**TORCH LAKE TOWNSHIP**

**SPECIAL BOARD MEETING APPROVED WITH CORRECTION AT APRIL 19, 2022 REGULAR BOARD MEETING. PASSED 5-0**

**March 22, 2022**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES BUILDING**

**Present:** J. Merchant, B. Cook, K. Windiate, S. Schultz

**Absent:** A. Martel

**Recording Secretary:** Veronica Beitner

**Audience:** 12

**1. Call to Order** at 6:31 pm by B. Cook followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Purpose of the meeting reviewed by B. Cook.

**2. Public Comments**: see comments below.

**3. Discussion related to the interest of the community in establishing a Police Enforcement Officer.**

Options as discussed with Sheriff Bean, Elk Rapids Chief of Police and others in industry reviewed by B. Cook. On April 19th, B. Cook will be proposing placing issue on the ballot for a 5-year - .35 Millage. $35 per $100,000 of TAXABLE value to cover cost of position.

**T. Stillings** – Any reports from the Sheriff regarding crime in area that has been reviewed. Review should contain statistics on murders, break-ins, etc. Against proposal. Shared an experience of a neighbor involved in domestic violence and the need to call for Law Enforcement. Due to another call, there was no one available but as issues escalated, it only took a call back to get an officer dispatched out of Elk Rapids. All went well. **P. VanHese**, Dragonfly Ln states there is a criminal element that is present in all areas. With a highway going through our area, this only increases risks. Feels a police presence would deter crime. States people don’t feel as easy to commit crimes when there is a presence. References the shooting last summer at the south end of Torch Lake.

**R. Bishop**, Wood Specials Dr. reviewed liability expenses, administrative expenses, etc. with establishing a police officer position. Reviewed entering into a contracted service agreement with an established group would be more cost effective. Shared recent experience with engaging with our ambulance and fire services as being excellent. Would like to see the Township requesting bids from nearby services. Against putting on ballot. **L. Andersen**, asks if any potential grants have been identified. **D. Steggles**, Third St. feels everyone is bringing up valid points. We are a small township. We need to look at more information to justify such a position. City Manager of Elk Rapids has shared with B. Cook that they are looking at approaching smaller Townships for interest in their services. Question regarding monies being paid to Sheriff Bean department. Tax assessments pay for services. S. Schultz clarified that the State Police also have a presence in our community. **M. Friend**, Royal View spoke to this discussion having been reviewed by Supervisor Cook at previous meeting. At the previous meeting it was mentioned that other smaller Townships are also looking at this option which speaks to potential need. Would like it done properly if this goes to a vote. You can’t provide numbers for an area not being monitored. Asks if Supervisor Cook envisions the wording of the vote to explain a plan; that would include option to bid for outside service, would make or break the vote. **B. Petersen**, Hjelte Rd. has been involved with this topic for last 2.5 years. Would ask the board to consider a blend of comments that have been shared. Has had many in community sharing that they do not see a presence by Antrim County Sheriff. There has been an elimination of a secondary road patrols. Adding summertime traffic increases dangers and you rarely see a Sheriff sitting along the highways near heavy used areas like the parks. To those that speak to having experienced quick response times from Antrim County or Elk Rapids, we need to ask is this standard response or just a fluke. Again, more information needed as we are not monitoring or being monitored. He does recommend that the Board moves forward but with an adjustment to amount being requested and to seriously look at contracting with another township. In regards to the Day Park, there has been many comments and observations regarding the high-volume usage and dangerous concerns.

**R. Service**, Dragonfly Ln reiterated that B. Cook stated we are looking at other options. Spoke to monthly report from Sheriff Bean which shows crimes that happen monthly. In regards to the Day Park, this summer there will not be any attendants. To see an officer drive through would have more of a presence. There are break-ins over the winter months. **K. Graves** thanks the Board for considering. She has had excellent experiences with law enforcement in both the summer and winter. She had no idea that the squad car sitting in the Township lot was dispatched from here. Would also like more detailed information from Sheriff Bean. Hopes the Board takes in all aspects and considers contracting with another existing service. Appreciates the Board’s forward thinking. The City Manager of Elk Rapids will be putting together a proposal for four (4) Townships to increase police presence. Suggestion by R. Bishop to ask Elk Rapids to provide the proposal for our Township meeting on the 19th. Supervisor Cook will be circling back to review comments from tonight’s meeting. Summary by Supervisor Cook is that there is interest

**J. Rubingh**, County Commissioner receives a report from the Sheriff regarding the 15 Townships in Antrim County. It details every call to 911. While he hasn’t broken out TLT specifically, the top calls are either for medical or car/deer accidents. Banks Township has also had these conversations. Feels that conversations began when Antrim County Sheriff Department officers were down. Still an issue and feels that the primary purpose of Government is to keep everyone safe. It is a good thing that TLT, Milton and Elk Rapids Townships are bringing attention to this topic.

**T. Petersen**, Hjelte Rd questions if we are paying Antrim County already to the Police Dept., why don’t we have more police in the area? Why is there a continued issue with our Township specifically? Believes we should be represented in this area. Perhaps there needs to be a direct conversation with Sheriff Bean. Concerns with rising issues in light of current economy. Does like the idea of a contract service with surrounding Townships.

**Written Correspondence**: **Andy Muth** email reviewed coverage from the Sheriff Dept. and feels this proposal would be a mistake. A one-man operation would cause more issues. If there isn’t enough work for an OEO, then there would not be enough to support a fulltime officer. Second email from A. Muth stated two questions to be added to consideration which included benefits and unionized employment. Went on to raise cost concerns of liability for various scenarios. Identified several issues of concerns as read by the Clerk. R. Bishop suggests written communications follow same limits and offers suggestions to rectify. Suggests issue be brought to another meeting.

**4. Discussion related to funding alternatives for operating the Township Day Park and Boat Ramp.** Supervisor Cook in discussing with TLT Attorney summarized need for discussion. The agreement states the Day Park must be kept up and if income received from fees collected don’t cover, then the Township must cover balance. B. Cook spoke to reasons for rising use and reality that the park has been a drain on the General Budget. Looking for support to the Day Park. To repair the Boat ramp, it will cost approximately $15,000. To do so appropriately, would cost ROUGHLY $50,000. .

**T. Stillings** asks for clarification regarding asking the residents to pay for usage. Will non-residents be charged? There is no way to change original agreement. As it stands, the TLT is committed to supporting. **B. Petersen**, Hjelte Rd. understands frustrations. Asks how Milton Township manage and fund their parks. Being a member of the Park Committee, he is opposed to logistical suggestions that have been discussed in committee. Feels that proposal doesn’t aid to keep expense of park under control. This proposal just moves the cost to another tax line. Boat ramp is a road end so is it even possible to charge for usage. It is a 2-acre park that includes the parking lots and drainage field.

**R. Service** offered historical information and has tried for the last several years to speak with the Township attorney and problem solve enforcing local ordinances and ensure safety for all visitors. It is a constant issue and expense that no one wants to apply to work. Review of last years costs and inability to collect fees offered as an example of what has become the norm. Review of charging for parking and corresponding staff issues provided. **S. Schultz** spoke to issue with trying to monitor parking. The park has become a Destination point and is widely used by nonresidents.

**J. Merchant** reminds public that having an Ordinance Enforcement Officer should aid in alleviating some of the issues as well as the installation of new cameras to help in enforcing off hour infractions. **Virginia Hawkins**, Third St. reported that the Committee is looking into Grant funding to aid in alleviating costs. **Tom Petersen**, Hjelte Rd, agreed to place on ballot and help aid the Township in its efforts. Feels that had the maintenance been kept up, the costs may not have been as high.

**5. Public Comment** - None

**6. Board Comment** – S. Schultz clarifies that there has been money invested into the park by the Township in the drainage issues, parking lot maintenance and playground just to name a few. B. Cook states in the last several years there have been significant increases in costs that the Township covered.

7. (M/S) Schultz/J. Merchant motion to adjourn at 8:08 pm.

Minutes Respectfully Submitted by Veronica Beitner and subject to approval at the next scheduled meeting.