

Centre Documenters

Meeting: Upper Bald Eagle/Halfmoon Council of Governments (COG) Meeting
Township Location: Port Matilda Fire Hall
Documenter name: Mo Almo & Aruzhan Yegemberdi
Date: November 14th, 2023
Start Time: 7:00 p.m.
End Time: 9:08 p.m.

Notes

Board members present:

Mark Lively – Port Matilda Borough
Keith Reese – Worth Township
Karen Dillon – Ballock – Huston Township
Ron Servello – Halfmoon Township
Tim Reese – Taylor Township

- 29 community members in attendance
- 2 documenters present

Call to order

The meeting began at 7:00 p.m. with the recitation of the pledge of allegiance initiated by board member Keith Reese.

Public Comments

- The public was concerned with the financial status, the funding for emergency services, and the change in budget compared to past years.

Approve Meeting Minutes

- The board passed the motion to approve meeting minutes for Oct. 3, 2023.

Approve COG Treasurer's Report

- The board approved the treasurer's request of \$21,125 towards Port Matilda Borough Emergency Medical Services (EMS).

Note to readers of these notes: Centre Documenters is part of a nationwide network dedicated to building a corps of "curious citizens" equipped with the skills necessary to support local government transparency. Our documenters attend public meetings in Centre County, and they make their notes available to the public. Documenters often include notes to their readers, and unless quotation marks are used, all text is paraphrased. If you believe anything in these notes is inaccurate or you would like to support our work in any way, please email us at documenters@psu.edu.

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Halfmoon Township – Ron Servello

- Servello raised concerns about the improper allocation of funds from the budget of the fire company and mentioned that is for the viability of the company not for anything else.
- Servello is worried about the civic or criminal liability towards the fire company due to an incident that occurred in May 23. Details about the incident were not mentioned however it is mentioned that it led to the termination of the offender.

Port Matilda Borough – Mark Lively

- No information was presented but he shared the need for a new secretary-treasurer and provided his contact information portmatildaborough@windstream.net for anyone interested.

Huston Township – Karen Reese-Ballock

- No information was presented, but she informed the public of a budget meeting next week.

Taylor Township - Tim Reese

- Met with an engineer to discuss the details of the plan for the township building.

Worth Township – Keith Reese

Port Matilda EMS

- EMS volunteer shares information on a new fundraiser coming up soon, with their attempt to have a fundraiser every month.
- Port Matilda Fire Company (PMFC) president Josh Witherite mentions the profit of \$25,032 from the recent raffle. He notifies the board that an electric heating system is being implemented throughout the firehouse.

Ron Servello raises concerns over the lack of information regarding the fire relief association's finances. The amount of 250,000 is reported without information on where and how it is being spent. He stresses his point by saying that it is our tax money, and we have a right to know. One of the firemen's relief members in the public mentions the fact that the money is being used to buy emergency equipment from a preapproved catalog. Servello responded that the money can be used for things other than equipment within the allowed parameters that are not being utilized at the moment.

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Fire company agenda chiefs report

- PMFC chief John Witherite Presented the fire company response numbers for the past year. Discussed the process of generating the company-requested budget for the upcoming year and what is being accounted for.
- The public questioned the requested budget and the drastic increase from 125,000 to 250,000 in the span of a single year for the company. The chief responded that the difference comes with accounting for long-term goals and the sustainability of the company rather than it being allocated for operations only as it was previously.
- The emergency shelter has a bad generator, and they are in desperate need of grant writers to support its replacement. Anyone interested in helping should contact Josh Witherite at 814-380-2958.

Follow-up Questions

- Why is Halfmoon Township depositing/allocating a much higher amount than any of the other townships?

Summary

After you've taken your notes, summarize the 3 most important outcomes from your notes. Ask yourself, what would you tell your neighbor about this meeting?

- The increase in the budget amount for the PMFC raised many concerns among the public of different townships. The public wants to know a detailed breakdown of the revenues from which the fire company is being funded and how those funds are being used.
- Since the budget and the funding for the fire company are coming from the residents of the townships, they are having detrimental effects on the election processes of these townships. This is one of the main reasons the residents are concerned about the 100% increase in the upcoming budget for PMFC.
- A check for \$21,125 was written from the board as part of expenses for Port Borough – 3rd quarter and Halfmoon Capital Allocation.

Top Quote

“[The fire company] is not the responsibility of Halfmoon township alone. It is the responsibility of 5 municipalities. [...] There are other sources of funding, as well. All of them are important. Not one of them can be left out.” – Ron Servello of Halfmoon Township

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