

**BEMIDJI TOWNSHIP TOWN BOARD  
REGULAR BOARD MEETING  
Tuesday, September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013  
MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Jan Heuer, Pete Fredrickson, John Rowles, Brian Merschman, Lowell Vagle and Clerk Erin Stieg, Representatives John Persell and Roger Erickson

**CALL TO ORDER:** The regular meeting of the Bemidji Township Town Board was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chairperson Jan Heuer and the pledge of allegiance was recited.

**AGENDA:** After review and discussion, Brian Merschman made a motion, seconded by Pete Fredrickson to approve the agenda as written. Motion carried unanimously.

**MINUTES:** Lowell Vagle motioned to approve the minutes as amended correcting an error. The motion was seconded by Pete Fredrickson and carried unanimously.

**CONSTITUENTS (see attached attendance sheet):** No constituent issues.

**Representatives John Persell and Roger Erickson: Discuss Annexation and Rural Fire Association:**

Jan Heuer began by stating that we asked the representatives here tonight to update them on our current situation with Annexation and the Rural Fire District proposal in the hopes that they would consider authoring bills in the future so that we don't have to deal with the same situation we are now. Rep. Erickson asked the board for some background information on the annexation situation, and it was explained that some of the current statues in place regarding annexation are antiquated and need to be changed. Our constituents did not wish to be annexed into the City of Bemidji and now that Phase 1 of the Orderly Annexation has taken place, they have not received any services not provided by the Township yet their taxes have almost doubled. It was purely a revenue generating venture and it is not fair for Cities to be able to annex large amounts of land to use however they see fit.

Rep. Persell asked if the Township had its own law enforcement and the board informed him that we are currently using Beltrami County Sherriff for law enforcement. Lowell Vagle stated that in a meeting held this spring, legislators were very adamant that Townships were very important to them and to the state of Minnesota. Persell responded by stating that it can be very difficult to protect Townships when there are people that think there are too many counties in Minnesota, let alone all the townships, and are pushing to combine everything. Persell then suggested that the Board voice their concerns to the Attorney for the Minnesota Association of Townships, Kent Sulem and have him research the situation. Pete Fredrickson added that the township residents that were annexed feel like pawns, they don't feel they are being treated as equals in comparison to City residents. He also stated that sometimes there is a need for annexation and if the municipality can provide for it, then it works out well, but that is not the case in this situation. One of the representatives mentioned that the constituents have the power to vote and to that a constituent answered that once the taxes are voted in, nobody can vote to remove them. They are stuck with what has already been voted in and that is not fair. Another constituent said that the Mayor herself stated that there will never be sewer and water put in where they live because they are too far out to provide those services to them. One township resident stated that he is in the "Phase 2" annexation area, but he used to own property in the City. He sold his property, even took a loss on it, to move outside of City limits. He stated that he doesn't want to have to do that again, but there is no benefit for him to be in the City. Jan explained that the Mediated Agreement that was signed with the City rescinded the

2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> phases of the Orderly Annexation, so he shouldn't have to worry about moving again.

After further discussion on this topic, the Board moved on to discuss the proposed Fire District with the Representatives. Brian Merschman explained that there are 5-10 other Fire Districts that are going to charge a "fee" rather than a tax, when really it's the same thing, just a way for them to charge non-profit entities like churches and schools for fire protection. Some say that to be fair, these non-profit organizations should have to pay for fire protection like everybody else, others argue that if these places are important to Townships and Cities, they should remain protected without charge. It was discussed that charging the fee would help ease the cost of fire protection for everyone in the Fire District, since there would be no tax and the non-profits would be sharing in the payment of the fee. Since the City of Bemidji has the most non-taxable organizations, they would obviously benefit the most from the current proposal, while the Townships wouldn't benefit nearly as much. One non-constituent guest who now serves on the Fire Committee explained that they would like legislation to create a bill that would make the proposal the fairest possible, however legislature wants a draft to be created first so they can see what they are signing.


The board maintains that the Rural Fire Association as it is now, works very well and the proposed changes to the governance and fees aren't necessary. They would like to see specific statutes for creating Fire Districts (or Joint Powers Entities or Agreements) that make the process easier and fairer for Cities and Townships alike.

The Representatives both stated that they have not seen or heard anything about this proposal in legislation as of yet. Rep. Persell suggested that the Board also bring the item up to the Minnesota Association of Townships for review.

**ADJOURN:**

Pete Fredrickson made a motion, seconded by Lowell Vagle, to adjourn. Motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Prepared by Erin Stieg, Bemidji Township Clerk

  
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Erin Stieg, Bemidji Township Clerk

Approved 10/8/13

  
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Jan Heuer, Chairperson