

Windham urged to unite on fire dept. agreement

By Jamie Bowers

The Joint Fire District Exploratory Advisory Committee in Windham met for the fourth time in as many months Thursday, June 28. The guest speaker was David (Chip) Comstock from the law firm Comstock, Springer and Wilson of Youngstown. Comstock is the fire chief of the Western Reserve Joint Fire District and is also the legal council for the Canfield and N.F. Joint Fire Districts.

Comstock gave his opinion of the organizational aspects of the Windham Fire Department after a cursory view of its documented history. He said that it appears that Windham Township contracted with Windham Village for fire protection, and at some point, the township created a fire district. As records stand now, Comstock said it seems that the village should have the operating authority.

The JFDEAC was formed because, Windham Township Trustees assumed the operating authority in the last few years without consultation with the village. Though everyone on the committee prefaces their objections to such an arrangement by saying that the trustees are not mishandling the funds, members still believe that the village should have some authority in the administration of the fire department.

Comstock emphasized that it would be a huge mistake for the trustees to avoid coming to the table, because everyone in the community would lose. He suspects that a worst case scenario would be that in a fight, the village would retain the equipment, the township would be awarded the fire station for at least the 20 years remaining on their lease, and both municipalities could lose the levy money. Comstock added that the committee must review the numbers to determine if a joint fire district would be beneficial for the entire community or at the very least, set up a legal agreement between the township and the village in Windham for fire protection.

Township Trustee Dan Timmons, who is also an attorney, was present at the meeting. When questioned by the committee as to his thoughts about Comstock's opinions, Timmons said that he is uncertain if he agreed with Comstock, but the most important thing to do now is look to Windham's future. The consensus among other audience members and the committee seemed to agree.

Comstock concluded by recommending that if it is the desire of both the township and village to form a joint fire district, they should make a joint resolution and then transfer the fire station to the district. The committee also expressed appreciation to the firefighters and emphasized that the problems involve administration and not day-to-day operations of the department.

The next meeting will be held Thursday, July 12 at 6:30 p.m. at the high school boardroom using the S. Main St. entrance. It is open to the public, and everyone is encouraged to attend.