

Town Hall

May 16, 2025

The meeting was called to order at 1:06 p.m. by chairperson Port. Trustee Hare was present. The Board Administrator Melissa Palmer and Fiscal Officer Karen Walder were present.

The following Department Head was present: Chief John Frazier.

Mr. Mueller joined the meeting at 1:08 pm.

FIRE DEPARTMENT: Discussed ClearGov requests submitted by Fire Department. Chief Frazier noted that the study report was due any day and he expects to have some preliminary information from Larson next week regarding the dormitory project. Trustees discussed the possibility of an additional Fire Department levy in the future and the need for community outreach. Chief Frazier noted that the Facebook page has been established, and the Trustees requested that social media impact be included in their annual report. The Trustees also suggested starting a program like "Coffee with a Cop".

Mr. Hare expressed desire to utilize OPIOD relief funds for educational outreach. The Trustees discussed the need to identify additional Fire Department revenue sources. Mr. Mueller proposed a replacement levy to support operations and a full-time staff of 3 people initially, expanding to 4-5. Fiscal Officer Walder noted that the Fire Department has been in equilibrium for the past several years where the budget just met recommended cash reserve, but this year is different. Additional revenue sources will be needed. Mrs. Walder also provided a rough cost estimate of \$150,000 per full-time person, however, the Trustees would first need to establish the rates of pay. Chief Frazier noted that each full-time firefighter would reduce some part-time hours, and reminded the Trustees that firefighters are permitted to work up to 52 hours a week without incurring overtime.

Trustees look forward to the strategic study report to help inform on decision making. Ms. Port inquired whether the study report would come in prior to the budget workshops and Chief Frazier thought it would. Ms. Port inquired whether the OP&F pension rate was still 24%. Mr. Hare inquired about issues with filling shifts. Chief Frazier notes that they had an average of 43 shift openings per month last year for their initial schedule. Shifts are filled using "on-call", which is not counted in the 1,500-hour maximum for part time workers.

Chief Fraizer noted that efforts are underway to eliminate replacement levies. Mrs. Walder recommended that the Trustees preserve taxpayer rollback wherever possible. Trustees discussed future Fire Department vehicle purchases and Mrs. Walder indicated that the days are passed when the Township could pay outright for an engine or ambulance. Annual vehicle reserve funding would need to meet debt obligations. Chief Frazier noted deliveries are running 4 years for engines and 3 years for ambulances. Chief Frazier stated that delivery of the new ambulance that is on order is expected June 2026.

There was a discussion about the need for additional revenue to support the Police Department operations. Ms. Port noted that 50% of Russell Township residents are over 50 years of age.

TOWN HALL: To complete the 2026 budget, Mrs. Walder suggested that the Board decide whether investment in the Town Hall is needed, and if so, what amounts and on what kind of schedule. Trustees noted some Town Hall projects that need to be done, including repair of the steps, windows, and siding. Trustees discussed whether the foundation needed attention. Frozen pipes and ability to see through the foundation in some places were noted. Trustees were unsure what the cost of a foundation would be, nor whether it would be more cost effective to rebuild the foundation in place, or to build a new foundation further back from the intersection and move the Town Hall onto the new foundation.

Mrs. Walder commented that if the Town Hall is important to this Board and they intend to continue to use it, then they need a plan to preserve it. Ms. Port stated the

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Town Hall is important and it is the Trustee's obligation to preserve it. Mr. Hare asked about the previous proposal from Chessler Group and suggested seeking a new proposal with a more limited scope. Mr. Hare will provide the specific items, and Mrs. Walder will reach out to Chessler to assess their interest. Mr. Hare mentioned identification of historical components, foundation, windows, siding, and grant possibilities as the scope. Trustees were not interested in seeking registry as a historical structure. Mrs. Palmer summed up the discussion that the Town Hall needs to be utilitarian but has modern conveniences. Ms. Port noted the Board of Elections needs the Town Hall to be handicapped accessible.

Trustees considered how much to put in the 2026 capital budget for the Town Hall but did not decide. It was suggested that the repair of the crumbling steps be done this year.

ROAD GARAGE: The Trustees discussed construction of a new road building along the same style of Auburn Twp, and moving all operations, including the fuel pumps, salt dome, and firing range, to the lot next to the Police Department. Feasibility and impact on neighboring properties was briefly discussed.

Ms. Port suggested a bond or levy would be needed to secure funds for the construction, also noting that a sale of the current property could offset costs. Mr. Mueller and Ms. Port expressed interest in selling the property once all operations were moved to the new location.

COMMUNITY ROOM LANDSCAPE DESIGN: Mrs. Palmer noted the materials sent by Rob Morgan for the Trustees to review and said Mr. Morgan is anxious to get the plans approved before June 13th to take advantage of the growing season. The estimate for the project is \$19,000.

The Trustees discussed the associated pathway to the corner, a platform and Amphitheatre space, and the need for additional parking. The Trustees agreed that additional parking would take precedence. Mr. Hare noted that with a maximum occupancy of 122, parking for 60 cars could be involved. The Trustees proposed having a special meeting on May 20 at 10:00 am to discuss the project.

MEMORIAL DAY: Ms. Port went over Memorial Day assignments. Mrs. Walder asked the Trustees to look at the cliff edge to assess whether the wire fencing should be extended.

Ms. Port made the motion to adjourn. Mr. Hare seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:17 pm.

Kristina Port, Chair

Karen Walder, Fiscal Officer