

**Village of Whitehouse
Village Council Meeting As A
Committee of the Whole
Village Hall, Whitehouse, OH
6:30pm February 13th, 2024**

CALL TO ORDER – ROLL CALL

Meeting called to order at 6:30pm by President of Council Louann Artiaga.

Council Members Present: Dave Riggensbach, Carrie Tuohy, Steve Fine, Steve Connelly, Larry Yunker and President of Council Louann Artiaga

Council Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Administrator Jordan Daugherty, Deputy Administrator Joshua Hartbarger, Fire Chief Jason Francis, Public Works Director Steve Pilcher, Council Clerk Nicole Hartbarger, Mayor Richard Bingham

Guests Present: Chuck Kethel, Bruce Robertson, Wendy Gehring, Timothy Pedro, Karen Gerhardinger (online)

Motion by Councilman Dave Riggensbach, seconded by Councilman Larry Yunker to approve the minutes of the January 9th, 2024 Committee of the Whole meeting. 6 ayes

CITIZEN COMMENTS ON COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE AGENDA ITEMS

Council President Artiaga asked if there were any citizen comments to be made regarding the agenda items. There were none.

FINANCE

ALS Contract

Administrator Daugherty asked for Deputy Administrator Hartbarger to start out by giving a history on the ALS Contract – he was Fire Chief during the time these discussions began. Hartbarger stated that this is a long time coming - about 7 years of discussion on reform/change/what's going to happen with ALS in Lucas County. A lot of questions like how sustainable is the current ALS system that we have, what do we actually want it to look like going forward – these were discussed with all Lucas County fire chiefs. Hartbarger shared that there were good portions of contract and system previously, then some portions that were counterproductive to provide good care to the residents. The discussion quickly changed to Lucas County saying why don't the fire departments just handle their own ALS. From there, many ideas and discussions occurred to get to where we are now with the new/updated contract. First idea was to divide up entirely the contract money which would not have benefitted Whitehouse as much as it would other locales; the contract offer now has been updated to a fair offer – as good as we're going to get.

Hartbarger asked Fire Chief Francis to add additional/current insight. Chief Francis shared there are 13 departments along with the Lucas County Commissioner that have been in discussions to get the current contract being decided upon. Chief Francis commented that ALS is not EMS in general - all this contract does is stipulate ALS ambulances going to the scene of emergencies. With Waterville/Whitehouse/Providence being in same region, it has

been decided that Waterville and Whitehouse will respond to Providence with ALS required responses. Chief Francis believes this is a good contract though we are losing about half of the current \$804k.

Administrator Daugherty commented that how do you agree to a contract that cuts revenue in half – it's a valid question. He says we have done all the negotiating we can and are getting as good as we absolutely could. He stated the recent organizational change has allowed us to make the way for the new ALS requirements to be upheld in the village – new contract allows for one paramedic and one EMT-Basic where old contract was two paramedics, organizational change fiscally allows for this set up going forward. He reiterated that this is not something that we/Whitehouse/Administration initiated. Daugherty stated that we were hoping for parts of the current county system and keep what you like, fix what you don't – this never worked out with the county discussions. But now, we will be able to be more tailored services.

Some questions and discussions from Council members:

- Councilwoman Artiaga asked prior to this new contract, we had LS9 – what has changed to warrant Waterville sharing in that revenue where it was all Whitehouse expense and revenue before. Deputy Administrator Hartbarger commented that the newly formed Co-Op is driving the shared revenue, it is now a collaborative approach due to the co-op contract. He did confirm that the previous LS9 contract could be pulled at any moment; the new contract will have at least a 90 days notification built in. He also shared that prior to this new contract LS9 could be called to respond anywhere in Lucas County – now it is more tailored to just our region. Hartbarger commented that giving Waterville some of the revenue will only help us here in Whitehouse as we all need ALS coverage going forward. Chief Francis commented that with the contract we are only required to have one ALS ambulance, but due to staffing updates, we will actually have two; he said this is the same with Waterville, we will be able to deploy 4 going forward.
- Councilman Riggensbach asked how much training do we need to see from Waterville to get up to the same level as Whitehouse paramedics, since Whitehouse housed the Life Squad up to this point. Chief Francis confirmed they do already have the same capabilities currently with their trained paramedics. Riggensbach also asked if we are receiving any assets. Chief Francis confirmed Whitehouse will receive one Life Squad ambulance, cardiac monitors, cot, load system, stair chair, auto CPR device - Waterville will be getting their own assets from the county. Councilman Riggensbach asked if there will be an increase to billing revenue. Chief Francis informed that we do soft billing from Whitehouse directly, if not paid by person transported it does go to insurance company – will be billed by whoever transports between Whitehouse and Waterville.
- Councilman Fine thanked all for the great explanations – he is asking for confirmation on the two ALS units, will those both be dispatchable under new system. Chief Francis confirms yes, dispatch will be able to decipher the Paramedic or Basic ambulances and dispatch accordingly.
- Councilman Yunker confirmed that there will be two ALS squads and we currently have two medic units on Whitehouse fire side - are we planning to phase one out. Chief Francis says that initially there will be all three in service, only two will be ALS capable to save on costs. Yunker is also asking to confirm on supplies - in past

several things/supplies we've got through Lucas County including drug refills, etc. Chief Francis confirms that yes we will now be responsible for all of that separately.

- Councilwoman Artiaga asked to confirm if there is a date when they want a signature/agreement for the County to help decide when Council needs to act/pass legislation. Administrator Daugherty stated they are to get this fully completed next month.
- Councilman Fine stated that the contract is clear on standards for response times, but asked what if we don't meet the standard, are both Waterville and Whitehouse responsible. Deputy Administrator Hartbarger confirmed that only the entity that failed to establish the response time numbers is held responsible.
- Councilwoman Artiaga commented on response times, now that St Lukes is closed – is there now a new determination on where the ambulance should go. Chief Francis stated that the closest, most appropriate hospital based on the call and it is up to the paramedics judgement with getting them to the best location for their current situation. With this, Hartbarger clarified it is response time in question which is time of dispatch to time on scene.
- Councilwoman Artiaga asked what action Admin is looking for from council this evening. Administrator Daugherty stated that Admin is ready to go - asking the Committee to recommend to council for approval if they are ready.

Motion by Councilman Riggensbach, seconded by Councilman Fine to approve the reviewed ALS contract and recommend to Council for signing and approval as written. 6 ayes

Revenue Source Review

Administrator Daugherty shared that the provided information to review is the same format in general that has been used for the last few years. He commented that the general fund is primary funder for most municipal services – the village is not allowed to go into deficit fund balances per auditor requirements. He goes on to explain the five year snap shot – top is break out of revenue, shows what percent of general fund line item is represented. A lot are trending on average increases but shows a good view of where funds come from. He shared that the services that are provided through the general fund are listed in the format, 60% safety services. Daugherty commented that a lot of times he is asked what a transfer is – general fund, funds general departments but also only fund that can go outside and fund special revenue or enterprise funds. Historically, the general fund has supplemented Life Squad 9 and streets, without the Whitehouse Income Tax these two areas would be chronically run in the red. He shared that the heart of this supporting information is looking at the bottom left box, there is a slightly positive look when looking at beginning for 2024; a larger carry over from 2023 than anyone predicted – split between two things: 1) spent less than 91% of appropriated funds and 2) changed investment approach – village is allowed to invest in T-bills/federal government sponsored items, Star Ohio which is a big state portfolio with low risk low returns, and standard banking with different interest rates. This past year T-bills did really well and the village made some changes with our bank. Have not seen anything like this for about 14 or so years.

Some questions and discussions from Council members:

- Councilwoman Artiaga asked how much better off projected we are now than a year ago. Administrator Daugherty shared that we are about \$700-\$800k better projected.
- Administrator Daugherty commented that we need to seal that good news in, because the trend does not change with expenses/spending going up, overall projection does not change – it was a good year but it is not sustainable to not use the money that is

appropriated as we have done recently – we will need new revenue stream intervention.

- Councilwoman Artiaga asked if there is a projection on loss of revenue from Ardagh, Life Squad 9, dispatch increases, etc. Administrator Daugherty commented that it is far north of \$1M in just the general fund. Councilwoman Artiaga commented that this is a huge number and details that we need to include in our education to the public as all of those increases and loss of funds occurred.
- Administrator Daugherty commented that it is very hard to accurately estimate projections past two years. There can be an upcoming market and legal correction with income taxes, these things are impossible to predict.
- Councilman Fine commented that he wants to commend the staff for managing expenses so well, the uptick is not all out of our control, it is because staff worked so hard to solve problems.
- Councilwoman Artiaga commented that it seems we now have a little more time, maybe a year. Do we need to be in a hurry to determine what we are going to put on the ballot in November considering the fact the school is putting on a levy, etc. – should we take the bit of extra time we’ve been granted and deep dive into a resident survey, find out what residents are willing to support, what cuts are appropriate and what we are not willing to cut, etc. She asked, do we want to be competing for taxpayer dollars – gives us time to educate the public.
- Councilman Connelly agrees, he feels we do have some time, mood is already a little sour, economic outlook is not great especially with supercharged emotions with it being a presidential election as well. He asked, do we take this time dial in the survey to figure out what people want then with a fresh slate next year figure out the next step.
- Councilman Yunker commented that a deficit isn’t projected until 2027, but with increase in tax or revenue, it’ll take a year before we even see the effect of that projection/increase. He asked about the comment ‘likely going away’ next to fire contracts – what is that. Administrator Daugherty shared this is Swanton Twp fire contract – it will be a conversation on do we want to continue this – comment is there to keep it on the radar that it might be going away.
- Councilwoman Artiaga asked what action tonight from the Committee. Administrator Daugherty said that from the Admin perspective, and him looking at this for 17 years, his recommendation is that council be in lock step that they will take action on something in the future but take the next year to get out there, door to door, campaign for more funds, get people interested, get the word out while it’s not under the guise of ‘urgent’. Include more education, townhalls, etc. He agrees with previous comments that currently lots of competition for taxpayer funds, volatile time right now, and we have another year.
- Councilwoman Artiaga asked do we want this to be a continuing topic for Committee of the Whole – how to implement somethings like survey, education, revenue ideas, etc. All of council agreed with this and this will be a topic on the Committee of the Whole agenda going forward.

GENERAL

Review and Discussion of Proposed Survey Questions

Councilman Rigganbach started the discussion with his opinion on the resident survey, as much as we would like to have open text questions, he feels we would have higher response rate with multiple choice and yes/no questions – being able to complete in 5 minutes or less.

Councilman Fine commented that he does think multiple choice is great, but feels we need some specific question that require open response. Councilman Connelly agreed it could be a mix of both, yes/no questions with an open area to ‘share more here’. Councilwoman Tuohy shared that we don’t want people viewing it as homework and not wanting to take the time to respond.

Councilman Connelly shared that he is very comfortable drafting and helping figure out balance of questions. He did this type of market research for 20 years. He also suggested we can ask if they want to be followed up with/contacted. He thinks it would make sense to come up with a few versions of what this survey could look like, then take a few meetings to dial it down and make final decisions.

Councilwoman Artiaga commented that we need to shorten the list of questions down a bit as to not overwhelm. Councilman Fine commented that maybe we need to focus on what we want to learn before focusing on questions specifically. Councilwoman Artiaga stated that we need to be very cautious in how questions are worded – do not want to be viewed as soliciting answers and trying to lean them in one direction or the other. Councilman Fine asked do we want to just ask questions or do we want to educate as well. Artiaga commented that she thinks we can do both, in 2009 council members went door to door seeking answers from residents – this could maybe be a way to educate the public at the same time. She also asked how do we want to go about collecting responses.

Administrator Daugherty commented that there are several things we’d like to accomplish, but priority should be resident engagement. Education is going to take a year – getting feedback or a sample of feedback will be a challenge as well. If anything, it is to encourage engagement with all residents.

Councilwoman Artiaga asked Mayor Bingham for any comments on items that have been discussed during the meeting so far. Mayor Bingham commented that he fully supports the ALS contract, it is as good as we’re going to get – there is good and bad – it is a three year contract, we can say we’re done or the county can too. The equipment we are getting is older and may need to be replaced – this burden is now on Whitehouse. But he agrees, we need to move forward. Mayor Bingham commented that on the revenue discussion – with the \$700k revenue cushion we have timing is everything, this next year is critical for community engagement. He said the survey is critical, need to find out information – but it will also focus on engagement as Administrator Daugherty mentioned. Bingham wants to start the engagement now and continue it all year.

Councilwoman Artiaga asked how we want to proceed for survey questions going forward - continue at Committee of the Whole, get draft completed, etc. Council commented that we need to get a draft completed, the sooner the better. Artiaga commented that she will defer to Mayor Bingham to accept volunteers or appoint them as he sees fit for the survey creation.

At this time Councilwoman Artiaga said a quick welcome and thank you to Tim Pedro, Mayor of Waterville, for joining our meeting.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Council President Artiaga asked if there were any general citizen comments to be made.

Tim Pedro, Waterville Mayor – 514 Cedar Lane, Waterville: Mayor Pedro offered his opinion as the Waterville mayor and experience with conducting surveys that 5-10 questions

should be plenty. He shared that engagement is key, as has been discussed. He shared that he and Mayor Bingham talk frequently – he is here to say he enjoys our neighbors in Whitehouse. The City of Waterville and the Mayor is pleased to be here and support Whitehouse as needed. Mayor Pedro commented that he has no agenda other than to say how supportive Waterville is and looks forward to continuing to be a team. Councilman Fine asked Mayor Pedro of any visions for the region that we can be working on. Pedro commented that the school system is the anchor of our communities – Western Lucas County is one of the areas with the opportunity for the most development. He commented that our number one trading partner – Canada - is working its way down – more and more traffic coming to the region from east, west and south.

Wendy Gehring – 6746 Pelton Drive: Sharing that Tuesday, February 27th is the job fair at the school. Brewing with the Chamber upcoming, there will be a school levy discussion with Amy Barret and Herman – Feb 28th.

OTHER BUSINESS

Council President Artiaga asked for comments on other business from all Committee of the Whole members.

Councilwoman Artiaga commented that Council and staff should have received an email from Rebecca Conklin Kleiboemer regarding a donation to the child and family abuse prevention center. Artiaga asking for confirmation on formalized charity giving currently – is there small budget for donations. Administrator Daugherty confirmed \$7,500 was approved for community support – if the scholarship is done this year \$1,000 would come out of that total. Artiaga asked do we get a lot of charitable requests typically. Daugherty said there is no norm, and we do not always get any, no requests last year. Councilwoman Artiaga commented that she is very familiar with this organization and the work they do – suggesting a smaller donation up front and maybe more toward the end of the year. Council agrees. Look to decide on amount at next council meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilwoman Artiaga, seconded by Councilwoman Tuohy to adjourn the meeting at 7:57pm. 6 ayes.

Respectfully submitted by Nicole Hartbarger, Clerk of Council