it is. He stated that when you have an employee and even when they take vacation, you are still paying for them. He stated that you would pay for them even with your own agency. Ms. Leis asked Chief Ott Huber if we still pay for the fire fighters to be on vacation. He stated yes. Major Kettelman stated that they are just asking to recoup their costs.

Mrs. Lapensee explained the contract and how the costs are broken down. She asked everyone to refer the spreadsheet that shows the contract years and how much we have saved since 2016. She stated that the only reason we are saving that amount of money is because we only pay for the power cars when they run in the township and are only billed for the amount of hours that a patrol officer is here plus benefits for those total number of hours. She also explained that next spreadsheet that plotted the two power cars for 2018 and gave an example of how many days/hours the power shift cars were not in Symmes even though they were scheduled. She stated that is due to them taking time off. She stated that we went 17 full days without the power cars, 75 half days without the power car and 16 partial days. She stated that this represents that \$169,000 dollars that we were not charged. She stated that what Major Kettelman is trying to explain is that the Sheriff's Office still must pay those two officers and they are losing money on providing them to us. She stated that the Sheriff's Office is also having budget issues and they can no longer afford to give us anything free. She stated that therefore our contract costs are going up over 18%. Mrs. Lapensee stated that they still plan on not charging us for Lieutenant Smith and the clerk's position and some other sergeants that work for the entire district. Mrs. Lapensee stated that the biggest thing for our budget is that we are still going to have to pay the full price for the power shift cars even if they take off for vacation, comp, personal or sick leave.

Mr. Harte asked about shared services. Lieutenant Smith stated that we have two 24/7 cars and two power shift cars that are 40-hour cars here in the township Monday through Friday. He stated

that the power shift car in the morning works 10 – 6 and the evening car works 4 – 12. He stated several years ago they went to 12-hour shifts. He stated that the 12-hour shifts are more favorable, and most officers do not want to work 8-hour shifts anymore. He stated that we do not have a minimum staffing requirement here for the power car, so time off requests are generally granted even on late notice. He gave a recent example of how the power shift cars do not always work. Lieutenant Smith stated that he would rather see us go to three 24/7 cars and eliminate the two power shift cars. Major Kettelman stated that this is the biggest complaint in Symmes Township has been that the residents never see the police and with three it would increase that visibility. Mr. Bryant asked a question relating to the number of cars we have. Major Kettelman stated that we have 9 vehicles here but that is because you can't drive a car 24 hours a day. He stated that each officer is assigned their own unit to drive and they are driven 12 hours a day. He stated that many of the cars that are parked on Weekly are Sycamore cars and County cars. He stated that the reason the cars are always running is because of all the equipment that needs to run in the vehicle.

Mr. Harte stated that this body just needs to make a recommendation on whether we should do a separate police levy or keep it combined with the safety services levy. He stated that the second thing to decide would be the amount.

Mrs. Lapensee stated that she also put on the smaller spreadsheet with the power car comparisons the number of calls that two to three officers make a day and per month. She stated that we have two thirds of the number of calls that Sycamore Township gets, and they have twice the staff. Major Kettelman pointed out that a lot of the calls we get here in Symmes are two man calls especially at night. Ms. Leis stated that we also have mutual aid to handle any calls that two officers may be tied up on after the power shift is gone. Lieutenant Smith stated that we are attempting to right size the police staff for the township. He shared adjacent communities staffing with the committee (Blue Ash, Loveland, Sycamore, etc.). He stated that he feels that there is enough justification to increase the number of 24/7 cars to three. Mr. Harte asked what our need is. Lieutenant Smith stated that we respond to 700 to 800 calls a month which is about $\frac{3}{4}$ of what Sycamore Township responds to. Mrs. Lapensee stated that she put the power car comparison together so we could all see that we are going to be paying for the power car regardless of attendance, so why not move to fill three cars and know that we are paying for three officers who are always in the township. Major Kettelman stated that the Sheriff's Office or anyone surrounding us is not going to continually run mutual aid for Symmes just because we have a shortage. He stated that communities will only do that for so long.

Mr. Sayles stated that it appears that we would need to have 1.4 to 1.6 mills to keep the police service at the same level we have now. He stated that if we want to increase the coverage to three officers a day, then we would need to increase that amount to 2.0 mills. Mrs. Lapensee stated yes. Ms. Leis asked what the cost increase would be. Mr. Bryant stated that if we removed the 2 power cars and went to a third full-time car, the increase is around \$500,000.00. Mrs. Lapensee stated that if we refer to the exhibits for the cost of the cars, that two full-time cars and two power shift cars cost 1.2 million in 2020, 1.3 million in 2021 and 1.38 million in 2022. She referred to the second exhibits for increasing to three full-time cars and the cost is 1.5 million in 2020. Lieutenant Smith stated that the increase is \$295,000 for 2020.

Mr. Harte asked what the bottom line would be for an increase. Mrs. Lapensee stated that we would have to do at least 2.0 mills for the police if we decided to put a separate police levy on. She stated we could save some money by sharing if we combined the money into the safety services. She stated that we would still need to decide how much carryover we will need and the duration. Ms. Leis suggested that we stay with 5 years because things may change over time.

Mrs. Lapensee stated that on the fire side, we own, operate and maintain two fire stations and all the equipment. She stated that we contract with NECC for dispatching and that the fire department owns NECC and we share the cost of operations with Loveland. Mr. Tranter stated that is why we asked the township to look at shared services since we already share with Loveland. Mrs. Lapensee stated that we did ask Loveland, Indian Hill and Montgomery and no one was interested in discussion shared services with us. Mrs. Lapensee stated that there is a spreadsheet in the packet to shows how much we pay for dispatching, number of calls, and we also pay Hamilton County for minimum calls. Mr. Bryant wanted to know if the PSAP fees were included. Mrs. Lapensee stated no (not in the spreadsheet). Mr. Harte wanted to know if we plan for a certain expense based

on trends and we only get 600 calls instead of 18,000, what happens to the money. Mrs. Lapensee stated that we would keep it and use it to push out the timeline to ask for another levy down the road. Mrs. Leis stated that we have had surplus in the past and we have lowered the millage at renewal time because of the carryover. Mr. Tranter stated that the auditor has also lowered the millage if we have too high of a carryover. Mrs. Lapensee stated that generally costs never seem to go down, they always increase.

Mrs. Lapensee asked how often we renew the personnel costs for the fire contract. Chief Huber stated that the last time we renewed our costs was five years ago. Chief Huber went over the history of the fire department and stated that Symmes pays about 50% of the total cost to run the department. He stated that we have the highest rated fire department in the state of Ohio and at the lowest cost of any township. He stated that Symmes has had the same fire department since 1885. He stated that everything needed is based on fire zones and they have performed risk analysis to determine the need for each zone. He stated that they have done a risk analysis and engaged the community to see what everyone expects service wise. He stated that for their accreditation they must meet those minimum response times 90% of the time (example respond to house within 7 minutes with 2 paramedics – they must meet that goal for that fire zone 90% of the time). He stated that if we do not meet those benchmarks, then we need to sit back down with the elected officials to see how they can. He stated that we have 4 fire stations in this district which is more than all the surrounding jurisdictions. He stated that we are not a union fire department which means we operate at a lower cost than everyone else. Mr. Harte asked if everyone was happy. Chief Ott stated that we are on the low end of pay and keep losing people to the City of Cincinnati because of the starting pay. Chief Ott stated that we are already in the hole with the levies so at a minimum we must renew the safety services levy and we still need to project out the need to make we can meet our costs in five years. He stated that they are deficit spending in the Fire Department because of increased costs on their end. He stated that they do not pay for spouses on their health care. He stated that he is asking for a 5% increase in their contract costs but will only give his employees a 2% raise.

There was a discussion over renewing the safety services levy vs adding a new police levy vs keeping the new levy combined in safety services.

Mr. Sayles asked what the 5% increase encompasses? Chief Huber stated that it does not include any capital only personnel costs. Mr. Sayles asked if that increase would get them to be more competitive? Chief Huber stated that it would help. He stated that they can be competitive at the top end, but not at the bottom end. He stated that if they can just keep people around for 3 years, then they stay. He stated that the new fire fighters are just not there to hire.

Mr. Vonderhaar stated that he recommended that they move to fund three police cars full time. He stated that he would be cautious though because if the school levy fails in November, they will be back in March at the same time we will.

Mr. Harte asked if they all agree to only put on one new levy and keep it with safety services, what does that number become? Mrs. Lapensee stated that she will have to run the scenarios again adding in a third car. Ms. Leis asked if everyone wanted to go to three cars. Mr. Bryant stated that he does not want to have to pay for a car that is not occupied. Mr. Tranter stated that he agrees, he does not agree to pay for a power car that is not filled, and we might as well pay for the third car that is full. Mr. Tranter asked if there were any other options. Ms. Leis stated that she remembers when we were all against 3 full-time cars. Mrs. Lapensee stated that we also need to take into consideration that run volume. She stated that we have anywhere from 15 to 40 runs a day with two officers (maybe 3). Lieutenant Smith listed comparisons to our neighbors for personnel costs. He stated that we are still paying far less than our neighbors for 3 full-time cars. Chief Huber pointed out that when we are busy so is everyone else and we can't rely on our neighbors to fill in the gaps. He stated that the runs continue to increase, and we are always trying to provide that same level, but you must increase personnel to accomplish that level of service.

Ms. Leis asked that we sum up what we want to do. Mrs. Lapensee stated that she needs to go back and in the three full-time cars (2.0 mills) and add it into the safety services levy. Mr. Sayles asked that she list all the funds together to compare. Mr. Bryant stated that we need to articulate what we

need and how much we need and what it is going to pay for and what we will need to give up if we do not get it.

Mr. Harte made a motion to keep the levies combined in Safety Services and Mrs. Lapensee will supply the correct number. Mr. Sayles seconded the motion. Motion carries.

Mrs. Lapensee stated that we will also have a renewal on the road levy of .9 mills. Mrs. Lapensee went over the numbers with everyone (revenues and expenditures). If we do not renew, we will only have enough money to pave roads for 2020. She stated that many people have asked for us to increase the sidewalk network but the only way to pay for additional sidewalks is to increase the road levy. She explained that we only save \$25,000 for sidewalks each year and that is not enough money to do a sidewalk project. She stated that we have talked about putting aside \$100,000 for sidewalks each year. She stated that at the end of the 5 years if we put on a new .1 mill, we would have 46% carryover. Mr. Vonderhaar asked why we need to have carryover. Mrs. Lapensee stated that you always need to have carryover so you can pay for the first quarter of your expenses into the next year because we do not receive our property tax collections until March and August. Mr. Sayles stated that we can also control when the expenses happen with the road paving. There was a discussion over a renewal vs a replacement levy. Mr. Sayles stated that he did not feel it was worth it to ask for a .1 mill levy at this time if we are going to ask for more money for safety services. Mrs. Lapensee stated that if we do not add the .1 new levy then we will not have enough money to do any more sidewalk projects. Mr. Bryant stated that we have gotten some grants to pay for sidewalks in the past.

Mr. Tranter stated that he wanted us to meet more often and continue to discuss these items throughout the year. Mrs. Lapensee suggested that we meet quarterly. Mr. Tranter stated that it was way ridiculous to wait this long to meet to discuss this. Mrs. Lapensee agreed. She stated that she will send out an email asking to meet again in January. Mr. Beck stated that he wanted to thank Mrs. Lapensee for putting these meetings together.

Mrs. Lapensee stated that she has provided a monthly report for our first month with Meeder Investments and that she obtained her certificate in commercial paper so we can invest money in that area. She stated that we have a bank account now with US Bank as they are the custodial bank.

Mrs. Lapensee stated that she provided the last monthly report for September and the list of warrants.

Mrs. Lapensee stated that at the last meeting we talked about ways to save money. She stated that she invited ESP Media to come tonight to tape our meeting. She stated that we could probably save about half of what we spend with ICRC. She stated that the biggest difference is that we would pay them per meeting vs paying a percentage of what we take in with cable franchise fees. She stated that we can also have them tape our events and our meetings would be available through a YouTube channel on our website. She stated that she is starting to look at different health brokers to see how we can structure our health insurance to save money. She stated that she is also looking at another risk insurance company – Ohio Plan – to see if we can save money with our property insurance.

Mrs. Lapensee put together a list of our township revenues and how we can legally generate money. She stated that we are limited to levies and other fees such as license plate fees. She went through the list with the committee. Mr. Vonderhaar asked why we are projecting less revenues than what we are taking in for EMS fees and lodging taxes. Mrs. Lapensee stated that she used Ms. Sims numbers for the tax budget we approved in July. Mr. Vonderhaar stated that this has been a problem in the past because we are not projecting good numbers. He stated that he feels that we have too much cushion in the budget because of that. Mrs. Lapensee went over the license plate fees and how they are distributed. She stated that we collect 3% of the hotel/motel tax. She stated that we have collected over \$200,000 for cable franchise fees and how much we have paid out to ICRC for our meetings. She stated that the FCC is working now to reduce cable franchise fees and she sees that they will disappear over the next 5 years. She went over what we took in for zoning fees and how much we pay out to Hamilton County to administer our zoning. She stated that we are upside down in what we take in vs what we pay out. She suggested looking into providing that service in house.

Mrs. Lapensee stated that we also take in fees for ambulance runs – Medicount 3000. Chief Huber stated they charge 9% to run the billing program. Mrs. Lapensee stated that we soft bill for the services. She asked if we charge for auto accidents. Chief Huber stated yes.

Meeting Adjourned 8:42 p.m.