



**NORTON CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2011**

Roll Call: Todd Bergstrom
 Don Nicolard
 Brenda Hlas
 Bill Mowery
 Ken Braman-Excused
 Scott Pelot
 Mike Zita

Also Present:
Mayor David Koontz-Absent
Rick Ryland
John Moss
Pete Kostoff-Excused
Chief Mike Schultz
Karla Richards
Ann Campbell

The Special Committee of the Whole Meeting convened on Thursday, November 10, 2011 at 7:03 PM, in the Council Chambers of the Safety Administration Building. The meeting was called to order by Scott Pelot, President of Council, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silent reflection.

COMMITTEE WORK SESSION-GENERAL TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Mr. Pelot explained procedures for a Special Meeting, they are called for a specific reason. Council Rules do not necessarily give the public a right to speak. However, he understands there is a spokesperson representing the residents from Brentwood Estates that would like to speak. Mr. Pelot stated that at the end of the meeting after we have discussed the Fire & EMS issues, he would ask for a vote of Council to all their comments.

Fire & EMS Budget Constraints:

Mrs. Hlas stated that because of the failures of the levies we have some budget constraints, Mr. Moss and Mr. Ryland are here tonight to discuss our options. Mr. Ryland stated that with the failure of these levies, we are forced to take another look at the budget. Had these two (2) levies passed we could have advanced money from the General Fund to make it through the end of the year, and in 2012 we would readjust the budget. Mr. Ryland stated that today he has instructed Fire Chief Schultz to release nine Firefighters and Paramedics from our work force. Mr. Ryland presented two different proposals or options for Council to consider. The first option is to eliminate 41 shifts per week from the schedule, which is a savings of about \$34,000.00 to the end of the year or \$190,000.00 annually. This is going into effect on Monday. So that everyone is clear this only for eight (8) weeks until the end of the year. Come January 1, 2012 we are forced to take further cuts with an additional 79 shifts per week and close the station at 10:00 PM. This is an annual savings of \$369,770.00 plus allowing us to meet our carryover balances to meet the needs in the years to come. The biggest question is what does this mean to the residents? This will mean that we will now be limited to one EMS call at a time, we are used to covering three (3) at a time. So when other calls do come in while that first EMS run is still out, we have no choice but to resort to mutual aid or private services. Fire calls will not have six (6) members responding. It's an extremely dangerous situation that we put these firefighters in, and entering a building fully engulfed in flames, they will not have the backup they need at fires.

We have twelve (12) miles of interstate and with the reduced staffing when calls come in, we have to decide what vehicles to send out for a rollover, a rescue truck with the extraction equipment or do we send an EMS unit? Either way it could be a right or wrong decision and we will not know until we are at the accident. Storm events will not get the response like in the past because we do not have the manpower. Standard accidents on the road and directing traffic around this will change. Mutual aid will change because of this reduction in staff and will not be the same after 10:00 PM. We will lose houses and unfortunately we may lose lives. Mr. Ryland stated that the second option, Council would have to instruct him to make those immediate cuts and close the station at 10:00 PM. This is not his recommendation. It is feasible to make the 79 shift cuts immediately and close the station at 10:00 PM. This would generate approximately \$79,000.00 from now until the end of the year. Mr. Ryland stated on Wednesday morning he made the call to the Safety Committee, and he apologized to Mrs. Hlas for not including her in that process, he was thinking more on the lines of a Safety Committee and not Finance Committee. Mr. Ryland stated these options were laid on the table and looked at very hard. We know we will end up eventually closing the department at 10:00 PM, he would like the opportunity to work with the neighboring communities and exercise the first option at this time. Mr. Ryland repeated that option as being cutting the nine (9) employees, cutting 41 shifts per week and we will be staffed 24/7 just until the end of the year, albeit with a very skeletal crew. Mr. Nicolard stated that what this means to the residents is the first resident who calls will get an EMS squad, the second resident that calls will be out of luck until that first EMS run returns. Mr. Ryland concurred adding that when we get invalid assist calls, we will still respond but now it would be on an "if available" type basis. Mr. Pelot stated that with mutual aid and our reduced staff, if we cannot respond to them when they call us, they might not be so able or willing to help us when we call them. Mr. Ryland stated we have met with the neighboring communities and they say they would do everything within their powers to help us. Mr. Bergstrom had concerns with the budget and wanted to do what ever we could to keep open 24/7 and fast response times, and asked if there are other places we could adjust or move funds? Mr. Moss stated if you cut more in the General Fund to come up with money, you would be stopping one department to cover another. Mr. Ryland stated you would be cutting services in other areas. Mr. Bergstrom asked about prior to 24/7 we had call per hour shifts, are we still able to do that? Mr. Ryland replied no, we have made changes to hiring standards and recent court rulings that state they don't have to live in the community. Mr. Bergstrom discussed setting money aside for more defibrillators and put one in each car of the volunteer. Mr. Ryland stated that the problem is that the cuts until the end of the year does not generate enough carryover balance to get you to the next big paycheck into the next year. Money from levies come in twice a year, and you have to have enough money Jan-March to make payroll so you have to have a heavy carry over balance. Mrs. Hlas stated you have to keep in mind our General Fund is already very tight now even before the Local Government Fund cuts, she was not sure where else you can cut. Mr. Nicolard reminded everyone that the snow seasons is just around the corner and our Service Dept. is already down from fifteen (15) employees to nine (9). Someone is also retiring soon and this position will not probably not be replaced. Administration has already been cut to the bare bones. Mr. Nicolard stated he did not think we would find any money we can transfer into this department. Mr. Nicolard stated this is a very sad day in the City of Norton.

Mr. Mowery asked how did we get to this point where we have no money for the carry over balances, what have we done wrong? Mr. Ryland replied what we have done wrong is that Council and Administration failed to recognize that the last time you passed a true levy was back in 1995. Those 4.6 mills are now only generating less than 2 mills and that money is not adequate to keep up. The blame falls in this room. Mr. Moss stated we have been providing a very good Fire & EMS services with a continued decrease in revenue and increases in costs. Mr. Mowery asked what are the increasing costs? Mr. Moss replied payroll is largest by far, Mr. Ryland stated those gentlemen standing in the back get paid \$15.00 an hour to put their lives on the line every day and they are not being overpaid. Mr. Mowery stated we should have been doing more to pull back the reigns or something. Mr. Ryland replied that we have been trying to do something. Looking back to 2007; gas prices were \$1.83 a gallon, now we are almost at \$4.00. When each year our runs have doubled, those costs just keep adding to it. We now have to buy our own medical equipment to restock the EMS vehicles; hospitals are no longer providing this to us. We as Council and Administration missed the boat on that 1995 levy when did not do anything about it until this Tuesday, that is where the blame falls, its not because of what this group of individuals are doing. Mr. Ryland discussed how tough its going to be when we are used to 2-3 minute response times, which may now end up like 10-15 minutes. Mr. Ryland discussed having lack of mutual aid and needing private services and when that happens they will bill residents using FEMA rates of \$175.00 hour for a fire truck. One fire would be a whole lot more expensive than the cost of a levy. Mr. Ryland stated had the levy passed we would have supplemented the Fire and EMS with General Fund money. Mr. Pelot asked if we are even going to make through the end of the year with this option? Mr. Moss replied that if we do nothing until the end of the year our carry over would be less than \$273,000.00. Mr. Ryland noted that we cannot budget for all calls, however in the next eight (8) weeks we can control medical calls but not with a house fire. On medical calls there will be no all calls going out from here on. Mike Zita stated with a normal day to day job you know the numbers, but in this line of work and more call outs mean more time out and more money spent. If we had a fire like we did at Syd's tire years ago, one fire like that would bankrupt the department. Chief Schultz explained that currently we have six (6) men on a shift and could do three (3) EMS calls. On Monday this would be cut in half. Chief Schultz stated that on a structure fire we would send six (6) out with two vehicles. On Monday we will leave with three (3) guys and a truck. This is just dangerous and we have really just put these men on the line. Chief Schultz stated he is so mad about this right now he can barely speak. We have been abused in the media, trash talked in the various mailers and lied about, and these employees don't deserve this. These are not my employees, that's my family here and we have jeopardized all of them. Chief Schultz discussed our past success of saving Grace Church, that's good work because churches normally burn to the ground. The next one we will not be able to save because you will only have three (3) guys, one (1) truck so you really have two (2) on the fire and one (1) guy at the truck. There was discussion on the nine (9) employees being cut and for two (2) of them this is their only job. Chief Schultz stated that their fellow employees stepped up and took the layoffs to save their positions so these two (2) individuals could stay on. Mr. Ryland recommended that Council take immediate action to place a Special Election back on the ballot for the original 4.6 mils. Mr. Pelot stated there was so much misinformation we need to get the right numbers out to the public. Chief Schultz stated he as spoken with Chief Benson from Copley and he indicated if they respond to us they would have to bill our residents.

That's going to be more than what the levy costs would have been. There was discussion if we would be placing one levy or two on the ballot, and which is best to get passage. Mr. Ryland stated we have discussed this and we are looking into that. Mrs. Hlas stated that she would hope when we hand out new fliers there would be a disclaimer on them with contact information. Chief Schultz stated he is at his office every day and he is willing to talk with any resident and explain the numbers to them at any time. Mr. Pelot stated email works great too; you can ask your question and get a response in writing, that way you have a paper trail to prove what you were told. Mr. Pelot stated the previous fliers that were out there had absolutely no disclaimers, and you have no idea where this information came from. It could be from someone ticked off at them or someone that is mad about their taxes. Mr. Nicolard asked Mrs. Richards when the deadline for legislation was to get on the Special Election. Mrs. Richards stated she was not sure and would check with the Board of Elections first thing in the morning. Chief Schultz stated he really needs these eight (8) weeks to sit down and get a real game plan going. Mr. Bergstrom stated he is all in favor of the first option to keep the station open 24/7 until the end of the year and Mr. Zita agreed knowing that come January 1, 2012 we go down another 79 shifts. Mr. Bergstrom asked why 10:00 PM was chosen as a closing time and Chief Schultz replied calls drop to about 18% at that time of night. Mr. Pelot stated this is not a knee jerk reaction to the levies failing. Mr. Ryland concurred, as early as August and many times since then we have told all of you if these levies fail we would be making these cuts. You were given plenty of prior notice. Mr. Moss explained that even if the levy had passed the actual money transfer would not have occurred until 2012 and not now. Mr. Nicolard thanked the fire department employees for all they have done, and felt that they have really gotten a raw deal here. Mr. Pelot asked for a roll call for authorizing the first option until the end of this year.

Roll Call: Yeas: Hlas, Nicolard, Bergstrom, Mowery, Zita, Pelot
Nays: None

Motion passed 6-0.

Mr. Pelot asked Council if there were any objections to allow the spokesperson from Brentwood Estates to speak; there were no objections.

Mr. Martin Arvay, 3253 Driftwood Road, Norton, Ohio, asked for all of the firefighters to remain for just a moment. Mr. Arvay stated their intention was to bring forward a complaint on their roads tonight. Mr. Arvay stated that four (4) years ago this very same day he suffered a heart attack and if were not for these firefighters/paramedics he would not be standing here today, and thanked all of them. Mr. Arvay read from a petition the residents of Brentwood and Driftwood Roads have signed; *“ At a meeting of Norton City Council on October 28, 2002, a number of Brentwood residents attending, asking the City of Norton not to use in the future any chip/seal on roads with curbs, sidewalks and storm sewers. The Mayor at that time stated “ in the future chip/seal would not be used for a topcoat on any city street. We the undersigned Norton residents of Brentwood Estates are petitioning again that the City Administration not to use this method in the future for any road that has curbs, sidewalks and storm sewers. We further petition the Administration to rectify the current road conditions of Driftwood Road and Longwood Road by sweeping the roads until all loose stones are removed and at the earliest possible date to pave each road with asphalt*

hot mix. We challenge the fact that this method of paving is only being used in the Brentwood neighborhood, as witnessed with last years paving of Greenridge Road in Norton Acres”.

Mr. Arvay stated he has obtained over 150 signatures and will continue to get more. Mr. Arvay stated he has been a Norton resident for over 32 years and supports the schools, Fire/EMS and Police. Mr. Arvay stated that Council needs to look at some of the decisions that were made in the past. Mr. Arvay discussed the tax credit and how those revenue funds are only being used on roads, shouldn't some of that be split and given to the safety forces? Mr. Arvay stated the Brentwood residents were here nine (9) years ago and asked to be treated fairly, we will not be going away this time. Mr. Arvay closed his comments by congratulating the newly elected Council at Large members, and Mr. Zita as Mayor.

ADJOURN:

There being no other business to come before the Special Council Meeting, the meeting was adjourned at 8:04 PM.

Scott Pelot, President of Council

I, Karla Richards, CMC-Clerk of Council for the City of Norton, do hereby certify that the foregoing minutes were approved at a Regular Council Meeting held on November 14, 2011.

Karla Richards, CMC-Clerk of Council

****NOTE: THESE MINUTES ARE NOT VERBATIM****

All Council & Committee Meetings will be held at the Norton Safety Administration Building, unless otherwise noted.