

ROSS TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS MEETING

July 7, 2025

The Ross Township Supervisors Meeting was called to order on July 7, 2025 at 5:59pm. The meeting was held at the Township Municipal Building.

In attendance were Chairman James Zahoroiko, Vice Chairman David Shay and Supervisor Randy Detrick. Solicitor Attorney Eric Filer was also in attendance.

Chairman James Zahoroiko announced that the Open to the Public segment of the Meeting would be moved until after Old Business to allow for discussion after presentation from Blue Ridge Hook & Ladder.

MINUTES REVIEW:

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the June 2, 2025 meeting as written by Supervisor Randy Detrick and seconded by Vice Chairman David Shay. The motion carried 3-0.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Vice Chairman David Shay made a motion to approve the Treasurer's Report. The motion was seconded by Supervisor Randy Detrick and carried 3-0.

OLD BUSINESS:

Blue Ridge Hook & Ladder

Fire Chief Paul Warnick addressed the Board of Supervisors about at last month's meeting there was talk about the possibility of adding a Fire Tax within the Township as the current budget did not allow for more funds to be directed to the Fire Department and asked if the Board of Supervisors had any further thoughts. Supervisor Randy Detrick stated they had talked about moving the Library Tax to the Fire Department instead, but that would not be possible as it is through the county instead of township. Vice Chairman David Shay stated that they would see what more could be done come the budget discussions in November.

Fire Chief Warnick explained his thoughts on why implementing a Fire Tax may be the better option as there is already such a budget gap and the Township contribution has remained close to the same since pre-covid prices, which have continued to rise. He also stated that Hamilton Township has doubled their contribution since last year along with paying for fuel, Workman's Comp and other items. Fire Chief Warnick stated that Ross Township been giving, on average, an additional \$43,000 per year towards their truck fund, but this year only gave \$10,000. The worry with waiting until budget discussions is that it may be too late to start the process to implement the Fire Tax as their budget is projected to run out at the end of next year.

Supervisor Randy Detrick stated he was not sure of the timeline to implement a new tax and asked if Fire Chief Warnick believed the community would be for or against the tax. Fire Chief Warnick stated those he had spoken with would be for the tax and explained that when they complete letter drives that only 13% of residents are donating and the volunteer fire fighters are answering calls while still trying to further raise funds for the department to continue running which should not only be on them. He further explained that, even a small fire tax such as \$100, would allow for the burden to be spread across all residents as everyone will eventually need to call 911.

Vice Chairman David Shay stated there could not be a flat tax amount added as it would be based off of the value of the home so the amounts would vary. Fire Chief Warnick agreed and stated that other townships have set caps to the tax so it could be stated it would not exceed a certain value.

Supervisor Randy Detrick then asked to discuss what would happen if nothing changes. Fire Chief Warnick stated they would be able to continue through next year though it would be tight and they have a truck in need of repairs they do not currently have the funds for. If everything continued as is, they would have to scale back to only serving Hamilton Township as they are providing roughly \$300,00, about 60% of the fire department's total budget. Cutting response calls within Ross Township would also lessen their maintenance costs of wear and tear on equipment.

Supervisor Randy Detrick asked Vice Chairman David Shay what the Board of Supervisors would need to do if they lost service from Blue Ridge Hook & Ladder. Vice Chairman David Shay stated that would not be what was wanted, but that they would need to be in contact with other departments to find one to name for Ross Township. Fire Chief Warnick stated that if another department was chosen, it would increase Homeowner's Insurance rates with longer response times coming from further out. He further explained other surrounding departments already have large coverage areas with limited truck resources for responding.

Supervisor Randy Detrick stated he personally was in favor of adding a millage to provide funds to the fire department, but that he is also in a role to support the community as a whole and wants to make sure that all questions would be able to be answered as to why a Fire Tax would be the best option for Ross Township after exploring all other options. This would guarantee the money of the community was being spent in the best way to have the service to cover the community. Fire Chief Warnick stated there was another Fire Chief present that evening if they would like to ask anything of them. After confirming it would be alright, the Fire Chief of West End, Mike Manfre, came forward.

Fire Chief Manfre stated that they are also stretched thin at West End Fire Company and that the money Blue Ridge Hook & Ladder is receiving would not be enough to cover for them due to the time and manpower which is why they implemented a Fire Tax in their township. He further stated there is time to respond to emergency calls or raise money, but not enough time to do both. They still do fund raising where they are able, but the Fire Tax does help cover costs.

Supervisor Randy Detrick asked about if Ross Township were to approach West End Fire Department with the current budget they are providing to Blue Ridge Hook & Ladder, would they deny request. Fire Chief Manfre said he could present it to membership, but that it would be too much with what they have. He stated that they would still respond to requests for assistance to Blue Ridge Hook & Ladder, but that a more local department would be able to have majority of work done before they would be able to be on scene. Fire Chief Warnick gave the example of the local veterinarian office that had recently caught fire, West End Fire Department was also called on initial dispatch for the fire, but that Blue Ridge Hook & Ladder already was able to have four firefighters on scene working before they were able to get there. The longer response times would need to be considered.

Chairman James Zahoroiko asked if the firehouse was ever manned. Fire Chief Warnick explained that it is all volunteer based so unless they would happen to be there, all members would need to first get to the firehouse before being able to head to call. Supervisor Randy Detrick again stated that he was in

favor of a tax, but wanted to open to the public for any objections and to be open to all other options. Chairman James Zahoroiko then announced the floor would be open for public comment.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:

Martha Rezeli came before the meeting and stated that her and her husband are residents of Ross Township and wanted to tell her neighbors and the Supervisors that something needed to be done for Blue Ridge Hook & Ladder. She asked for neighbors in the community to contribute a donation to the Fire Department for all of the good work done by them as all volunteers. She shared the story of the quick response of the department when her husband's truck caught fire and how they had the fire under control before Kunkletown Fire Department was able to respond.

Ms. Rezeli continued with stating those who may have moved into the area from a larger city, who may have had a paid/professional fire department cover their area, may not be aware that those in the local area are all unpaid volunteers. She feels Ross Township is fortunate to have Blue Ridge Hook & Ladder, and the comfort having a local department brings, so she would not like to see another department be brought in.

Ms. Rezeli stated she understands finances can be strained, but still stressed the importance of supporting the local fire department. She addressed the fire department stating their presence makes a meaningful contribution to the community and stated she had a couple of suggestions for them. Her first suggestion included considering an option for residents to have an annual subscription for donating to the fire department and a second suggestion of listing their budget on their website to allow for public knowledge of where shortages are in the budget.

Ms. Rezeli then addressed the Board of Supervisors with a suggestion of if they had considered Per Capita Tax instead of a major tax as her brother, who lives in Carbon County, pays a little less than \$5 per person in the household to go towards their fire department. She concluded with asking all to keep in mind the sacrifices the local fire department makes in order to keep all in the community safe.

Next to address the meeting was Tax Collector Laura Hoffman who wanted to weigh in and give an overview of what steps would need to be taken in order to implement a new tax. She stated a Per Capita Tax would be something entirely different so would be better to stick with a Fire Tax. It was explained a Fire Tax would be a separate line item on the County Municipal Bill that would be based off of set millage, with one mill being \$1 for every \$1000 of assessed value.

When sharing the current 2025 duplicate, which is what a Tax Collector collects, for Monroe County, it was stated the duplicate had a total of \$382,989,070 which would equal \$382,989.07 after being divided by 1000. For an example, if the potential Fire Tax would be set at a millage of 0.25, the total would equate to \$95,747.27 for the fire department with 5% of that total going to the Tax Collector for their compensation. The example would be based off of 100% collection of the duplicate, but would vary as the usual is between 90-92% collection.

Ms. Hoffman then went into the logistics that it would be possible to have a new Fire Tax implemented for 2026 if the process was started and all was completed within the deadline. The Board of Supervisors would need to put together a Resolution of Compensation for the Tax Collector even though it should have been done by February 15th of this year with it being an election year. This resolution is where the percentage to be collected and remitted would be laid out.

Once the Resolution for Compensation was in place, the Tax Collector would be aware of what bills needed to be sent out and contact would be made from the County to know what all the millage rates for the Township are so the bills would be reflected correctly for printing to go to residents.

Ms. Hoffman then explained the Tax Collector would be responsible for filing a separate check and remittance report to the Board of Supervisors every month. The Fire Tax, being a separate line item, would always be separate checks and reports so the Township could easily track what amount would be set aside for payroll to the Tax Collector. It would then need to be decided what the pay frequency to the Fire Department would be. With this, if the Township was able to get all items completed by the January 15th deadline, they would be capable of having the new tax on the bills for March 2026.

Ms. Hoffman then stated she had gone through census.gov for the population to get a 2024 total of 5,471 residents which, per Local Tax Collection Law, would cap the max for the Tax Collector in the Resolution of Compensation at 5%. She also stated she had a copy of the Local Tax Collection Law to offer if needed for the Board of Supervisors and Township Solicitor. She also had copies of the 2025 millage rates, and Duplicate page, and that it would behoove them to move forward with the Fire Tax as it would be a nominal amount to each tax payer with an estimate of about \$40 per household based off of parcels billed.

Chairman James Zahoroiko asked how many other townships have a Fire Tax. Ms. Hoffman stated while she could not give an exact number, she would say around 70%. Secretary Melissa Monaco then stated she had a copy of all the millage rates that could be copied for the Board of Supervisors. Ms. Hoffman ended with stating she had wanted to weigh in on the logistics and let them know it would be possible to have in place for next year.

Next to address the meeting was Dr. Anne Sobers who shared she had not known that none of her taxes were going to the fire department and that others may be under the same impression. Her opinion is that there would not be the push back the Board may be concerned about with adding a Fire Tax if others were aware they were not currently paying into the fire department.

Vincent Delhery next addressed the meeting stating he was one of the 13% that were said to donate through the letter drives for the fire department as he considers it a civic duty. He then stated he is against taxes, as he had such high tax amounts while living in New Jersey, so whatever was taxed would be that much less he would send in through donation.

Fire Chief Warnick responded that such a response would be expected. Supervisor Randy Detrick stated such comments are why he is asking for any pushbacks, or other challenges, to be presented now and discussed.

Vice Chairman David Shay asked if there had been any discussions with Hamilton Township about a Fire Tax. Fire Chief Warnick stated with the additional funds they have committed to they are not currently looking into a Fire Tax with them. It was stated that Hamilton does have millage in place.

Supervisor Randy Detrick stated he wanted to put it forward that he would like to move toward the Fire Department being supported through millage within the Township, but if anyone had a better alternative that he would be open to it. Ms. Rezeli suggested the Fire Department should do more public

relations to educate the public that everything is volunteer based so there may not be as much pushback.

Vice Chairman David Shay that there needed to be an ongoing discussion to figure out the legality and what the maximum millage that the Board of Supervisors would be able to apply. They also would need to look into responsibility of tracking proper allocation of funds and if any other audits would need to be completed. He then went into setups within the Township from his previous time as Supervisor and that there was the allocation dependent on the residential, and commercial, counts along with the Foreign Fireman Fund Insurance that is passed along to the Fire Departments.

Fire Chief Warnick reiterated their current issue with the budget gap is the numbers still mirror 2012 numbers, but everything has gone up in price. Supervisor Randy Detrick then asked the Fire Department to come to the next meeting again and for anyone who has any objections to come before the Board of Supervisors to voice their opinions to have a final decision by the end of the year to meet the January 15th deadline.

Anything with the Fire Tax could at least be a starting point to further help the Fire Department which may allow for budget funds to be allocated in other areas of the Township, but may still not be enough to fully bridge the department's budget gap.

The Board of Supervisors asked for Attorney Eric Filer to confirm the legality of all items for adding a tax and stated there would be further discussion at the next meeting.

PLANS:

Catherine Andrews Extension Request - Extension Expires 8/4/2025

Applicants were not in attendance and Attorney Filer stated that the Board of Supervisors would not be able to act on a request as there was no request received. Vice Chairman David Shay made a motion to deny the plan to which there was no second.

Attorney Filer stated the plan is currently before the Planning Commission and that the Board of Supervisors is still awaiting a recommendation. Secretary Melissa Monaco stated the applicant had submitted an appeal with Zoning and is awaiting a date to be scheduled by the Zoning Hearing Board so the plan would not be considered before the Planning Commission or Board of Supervisors.

Attorney Filer stated action would need to be taken before the extension expires, but that they are unable to grant a further extension without a written request. Vice Chairman David Shay stated he had made a motion to deny the plan and there, again, was no second to the motion. Attorney Filer stated the plan was before the Planning Commission who would be meeting on July 17th. The current extension would go through until the next Board of Supervisors meeting on August 4th at which time action would need to be taken, and a written decision approving or denying the plan issued, as the extension would be up. He further stated without a response, the plan would be automatically approved.

NEW BUSINESS:

Motion for 90 Day Raise – Kayla Heckman

Chairman James Zahoroiko asked if Kayla Heckman was present to which Secretary Melissa Monaco stated she was not. Vice Chairman David Shay requested an Executive Session to further discuss which began at 6:51pm and the Board of Supervisors returned from Executive Session at 6:56pm.

Upon return, Chairman James Zahoroiko stated there was no decision to be made that evening pending a later conversation with Kayla Heckman. The decision would be tabled until the next meeting and could be used for backpay if desired.

Motion to Pay Invoice for Bog Turtles Project

Vice Chairman David Shay stated a final item listed under the grant for the Mt Eaton Road Project was for avoidance of Bog Turtles through the Bog Turtle Project.

Vice Chairman David Shay made a motion to pay the \$3775 for the project and the motion was seconded by Supervisor Randy Detrick. The motion carried 3-0.

Before moving into events, Secretary Melissa Monaco stated that the floor had not been opened to the public beyond the discussion regarding Blue Ridge Hook & Ladder. Martha Rezeli, of The Ross Township Historical Society, let it be known that the Museum will be open Saturday 7/12 from 11:00am-3:00pm. She also stated that there are continued preparations for the reenactment on September 7, 2025 along with preparing for a celebration for the Anniversary of Our Independence Day next year. Ms. Rezeli also shared the Historical Society is looking for more community involvement for this event. Being involved does not have to include joining the Historical Society, but that members of the community could still come together to meet and discuss more ideas.

Chairman James Zahoroiko asked if there were any other public comments, which there were none.

EVENTS:

Saturday July 19th from 1:00-6:30pm – Blue Ridge Fire Fundraiser at Mazeilla

This event will be in celebration of Blue Ridge Hook & Ladder's 120th Anniversary along with raising funds for the Fire Department. Barley Creek will be providing food and drink for purchase and donating a portion of their sales. Blue Ridge Winery will be selling wine and donating 100% of sales to the fire department. No advanced tickets are needed and there will also be commemorative items for sale, live music, and various drawings to take part in. They are hoping for better attendance than the Firemen's Festival as numbers were down this year due to the weather.

ROAD FOREMAN REPORT:

Mt Eaton Road Culvert Project

Road Foreman Ethan Brewer stated the Mt Eaton Road Culvert Project is expected to start in August. Beginning of August, the road will be closed with the contractor expected to be in during the second week. The project is expected to be mostly completed by the end of August.

Backhoe Repair

Road Foreman Ethan Brewer stated the parts to repair the backhoe have been ordered.

CORRESPONDENCE:

The Board of Supervisors had reviewed the provided Correspondence items and there were no further questions.

RECEIPTS & EXPENDITURES:

After a review of the bills to be paid, a motion to approve the processing and payment of all current bills was made by Supervisor Randy Detrick and seconded by Vice Chairman David Shay. The motion carried 3-0.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:03pm. The motion to adjourn was made by Supervisor Randy Detrick, seconded by Vice Chairman David Shay and carried 3-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lizzy Stortz

Temporary Recording Secretary