



Windham township and village still grappling with joint fire district

Has the issue become a personal one?

JAMIE WARD

At the last Windham Township Trustees' meeting, Windham Village Council President Scott Garrett presented the findings of the Joint Fire District Exploratory/Advisory Committee.

It was recommended by that committee, made up of 11 members within the community, that both village and township form a joint fire district.

But the issue is far from resolved, as trustees have repeatedly ignored the village's requests for a district, favoring an operating agreement. The last operating agreement between village and township expired at the end of 2003.

While both entities continue to get legal advice, the disagreement may stem from problems with past negotiations.

"I suppose you could call it that," said Township Trustee Howard Furl when asked if the issue had become a personal one.

"This has been in the making for a long time. I don't feel good about the whole situation. Those people (in the village) are good people, and I like a lot of those people. What they are doing now is driving a wedge between the township and village."

Furl said he does not support the formation of a fire district, and said he is not confident in the findings of the advisory committee. "For five years, it's been nothing but a fight," he said.

He said he wants the village to have a say in what goes, but that the township should still be in charge of the money.

"They've taken cheap shots at me, the whole bunch of them (council and committee members) in an open meeting. We'll let someone else tell us what we have to do. We'll follow our own legal advice," he said.

The advisory committee met six separate times in public meetings. After a fiscal analysis, it was decided by the committee a joint fire district would not cause an increase in resident's taxes.

Committee Chairman Mau-

rice Hankins, who also is the Village Administrator, said representatives from other area fire districts all agreed a joint district would be most beneficial to everybody in the area.

"It can't stay like it is," he said. "You can't have village tax money and then the village residents have no voice in where it's going at all. We got a complete report with cost analysis, financial statements and three different organizations to visit. They could see nothing wrong with going to a fire district."

At the trustees' meeting, they said they would review the documents provided by the advisory committee and come to a decision, potentially at their next meeting.

Other members of the committee were: George Bengtson, retired Assistant Fire Chief, prior Township trustee; Don Vanderbloom, retired Fireman; Jesse Wirick, Township resident; Thom Tauche, Township resident; Phil Snyder, Council Safety Committee member; Rachel Barrett, Council Safety Committee member; Bruce Rininger, retired Fireman; Ted St. John, Township resident; Bill Sponaule, Village resident, Chief of EMS Community Ambulance; and Robert Donham, Council Safety Committee member.

Hankins said all the trustees were asked to participate on the committee – but declined.

"We've got to get the politics out of fire fighting," he said. "There's no room for it."

The Villager will continue to follow the various decisions by both village and township.