

## **MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING OF JANUARY 5, 2004**

The regular meeting of the Conemaugh Township Board of Supervisors was called to order at 6:44 p.m. on January 5, 2004 by Chairman Calvin Gindlesperger. Board members present were Calvin Gindlesperger, Chairman, David Hart, Secretary-Treasurer, and Robert Rouser, Vice-Chairman. Solicitor James Beener was present.

Pledge to the Flag.

### **FLOOR OPENED TO PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS:**

None.

### **MINUTES:**

There was a motion by Mr. Rouser, seconded by Mr. Hart, to accept the minutes of the regular meeting of December 17, 2003. Roll call vote: Mr. Rouser – yes, Mr. Hart – yes, and Mr. Gindlesperger – abstained. Motion carried, two yes, one abstention.

### **BILLS:**

There was a motion by Mr. Rouser, seconded by Mr. Hart, to pay the bills for the month of January 2004 in the amount of \$496.59 for the General Fund, and \$3,521.09 for the Liquid Fuels Fund. Roll call vote: Mr. Rouser – yes, Mr. Hart – yes, and Mr. Gindlesperger – yes. Motion carried unanimously.

### **POLICE REPORT:**

The police report as submitted by Acting Chief, Sgt. James McKnight for the month of December 2003 for Conemaugh Township and Benson Borough was read. There was a motion by Mr. Hart, seconded by Mr. Rouser, to accept the police report for the month of December 2003 for the Township and Benson Borough. Roll call vote: Mr. Hart – yes, Mr. Rouser – yes, and Mr. Gindlesperger – yes. Motion carried unanimously.

### **PERSONS TO BE HEARD:**

None.

### **CORRESPONDENCE:**

None.

### **OLD BUSINESS:**

None.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

1. **NEW TELEPHONE SYSTEM:** Chairman Gindlesperger stated that the Township's current telephone system has one line coming into the building and one person answering the telephone for all departments. The following quotes were received for an automative answering system (all companies were given the same specifications): Laurel Net Services - \$6,575, Team Telecom Services - \$5,155, and Verizon - \$9,451.06.

It was also noted that this would free up the secretaries and the public would choose where they wanted their call to go. There was a motion by Mr. Hart, seconded by Mr. Rouser, to accept the lower bidder of Team Telecom Services in the amount of \$5,155 for the installation of an automative telephone system in the Township Offices, contingent upon review by the Solicitor. Roll call vote: Mr. Hart – yes, Mr. Rouser – yes, and Mr. Gindlesperger – yes. Motion carried unanimously.

2. **FOUR POLICE OFFICERS BACK TO PART-TIME STATUS:** Mr. Hart stated that at the November 2003 meeting, the Supervisors approved the promotion of four part-time police officers to full-time positions. Mr. Hart stated that there was nothing against these officers, but he did not want to base these full-time positions on money the Township did not have. He felt that the landfill money should not be used to cover this cost, and he felt that there was no need for the second police car. There was a motion by Mr. Hart, seconded by Mr. Gindlesperger, to lay off the following full-time police officers back to part-time status as they were before: John Todaro, Michael Popma, Daniel Gonos, and Angelo DiRosa. Roll call vote: Mr. Hart – yes, Mr. Gindlesperger – yes, and Mr. Rouser – no. Motion carried, two yes, one no.

3. **CHANGE OF ACTING POLICE CHIEF:** Mr. Hart indicated that the Township's Police Chief was presently serving in Kosovo and was due back sometime in March 2004. The current Acting Police Chief was Sgt. James McKnight. At this point, there was a motion by Mr. Hart, seconded by Mr. Gindlesperger, to appoint Officer Howard Jackson to replace Sgt. James McKnight as Acting Police Chief. Roll call vote: Mr. Hart – yes, Mr. Gindlesperger – yes, and Mr. Rouser – no. Motion carried, two yes, one no.

#### **FLOOR OPENED TO PUBLIC COMMENT:**

**Ernest Spory**, resident of Ham Road and EMA Coordinator for the Township, wished to state that he works closely with the police and he felt that the motion putting the officers back to part-time status was sticking a knife in the back of every resident in the Township. He felt that these officers were needed, it was a bad move, and he was objecting to this as a citizen of the Township. Chairman Gindlesperger thanked Mr. Spory for his comments and noted that things would just be going back to the way they were before these officers were made full-time. Mr. Spory further stated that many part-time police officers have left the Township in the past after the Township had paid for their training and uniforms, etc.

**Terry Ruparcic**, resident of Kring Street and Conemaugh Township EMS, stated that this police force is the best he has ever seen. Mr. Ruparcic felt the consistency with the full-time police was needed and he did not want to see the Township lose them.

**Jerry Bellak**, resident of Carpenters Park and Conemaugh Township part-time police officer, spoke about the SERT that was established four years ago for hostage and conflict situations. He noted that it was impossible to get a quick response with part-time

officers. He further stated that the officers were not here for themselves, there were here for the people—they put their lives on the line for the public.

**John Todaro**, one of the full-time police officers placed back to part-time status, stated that he was certified to inspect the trucks going into the landfill, noting that the truck violations needed more police action to protect the residents. He further stated that the State has mandated a new accident report system, and it takes more time to complete an accident report now. Mr. Todaro indicated that the purpose of the additional full-time officers was to protect the residents when the other officer was tied up on truck detail or an accident, etc., and not to rely on outside forces for assistance.

**Pat Sleek**, resident of Mossy Lane, stated that it was a big mistake eliminating these officers, noting that she had a burglary in the past that was never solved.

**Bob Miller**, resident of Thomas Mills, stated that the CTMA was broke and wanted to know what the Supervisors were going to do about it. Chairman Gindlesperger stated that this was the Board's first meeting and he did not know at this time. Mr. Miller said that this problem has been going on for twelve years and the Supervisors should have a plan. Chairman Gindlesperger indicated that the Supervisors did appoint a new member to the CTMA Board this evening. Mr. Miller stated that he had asked for a whole new CTMA Board. Chairman Gindlesperger said that the Supervisors could only ask for resignations, they could not force resignations – only a judge could remove the members. Mr. Miller felt it was up to the Supervisors to go to court and take care of the matter. He further complained about the Township spending his money to install sewers within the Township that he does not benefit from, again stating that the Supervisors have no plans to correct this.

**Steve Buncich**, resident of Western Avenue, stated that when he was leaving the Township building during last month's meeting, a neighboring police department was coming in with prisoners, which a Township officer had to be present for. He said that he then proceeded to the Davidsville traffic light; a vehicle accident had occurred there, and officers were being called out for additional help. Mr. Buncich noted that the State Police take too long to respond, which jeopardizes the police officers and residents.

**John Todaro**, Township police officer, wished to ask when the layoffs were effective because hearings were scheduled. He further noted that he was scheduled to work a full shift tomorrow at 11:00. Mr. Hart informed Mr. Todaro to check with the Acting Chief concerning the hearings, and that he should come in to work tomorrow as scheduled. Mr. Todaro was also informed that the Acting Chief would make a new schedule. Solicitor Beener stated that the officers should continue to show up as scheduled to work. Mr. Todaro stated that the law firm of Gary Lightman & Associates would be representing the police officers.

**Sam Mazzaresse**, resident of Hollsopple and Elected Township Auditor, asked if Mr. Gindlesperger would be a full-time roadmaster. He was answered that Mr. Gindlesperger would be a part-time roadmaster. Mr. Mazzaresse then asked how many hours Mr.

Gindlesperger would be working. The answer was that the hours Mr. Gindlesperger worked would depend on what the Township needed.

**Joe Stevens**, resident of Hollsopple, suggested that the Supervisors temporarily put a hold on the motion to lay off the four new full-time police officers until the matter could be further reviewed. He stated that the revenue from the landfill was going to increase and this should justify keeping these officers on as full-time until the Supervisors have a chance to see what was going on. Mr. Stevens suggested a 30 or 90-day hold period.

At this point, Mr. Rouser wished to state that the reason these four officers were promoted to full-time at the November 2003 meeting was that the landfill did increase its tonnage since they had received their new permit. Mr. Rouser stated that he could not find a better place to spend this extra money. He felt these officers were doing a fine job and the money was there to pay for them.

**John Todaro**, Township Police Officer, asked Mr. Rouser if there was a surplus in the 2004 budget. Mr. Rouser answered, yes.

**Shawn Adams**, resident of Moonshine Hollow Road and Chief of Conemaugh Township Volunteer Fire Company, asked if the Supervisors had any plans or suggestions that would benefit the volunteer fire companies, referring to the problem of duplicate services that the Township presently has with its fire companies. Mr. Hart asked how Mr. Adams felt about the possibility of the fire companies merging. Mr. Adams stated that he could only speak for his company and felt it had to happen for the benefit and safety of the residents. He further stated that volunteers put in many hours and training and are not paid, noting that the volunteer status is dying. Mr. Adams felt that the current volunteer membership was not enough to efficiently fight a fire and save lives. He also indicated that other equipment was needed. He stated that other companies are purchasing the same equipment, and they are competing against each other. Mr. Adams also said that good water sources are hard to find. He indicated that the problems with the volunteer fire companies are on going and getting worse, and that these problems are the politicians' problems.

At this point, Mr. Rouser told Mr. Adams to stop, stating that the Supervisors had a meeting in the past and offered funding to do a feasibility study on the fire companies possibly merging. Mr. Adams noted that all the fire companies have to agree to do this. He was here to tell the Supervisors that there was a very bad problem with the safety of the Township and it was up to the Supervisors to address it. Chairman Gindlesperger stated that the Supervisors agree that there was a problem and that a meeting was needed; noting that if all four fire companies cannot get together, it would not work. He would like to set up a meeting this month with the fire companies. Mr. Adams requested that Mr. Spory, EMA coordinator, also be present.

**Jerry Bellak**, resident and Township police officer, spoke on behalf of the police, stating that they do the best job they can do, but he can understand the Township's money situation. Mr. Bellak wished to see everyone band together and asked everyone present

who was in favor of holding the decision off for 90 days until the Supervisors see how well the landfill monies come in to stand up. A group of people stood up.

Mr. Rouser made a motion to hold off the decision to lay off the four new full-time police officers to part-time status for 90 days. Solicitor Beener informed Mr. Rouser that since he had voted no on the original motion involving the lay off of these officers, this particular motion had to come from a Supervisor who had voted yes to laying them off. No further motions were made on this matter.

**Shawn Adams**, resident and Chief of Conemaugh Township Volunteer Fire Company, asked the Supervisors if they had discussed the 1 mill of tax that was in the budget for the fire companies. He was answered that this had not been discussed.

**Joyce Graham**, resident of Hollsopple, wanted to know why the Supervisors were putting these officers back to part-time status, tax dollars were spent to train them. She wanted to know why there is only one officer on a shift at a time when the Supervisors are told repeatedly that more than one officer was needed. Ms. Graham felt that if burglars knew that the one officer was tied up on a call, they would know that the rest of the Township was not being covered at that time. She requested that the Supervisors reconsider their decision right now—they were taxpayers.

**Shawn Adams**, resident and Chief of C.T. VFD, noted that the fire companies have to come out to cover traffic control that the police should be doing.

**Mike McKool**, resident of Edgar Croyle Road, felt that as long as money from the landfill was paying for these officers it was okay, but if not, then the officers should go back to part-time status. Mr. Hart indicated that the Supervisors could possibly reconsider this decision, if landfill money could pay for these officers.

**Bob Fatula**, Township police detective, asked what the reason was for replacing Sgt. McKnight with Howard Jackson as Acting Police Chief. Mr. Hart answered that he felt that Mr. Jackson would do just as good of a job or better. Mr. Fatula asked if the Supervisors had reviewed the “numbers” regarding work performed over the years. Mr. Hart answered, yes. Mr. Fatula stated that the Supervisors have taken a man that has no rank or performance and put him over the rest of the police force. Mr. Hart answered, yes; the Supervisors had the right to appoint anyone they want to this position. Mr. Fatula asked if Mr. Hart knew Mr. Jackson on a personal basis. Mr. Hart answered, yes. Mr. Fatula then asked if this was the only decision, or was Mr. Jackson going to be detective also. Mr. Hart answered that this was the only decision. Mr. Fatula stated that he has been a police officer for the Township for nine years and has always performed his best, and it seems his bosses do not look at his performance; he wanted to know why he could not advance. Mr. Hart explained that this was just an “acting” position, noting also that Mr. McKnight was still Sergeant.

**Angelo DiRosa**, one of the full-time police officers placed back to part-time status, asked why Howard Jackson was placed over Sgt. McKnight, stating that the officers work with

these two and the Sergeant was fantastic. He stated that by putting Mr. Jackson as Acting Chief, the Supervisors passed over the rest of the officers, and that did not make sense. Mr. DiRosa stated that the “numbers” on performance are available for review.

**Vince Zangaglia**, Township Police Corporal, stated that Sgt. McKnight has been Acting Chief for most of a year and he personally felt that Sgt. McKnight was doing an excellent job; he disagreed with the decision of putting Howard Jackson on as Acting Chief. Mr. Zangaglia stated that the morale in the Department was going to drop and the public needed to know that.

**Bob Fatula**, Township police detective, stated that everything was built on the chain of command and when the Supervisors jump someone out of rank and place that person over the rest of the officers; that was asking for trouble. Mr. Fatula noted that the Supervisors made an individual Acting Chief who had told him to his face that he did not care about the Township.

At this point, Chairman Gindlesperger asked Mr. Fatula if anyone had told him that he was loosing his job. Mr. Fatula answered that the Supervisors just told him they did not care what he did – morale would drop, but he would still do his job.

**Joyce Graham**, resident, asked if Sgt. McKnight had any other job. The answer was, no. She then asked if Howard Jackson would suspend his personal construction job to concentrate on the Acting Chief’s position. Mr. Hart stated that Mr. Jackson would give full time to his position – eight hours. She replied that the position is 24 hours.

**John Todaro**, Township police officer, asked if they were ordered to come back as part-time. Solicitor Beener stated that they should report when scheduled to work. Mr. Todaro noted that the officers did take an hourly rate pay cut for the full-time position, and he wanted to know which pay rate he would be coming to work for. Mr. Hart stated that the motion was to place

them back to part-time status, so they would work for the part-time rate. Mr. Todaro wanted to verify that there was no tax increase in the 2004 budget and that there was a surplus. He was answered, yes. Mr. Todaro asked if the benefits would be vacated also. He was answered, yes.

**Jerry Bellak**, Township police officer, wished to note that Howard Jackson was the only officer to refuse to participate in SERT, and again asked the Supervisors to reconsider the four full-time positions for 90 days.

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

1. There will be a Special Township Supervisors’ Meeting scheduled for January 21, 2004 at 7:00 p.m. for various zoning matters and other business deemed necessary.

2. The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Township Supervisors will be held on Wednesday, February 18, 2004 at 7:00 p.m.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

There was a motion by Mr. Rouser, seconded by Mr. Hart, to adjourn the meeting at 7:51 p.m.

Submitted by,

**(signed) David A. Hart, Secretary/Treasurer**