

COMMUNITY

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WINDHAM TOWNSHIP

Legal opinion sought on joint fire district

Trustees having documents presented by exploratory committee analyzed

By Don Jovich
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WINDHAM TOWNSHIP —

While discussions about creating a joint fire district between the township and village continue, a legal opinion is now being sought by township trustees.

Last month, the joint fire district exploratory committee gave a written report to both the village and township that unanimously endorses the joint venture.

"We are analyzing this in a professional manner," said Trustee Dann

Timmons. "We're taking it seriously."

During Thursday's meeting at Windham Town Hall, Timmons said they were seeking a legal opinion from attorney Mark Finamore, who is experienced and well-versed in how joint fire districts are formed.

Finamore said he is in the process of researching the committee's documents and will provide the township with a legal opinion within the next few weeks.

"I've met with the trustees and will have a concrete opinion within one to two weeks," he said. Currently, the Windham Fire De-

partment serves both the village and township, although it is operated exclusively by the township, which handles the day-to-day operations, payroll, capital improvements and large equipment purchases.

"One side has complete control, the other side has none," said Village Council President Scott Garrett.

The last operating agreement between the township and village expired on Dec. 31, 2003 and has not been renewed.

Under the existing administrative structure, Trustees Timmons, Howland and Furl and Brian Miller comprise

the fire board. Jayme Niekirk is the fiscal officer of both the township and the fire district.

With the existing 1-mill operating and 1-mill equipment levies already in place to fund the fire department, Mayor C. James Moore said there would be no need to go to the voters for any additional funds for the creation of a joint fire district.

"When the existing levies come up for renewal or replacement, they would be put on under the new joint fire district," he said.

Garrett said this is a chance for Windham to be proactive.

"Joint fire districts are growing everywhere," he said, noting the nearby communities of Newton Falls, Troy, Mantua-Shalersville, and Garrettsville-Nelson-Freedom, who all have formed joint fire districts.

"This is an opportunity to bring unity to the township and village," Garrett said.

In agreement, township resident Annette Bengston said the situation with the fire department is a mess.

"It's the Windham Fire Department, not the township or the village fire department ... We're all neighbors," she said.