

TOWN MEETING

VILLAGE OF FONTANA ON GENEVA LAKE
WALWORTH COUNTY, WISCONSIN

MEETING NOTES

Saturday, November 12, 2005 at 8:00 AM

Trustees Present: Larson, Pollitt and President Whowell

Also Present: Steve Beers, Officer Mark Chalcoff, Village Administrator Kelly E. Hayden-Staggs, Joe Kowalski, Village Clerk Dennis Martin, Rick McCue, Police Chief Steve Olson, Village Treasurer Peg Pollitt, George Spadoni, Village Attorney Dale Thorpe, and about 100 residents of the Village of Fontana

Thorpe began the meeting with an explanation of Act 40, which was adopted by the state legislature about three months ago; the state imposed municipal tax levy limit legislation; and an inquiry letter from the Village to Walworth County Sheriff David Graves with regard to soliciting preliminary economic information for contracting for full-time police services. Thorpe stated that the inquiry letter to Sheriff Graves that was authorized by the Village Board is the first step of what would be a very long process if the Village Board eventually votes to disband the Village of Fontana Police Department and contract for police services from the Sheriff's Department. Thorpe also presented a memo to the Village Board with regard to the preliminary negotiations with the Sheriff's Department. The memo delineates four commitments that have been discussed by the Village Board members. Four commitments that the memo states must be met in order for the Village Board to move forward with the preliminary negotiations are:

1. That any contract with the county must provide a tax savings to Village taxpayers.
2. That all current full-time police department employees must end up with County or Village employment that is comparable in the level of pay and benefits to their current position.
3. That any services provided by the county must be equal to or better than the services currently provided.
4. That the village commit itself to regular open meetings with its citizens on this subject, including an open session discussion and public hearing prior to any final decision being made on a contract with the county.

Michele Teale asked that if the Village of Fontana contracts with the county Sheriff's Department for police services and the current Village of Fontana police officers apply for jobs with the Sheriff's Department, will the Fontana officers be placed in positions of lower seniority on the Sheriff's Department staff than they currently hold on the Village of Fontana Police Department staff, and will the officers' union status and benefits be transferred to the Sheriff's Department union. Thorpe stated that the Village has only solicited preliminary economic information at this time and the seniority and union status questions could not be answered until later in the negotiations. Irene LaBonne stated that the Village Board should hold more than a Town Hall meeting to consider the proposal and suggested that the Village hold a referendum on the matter. Thorpe stated that the Village Board has not yet received any facts or figures to present to the public and a referendum would be premature at this time. Addison Voss stated that if the current Fontana police officers lose their jobs, the Village would not receive the same quality police services that they currently receive. Voss also asked if the officers would be hired by the Sheriff's Department at the same rank that they currently hold with the Village of Fontana Police Department. Thorpe again stated that the Act 40 legislation requires that if a police department is disbanded in order to contract for services from the county sheriff's department, all current municipal officers must be hired first for any new positions; and again pointed out that the second condition in the Village Board memo states that "all current full-time police department employees must end up with County or Village employment that is comparable in the level of pay and benefits to their current position." With regard to the rank question, Thorpe stated that the Board only has requested preliminary economic information at this

time, but the Village Board knows that the Fontana officers want it negotiated if the proposal advances. Richard Murphy asked if the level of service that the Village contracts for with the county is the same as the current service provided by the Village Police Department, how can the proposal save tax money. Hayden-Staggs responded that the Village Board is seeking that information, and that is what the preliminary inquiry to Sheriff Graves will determine. If there is no economic benefit, the Village Board will not pursue the proposal any further. Bruce Jensen stated that the residents don't care if there is a cost savings generated from contracting for police services from the county. Jensen stated that the residents would rather pay more taxes and keep the Village Police Department instead of contracting for police services from the Walworth County Sheriff's Department. Jensen and LaBonne asked which trustee initiated the proposal to solicit information from the Sheriff's Department. Thorpe stated that the entire Village Board directed the administrator to submit the inquiry letter to the Sheriff's Department. Beth Ptacek asked if the Village would receive 24-hour protection, seven days a week if the Village contracts for police services from the Sheriff's Department. Thorpe responded that the third point in the Village Board memo states that "any services provided by the county must be equal to or better than the services currently provided." Don Roberts stated that he does not know how the village could save money if the Village Board votes to disband the Village Police Department and contract for police services from the Walworth County Sheriff's Department and the current officers are hired at their same level of pay and the level of service is comparable. Roberts also stated that he read an article in a national newspaper that states citizens would rather pay more taxes to receive a high level of policing services. Ann Rowley stated that she decided to move to the Village of Fontana because of its school and the Police Department. Michele Teale stated that new officers would not know the Village streets well enough to provide the same level of police services that the current officers provide. Thorpe again responded to Rowley and Teale that the Village Board will not pursue the proposal if the level of service is not comparable to the current police services. Hugh Plunkett stated that the Village just raised the assessment on his residence and he asked why the Village Board was now looking for ways to save money on the tax levy. Plunkett said at his other home in Northbrook, IL, the Cook County Sheriff's Department does not even respond to calls in the municipality. An unidentified man asked why the Village Board has not filled the open officer position on the Village of Fontana Police Department staff. Hayden-Staggs responded that the Village Board and Protection Committee have voted to approve the new officer; however, the Police and Fire Commission has not been able to finalize the list of candidates for the full-time position and for open part-time positions because the committee has been waiting for background check information to be completed. County Board Supervisor Joe Guido stated that the Village Board is doing a good job representing the community and the economic study is a good idea. Guido stated that the residents should be aware that their tax dollars also support the County Sheriff's Department. Tim Dunkel asked why the Village Board was looking at the Police Department as an area for tax levy savings. Hayden-Staggs responded that the Village Board also studied and then changed from contracting for Building Inspection and Zoning Administration services to establishing an intergovernmental agreement with the Village of Walworth and hire their own building staff. The Village Board also recently approved an IGA with the Village of Walworth for a water connection project in order to save money for both municipalities. Joyce Roche asked if the Village decides to contract for police services with the county, what will happen to the current officers after one year if they are hired by the Sheriff's Department. Thorpe stated the Act 40 calls for a 24-month lockdown on the new contract, and after two years of employment, the officers would be subject to the same protections that they currently have with the contract between the Village of Fontana and the Village of Fontana Police Officer Union. Thorpe stated that the Village would work to negotiate other employment protection provisions for the current officers if the proposal is pursued. Todd Sammons stated that the residents of the Village of Fontana don't want to pursue the proposal and asked what would happen if a petition was presented to the Village Board. Thorpe stated if there is a petition, it should be presented to the Board; however, he could not state how the Board would react to a hypothetical petition. Henry Burmeister stated that if the insurance industry changes its rating of the Village from a medium-risk area to a high-risk area, the premium rates for homeowner's policies would increase. Dave Jensen asked how the current Village of Fontana Police Department budget compares to the Village of Williams Bay and the Village of Walworth. Hayden-Staggs responded that the current VOF budget for the Police Department totals \$600,000, but she does not know what the budgets are in Williams Bay and Walworth. Bob Webster

asked what the time table for the proposal is and how could services be switched to the county for less money without losing quality of service or officer positions. Thorpe stated that the inquiry for an economic estimate and a proposal for level of service has not been submitted yet, and those are the issues that the Village Board would like addressed. As far as the time table for the proposal, Thorpe stated that current union contracts have to be fulfilled or nullified with a vote of the officers according to Act 40, and the term for the current VOF Union Contract has two years remaining. Thorpe stated that the process would be very lengthy and if it progresses, the Village Board will proceed carefully and make sure all the details are presented to the public as the process continues. LaBonne stated she believes the current proposal is just “smoke and mirrors” and the Village Board has problems with the current police officers and the manner in which Chief Olson performs his job duties. Thorpe responded that the rumors LaBonne was referring to are the reason that the Village Board decided to issue the memo. An unidentified man stated that according to calculations he came up with with regard to the proposed 2006 budget, he does not see how the proposal could save the Village money. Officer Chalcoff stated that he works for the citizens of Fontana, and if the Village changes to contracting for services from the Sheriff’s Department, the officers will be working for the county. Chalcoff stated that the Village Board should stop its economic study immediately to alleviate the strife that the letter of inquiry has caused in the village. Nancy Taylor asked if other municipalities in the state have disbanded their municipal police departments and contracted for service with sheriff’s departments. Thorpe stated that after polling less than half of the state, there are 26 municipalities that have disbanded their police departments and contracted for service with sheriff’s departments. An unidentified man stated that Fontana is a unique community and he asked if the Village will receive the same level of police service if the Village Board approves contracting for the police service from the Walworth County Sheriff’s Department. Thorpe again repeated that the Village Board memo states “that any services provided by the county must be equal to or better than the services currently provided.” Marion Swanson asked how much money was in the current budget to complete the study, and asked why the Board would continue to look at the matter if it is costing “so much money.” Hayden-Staggs stated that she gets paid a salary that covers the time she has spent on the drafting the initial letter to Sheriff Graves. Thorpe gets paid \$88 an hour for his time, but he did not know how much time he has spent on the issue to date. George Spadoni stated that the Village Board members are simply doing their fiscal responsibility. Spadoni stated that a resident points out at the annual budget meeting every year that the Village of Fontana spends too much per capita on its police budget. Spadoni stated that the Board is just asking for a quote from Sheriff Graves to determine the economic feasibility of switching from a Village Police Department to contracting with the Sheriff’s Department for police service. Spadoni stated that he has gathered 19 signatures over a very short period of time from residents who favor looking into the financial ramifications of contracting with the Sheriff’s Department for police service. Hugh Plunkett stated that the elected officials are supposed to serve and protect the residents, and they should listen to the people at the Town Hall meeting who stated that they oppose the proposal. An unidentified man asked if the Village Board had voted on the proposal to contract for police services. Thorpe stated at this time that the Board has only directed the staff to check into the economic ramifications of the proposal. An unidentified person suggested that the Village Board stop the inquiry and stop spending money on researching the issue. LaBonne asked why the entire Village Board was not in attendance at the meeting. President Howell responded that the special meeting was scheduled to get information out to the public as soon as possible after the inquiry letter was made public and rumors were spread, and Trustees Bromfield, Turner and O’Connell were all on trips out of town, and Trustee Petersen did not come to the meeting to avoid having a quorum of Village Board members at the meeting, which was not posted as a Village Board meeting. Trustee Pollitt stated that he was listening to all of the comments and he would relay the opinions of the residents to the Trustees who were not at the meeting. An unidentified man suggested that the Village look into combining Police Departments with the Village of Walworth. Bob Sandy stated that the Village of Fontana looked into negotiating with the Village of Walworth to combine police, fire and rescue services in the 1960s, but the negotiations never advanced beyond the preliminary level. Sandy also suggested that the Village research a similar law that was passed in Connecticut and resulted in some municipal police departments being disbanded and municipalities contracting with Sheriff’s Departments for police services. Chief Olson stated he monitors every dollar spent in the Fontana Police Department and he is aware of the economic situation; however, the Village Board should

keep in mind the intangible benefits the officers provide to the municipality. Chief Olson stated that the current Fontana police officers live in the village and if there were calls to the school, the officers would respond immediately. Chief Olson stated that he and the officers do not want to work for the Sheriff's Department and that's why they have not applied for jobs there in the past. Chief Olson said it's hard on the current officers to have the economic study "hanging over their heads." Karen Martinez stated that she wants the Village to keep its current Police Department. Bob Sandy stated that the Fontana Police Department has always been a training ground for future Walworth County Sheriff's Department employees. Peter Jensen stated that all the residents of Fontana like the current Police Department officers. Thorpe stated that more meetings will be scheduled as the Village receives information and asked if there were any more questions. Nancy Taylor stated that the Village Board may want to consider that more criminals may operate in the Village of Fontana if the Village contracts for police services with the Sheriff's Department. President Whowell thanked the residents for attending the Town Hall meeting. The meeting ended at 9:30 AM.

*Notes prepared by:
Dennis L. Martin, Village Clerk
11-14-2005*