

Windham residents demand officials' attention

By Jamie Bowers

Residents of both Windham Village and Township attended the trustee meeting held Thursday, June 7 to request that the trustees participate in the exploration of forming a joint fire district. Mayor Cecil J. Moore expressed appreciation to Trustee Brian Miller for his attendance at the last meeting of the exploratory committee and assured Trustee Dan Timmons that their next meeting would be scheduled during a time that he could also attend.

Despite the amicable start to the gathering, certain issues were of heated debate. Member of the exploratory committee George Bengston's request for the salaries of the trustees and township clerk were met with the answer from Timmons that the figures had nothing to do with forming a joint fire district. Bengston added that the information was public record and that he was also looking at the salary amounts of the village's mayor, council and clerk. He concluded that he would find answers to his questions elsewhere and emphasized that both municipalities should manage an agreement that is in the best interest of the people. Bengston also asked if village officials signed off on the sale of fire department vehicles. Timmons responded by saying that the vehicles were titled in the township's name and that the proceeds went back to the fire department and not

the township. Bengston answered by explaining that the fire department is an independent entity that should serve both the village and township governments. He also claimed that fire department personnel have been alienated from the village.

Township resident, Ted St. John said that there are fire districts all around Windham and then asked why a township is operating a village and if the cost would not be much different, then why not form a fire district? He emphasized that public safety is the most important issue. Timmons said in response that the township currently absorbs administrative costs for the fire department and extra mil levies have been voted down in the past.

Lanae St. John, a village resident and also a property owner in the township said that many people would not vote for a levy until the fighting between township and village officials stops. Council Representative Jodi Minotti emphasized that something has to be done to improve service, because her mother waited 45 minutes for an ambulance after suffering a heart attack. She added that eventually she had to call for help from Warren.

Council Representative Phil Snyder said that politics must be removed from the situation and that township and village officials would be negligent if they do not try to make things better. Moore added that a

joint fire district would bring everyone together.

Village Administrator Maurice Hankins asked what had to be done to get the input of the trustees. He added that Trustee Howard Furl's dislike of the current mayor should not be a stumbling block to officials of both municipalities working together. Hankins also stated that the problem with the fire department began when the township trustees took away the say of village taxpayers.

Jessie Warrick said that fire districts in other areas have no problem getting additional tax money, and Lanae St. John reiterated that township residents are letting the trustees know that they want officials from both municipalities to work together.

When the citizens in attendance perceived a negative or noncommittal response from any of the trustees, village resident, Francis Bengston stood up and said, "You're not listening!" Many others echoed her words.

At the end of the 45-minute session, it seemed that the consensus was that at least Timmons and Miller would attend the next meeting of the exploratory committee. Some of those who were there to talk about a joint fire district left the township hall when the trustees continued their regular meeting to discuss other business.

The next meeting of the exploratory committee is to be announced.