

**WARWICK TOWNSHIP**  
Board of Supervisors' Public Work Session Meeting with Warwick Fire Company  
**DECEMBER 14, 2009**

Members Present: Judith A. Algeo, Esq., Chair  
John W. Cox, Vice Chairman  
Edward P. Thompson, Member

Others Present: Gail Weniger, Township Manager  
Bryan McAdam, P.E., Township Engineer  
Linda Grant, Recording Secretary  
Phil Ramos, Warwick Fire Company  
Mark Surrusco, Warwick Fire Company  
Pat McCarty, Warwick Fire Company

■ **CALL TO ORDER:**

The Warwick Township Board of Supervisors' December 14, 2009 public meeting, held at Warwick Township Administration Office, 1733 Township Greene, Jamison, PA., was called to order at 7:08 p.m., by Chair, Judith Algeo who then led attendees in the pledge of allegiance.

■ **ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Ms. Algeo announced that Warwick Township Administrative offices will be closed on Thursday, December 24 and Friday, December 25.

■ **WORK SESSION ITEM:**

⇒ Warwick Fire Company – Discussion of New Station

Phil Ramos distributed his meeting notes, listing an outline of discussions the fire company has had with the Township since 2002 (exhibit A). Mr. Ramos noted that the Board had approved the plan to use the Meyer Way-WaWa site, the fire tax referendum was approved, the voters said yes which increased 3 mills to 5 mills. The fire company has had an engineer and an architect consider the WaWa site for the new fire house and then the project fell through. Mr. Ramos stated the fire company has looked at other available properties along York Road and in November 2009, announced that they would build at their current site. The current construction estimate is \$150 per square foot which comes out to approximately 3 million dollars for the construction, tear down of the firehouse and the use of a steel building to temporarily store equipment. The steel building can eventually be used for the banquet hall.

Bryan McAdam, Township Engineer, presented a drawing depicting the layout of the two-story building as it adjoins surrounding property.

Phil notes there will be a need for parking relief for the banquet hall. Mr. Ramos also talked about estimates to replace the thirty three year old tanker, which could cost from \$275,000 to 350,000. Mr. Ramos said the fire company has a building committee and they will be meeting in the beginning of January. They hope to have cost estimates and information from the architect. Mr. Ramos notes that with the current cost of steel, the 3 million may come to 2.5 million.

Mark Surrusco, fire company treasurer, distributed a cost analysis, noting that with the move to Meyer Way, they would have benefitted from proceeds of the sale of the York Road property. Mr. Surrusco pointed out that donations primarily cover operating costs and lengthy discussion took place. Mr. Surrusco believes that the additional taxes for the firehouse are necessary for the project to be financially viable. During this discussion, Mr. Thompson asked why the fire company did not apply for the stimulus grant. Mr. Surrusco said it was because they did not own the property at the WaWa location. Mr. Thompson reports that Mr. Surrusco talked the fire company out of applying for the grant and pointed out that they owned the York Road property and should have applied for a grant for that property. Mr. Thompson stated that the notes read tonight were a one-sided account of what has taken place and the reason for no grant application isn't that the township manager said there isn't enough time, it is that Mark Surrusco talked the members out of it.

Mr. Surrusco asked about the fire tax being taken away from the Fire Company and wants to know how the decision was made and when it will be returned to the fire company. Ms. Algeo said the Township looked hard at the budget and recognized that the residents could not sustain a further tax increase. The Board then decided to not assess the mills for the new fire company since the plan was not imminent. Ms. Algeo said that we (the Board) cannot say when the money will come back, but we will revisit the question at budget time

John Cox said the plan may be a bit ambitious for the state of today's economy. Mr. Ramos believes we need to make sure this is at least a fifty year firehouse. Mr. Ramos notes that in ten or fifteen years, there may be paid daytime responders. Mr. Cox notes that there is concern regarding the future of volunteer fire companies throughout the state and notes that the fire company representatives here today have been here for years. Mr. Ramos also notes membership has been rising over the past few years

Mr. Thompson asked about a pole building requiring minimal heating and simple basics, noting the cost to convert it to a banquet hall may be very high. Phil spoke of a possibility of a catering company being interested and offering to design and install the kitchen for the space. Ms. Weniger, township manager, noted the fire company needs to be careful because zoning permits one use on one lot and a private caterer would not fit the zoning. Phil states that the building would still remain the property of the fire company and would be a rental.

Mr. Thompson explained the mound of dirt the fire company spoke of for parking spaces would be a problem for the Outback should Heritage decide to change hours of operation of their building because that would lose parking spaces for Outback. He reports that these are reserved parking on a plan. Mr. Thompson asked why a steel building is needed as opposed to building the new building behind the existing building. Mr. Ramos reports that CKS gave them the plan that showed that as an option. Bryan Mc Adam, engineer, refuted the statement and believes that it may be possible to build behind the existing building.

Katrina Harding, Director of Planning and Zoning, noted that storm water management needs to be looked into if the fire company uses any of the next lot. Ms. Weniger asked if the project could be phased. Phil said phasing was discussed but it is believed that construction

costs are likely to be cheaper to do everything at once. Ms. Weniger clarified that the financial document presented represented only the replacement for the firehouse and not the ambulance.

Mr. Surrusco said it also included the steel structure to house the equipment during construction. Ms. Weniger noted that the Township would have to incur debt to build an ambulance station and that further tax increases would be required to cover the debt.

Judith Algeo suggested that the fire company should be thinking of the word "regional", explaining that she is scared that somewhere down the road, people will not be able to afford a paid fire company. Ms. Algeo also asked if sharing a tanker with another fire company has been discussed. The fire company notes that since there are areas in the Township that still do not have (public) water, that moves the tanker too far away. Ms. Algeo again stated that thinking of possible regionalization may be wise. Ms. Weniger noted we need to make sure this is a very long term fire house and noted that if regionalization became a fact, we wouldn't want to find that the firehouse should have been located elsewhere.

Ms. Algeo believes an ambulance service has to be factored in, but notes that Warminster tried and could not sustain here because of too few calls. Phil believes that if the laws change to reimburse the ambulance company rather than the patient, that would be a help. Phil said that the fire company will meet with Warminster to find out what they would need. Mr. Cox cautions the fire company to make it clear that there is no obligation to an ambulance company. There was further discussion regarding the ability of an ambulance company to be financially sustainable without addition tax dollars.

Ms. Harding suggested that there are green grants that allow money up front, if the fire company could prove energy savings over so many years.

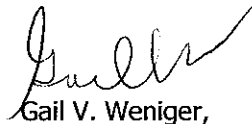
Greg Mester, resident, stated that three million dollars is a lot to spend right now, specifically with this economy and asks what assurance we have that in ten years, we will still have a volunteer fire company. Mr. Mester said we should be looking very hard at this. Mr. Cox agrees and wonders if it would be worthwhile to have DCED do a study on all township emergency services. Pat McCarty is opposed to having more studies and putting this off even longer. Ms. Algeo reminds this has already been discussed since at least 2000. Mr. Ramos said there is enough in reserve to get the process started now. Mr. Thompson wants more input since we are using taxpayers money. Mr. Thompson feels strongly that the Board should be part of the process and he wants to be included in all building committee meetings. Mr. Mester is concerned that the Township will have no equity. Mr. Ramos noted that if the fire company defaults, the Township would be able to sell off equipment, etc. Mr. Ramos reports that there is an agreement with the state that says the Township gets the assets if they dissolve. The Board requested a copy of the agreement. Ms. Algeo agreed that we need to protect the township and sees a legal agreement giving the Township equity in the new building.

Mr. McCarty asked how it is possible that the Township can decide on changing the tax. Ms. Algeo explained that the Board of Supervisors looked at what was going on with the Township budget and we adopted a resolution that reflected less mills for the fire company and then raised the mills in the general fund to cover expenses. Ms. Algeo notes that she has explained this previously. Mr. Mc Carty wants to know what document he should cite that gives the supervisors the authority to tax. Ms. Weniger noted the Second Class Township Code and the local tax enabling act gives that authority and agreed to send the section of the code that lists the taxes allowed to Phil Ramos.

■ **ADJOURNMENT:**

The Warwick Township December 14, 2009 public work session meeting with the Warwick Fire Company was adjourned at 8:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Gail V. Weniger,  
Township Manager/Secretary

These minutes were approved at the  
Board of Supervisors' meeting held: