

Kenockee Township Board of Trustees
Special Meeting September 19th, 2022

Meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m.

Roll Call was conducted with all board members present. 30 Residents in attendance.

Supervisor Molesworth led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of the Agenda: Motion made by Clerk Hill, 2nd by Trustee Hawks to approve the meeting agenda for the special meeting. Motion Passed 5-0.

Resignation of Kenockee Township Fire Chief Jason Rottmann: Supervisor Molesworth read the letter of resignation submitted by Chief Rottmann. Copies of the letter were given to all who attended the meeting.

Motion made by Treasurer Shappee 2nd by Trustee Hawks to accept the resignation of Kenockee Township Fire Chief Jason Rottmann. Motion Passed 5-0.

Assignment of Interim Kenockee Township Fire Chief: The board discussed the process of assigning a interim fire chief.

Supervisor Molesworth made a motion to hire Jerry Nuss as the interim Kenockee Township Fire Chief. He stated that Jerry Nuss has 30 years on the Emmett Fire department and all of the qualifications and experience needed for the position. He is also a resident of Kenockee Township. He stated that he should be able to find out if there are any irregularities.

Trustee Hawks stated that we have a letter from James Vincent. Supervisor Molesworth stated that we couldn't do anything with that. It would be a Chief's decision. Trustee Schieweck stated that he stepped away. Why would he leave and then automatically return once the Chief leaves. Treasurer Shappee advised that it was personal reasons. Trustee Schieweck stated, that he didn't understand why he couldn't just step into a lower position. Trustee Schieweck advised that he would not be voting on the subject. He is abstaining.

Treasurer Shappee stated that she is making a motion to have James Vincent become the Chief due to the fact that his return to service letter was dated September 17th, 2022.

Supervisor Molesworth stated that he has to be accepted by the Chief. Clerk Hill inquired what do you mean that he has to be accepted by the Chief. Supervisor Molesworth stated that the Chief assigns the officers. Clerk Hill stated, but he just took a leave of absence, he did not resign his position.

Treasurer Shappee stated that his leave was never accepted by the Chief so why is that any different. Supervisor Molesworth stated his leave was accepted by the Chief.

Trustee Hawks stated that you can take a leave of absence at any job that you work at and you don't lose your position. That is the whole purpose of giving a letter of leave absence, so you don't lose your position. I know that by law it can't be taken away.

Nick St James stated that he took a leave of absence due to medical, I did not lose my position on my return to work. I was in the same position. If the leave of absence wasn't accepted then technically it wasn't valid and he was still considered active. If it wasn't valid than Jim Vincent would have been the Asst Chief and should have accepted the Chief position.

Treasurer Shappee stated that if we didn't accept the leave of absence why are we accepting the resignation. Supervisor Molesworth stated that the township determines who is the Chief. All of the other positions are determined by the Chief.

Nick St. James stated that he has been on the department for a while. Jim Vincent has put good structure within the department and organization. I don't live in the township personally. But I have seen the structure he has in place and he knows the guys on the department. Jerry Nuss is not on the department. At least Jim Vincent knows what is going on within the department. Personally, I feel he would do a fantastic job as Chief and with his experience and time on the department.

Clerk Hill stated that we know that this is just a temporary position until we choose a Chief. We still have to put out notification of the job position and receive resumes and go over their qualifications of those who submit them.

Treasurer Shappee stated, that she put a motion on the floor. Supervisor Molesworth advised So, did I.

Nick Engel submitted his resume to the township board for the interim position. He stated that he has a letter of references for the position.

Keith Fones submitted his resume to the township board for the interim position.

Treasurer Shappee inquired if she was allowed to ask questions regarding the information that was just received. Trustee Schieweck stated, I would say yes, because they are applying for the interim chief position.

Treasurer Shappee inquired, Keith, you give us this packet to apply for the interim Chief's position. But we were told that you didn't want to be the interim Asst Chief. Keith Fones responded by saying that is not true. I was not here for that meeting it was my mother's birthday. I spoke with Jason regarding this a week ago and then it never happened. Was it miscommunication on his end.

Treasurer Shappee asked, so you never said that you were not interested. Keith Fones stated, that he did not. Trustee Schieweck stated that he 2nd Keith Fones statement.

Supervisor Molesworth stated that we seem to be at an impasse. So, we will go with the Assist Chief and the interim Chief until everyone gets their applications in.

Treasurer Shappee inquired that you say were going with the assistant chief. Supervisor Molesworth stated, yes. Until we can either get an interim Chief or actual Fire Chief. Treasurer Shappee stated, no Jim Vincent has returned. Supervisor Molesworth stated that is correct we now have 2 assistant chiefs. Clerk Hill inquired does that mean were going with Jim Vincent then.

Nick St. James stated that we had an inactive asst fire chief with Jim Vincent on leave. Technically Nick Engel would return back to his position upon the return of Jim Vincent. He stated that Nick Engel would return back to Lieutenant 1, Keith Fones would be Captain and Steve Rzenkowski would be Lieutenant 2. So, James Vincent should be our Interim Chief.

Treasurer Shappee stated that James Vincent did return to duty prior to tonight and following protocol it should be James Vincent that becomes the interim Chief.

Nick Engel stated that at the last board meeting he was not voted in as an interim assistant chief but as an assistant chief. So as of right now we have 2 assistant chiefs in the department.

Trustee Schieweck inquired if a letter was sent to chief regarding his leave or did, he just inform everyone via crew. James Vincent stated that a letter was sent. Supervisor Molesworth stated that if we accept this letter than we are setting a precedent of running the fire department. Clerk Hill stated she has a question. I'm on medical leave with my job, someone comes in and covers my position. If I'm not able to return to work for whatever reason, then I'm released by my company. If I am able to return to work, I don't have to get approval from my CEO to return to duty. I just need a release to work. The person who was covering for me would go back to their position.

Supervisor Molesworth stated that Nick was not covering for him. Nick St. James stated that Nick should return to his former position now the James Vincent has returned. Supervisor Molesworth state by who's authority. Treasurer Shappee stated by employment law. Because they are technically employees of Kenockee Township. The township must still follow employment laws.

Nick Engel stated that the assistant chief position is not the township board decision it is an operational decision.

Jerry Nuss asked to speak to the board. He stated that you all know that I have over 30 years fire experience and running a fire department. One thing that I've always seen and I'm seeing it tonight. The previous board and this township board never seems to work with the fire department. The fire department follows the SOG's coming in and going out. The policies of the fire department. Nick Engel, I think a lot of him, but I just got a hold of his resume. He has five different jobs where is he going to find time to run a fire department. I'm not saying that I want to be the chief interim. I'm just saying that you guys have to figure this out for what's best as a community. I'm on the fire board and I've seen the budget and helped Jason set up the Quick Books. I should him how to track his expenses. I called assistant chief Engel and asked to speak with him and his officers the other night. I asked them what were the issues with the previous chief and what did they want to see with the new chief. In my opinion, you have 2 assistant chiefs. The current SOG's state that the 2 assistant chiefs are to assume all responsibilities of the Chief if the Chief is not available. This is what the SOG's state. So, you do have an interim chief. So, make the decision so does he have the experience or is he qualified for the position. I think I've proven to this township and I pointed out with the Greenwood contract that it was costing the township money. Clerk Hill inquired, if the SOG's stated any time of service stated prior to someone holding a Chief position. Keith Fones stated that He believes that to hold the Chief position you have to have 10 years on the department. He stated, that any other officer position you have to have I believe it's you have to have 3 years fire 1, fire 2 and 2 medical. Jerry Nuss stated, that when this all went happened, I had already left the board meeting and received a text stating that I left too soon. I received a text the next day from Chief Rottmann stating that he had resigned. I contacted Supervisor Molesworth and advised him I was available to help in what the township needs. He stated, that Supervisor Molesworth inquired if he would step in as the Interim Chief, I didn't say yes or no. After seeing all of these guys stating they want the job it's bull this is a department that's suppose to run as a team. Until someone stands up in this organization being the fire department and changes the culture of the fire department it will not get any better. I've seen chiefs ask for \$100 and that's ridiculous and I've seen chiefs circumvent the \$3000 emergency fund and get around it by double billing. This happened numerous times and that's the culture within the fire department. Who's going to change it? Somebody from within the culture? When the chief stands up stating all that's happened you have to trust him. If he has the knowledge and experience and is telling you which direction the fire department needs to go, he's telling you the right direction. Other than Josh he has some idea of what the fire department is suppose to do. The culture has to change, the board and the fire department has to get along. Thank you.

Pete Walters: I agree with Jerry about one thing. With the SOG's if you're going to have them then you need to follow them. It's that simple. Also, in the SOG's there was a fire ordinance, it mentions the SOG's, it mentions that the Chief Should contact the Supervisor for some issues and mentions when a supervisor should take action and some other things. We need to redo that ordinance. I've been here 15 years. I've seen 3 chiefs resign.

It's not the board, the board, the board like Jerry says. The board it's only that way when all 5 vote the same way. If you vote differently and the board overrules you 3-1 or 3-2. It's not the board because you voted against it. You just can't blanket blame a group of people. I know that you need a chief right away. I didn't know they were assistant chiefs, I thought they were deputy Chiefs. Jerry Nuss stated, there is no reason there can't be more than 1 assistant chief. Pete Walters stated that I have the fire ordinance and can give you all a copy of it. Steve Rzenkowski stated, that the SOG's doesn't specify regarding a Chief. Treasurer Shappee stated, that I thought we weren't sure what set was the actual set we should be using that's current? Pete Walters stated, that Jason didn't have the qualifications when he became chief, if I recall. Supervisor Molesworth stated, that's true. Pete stated, but there was a clause that you had up to 2 years to obtain your qualifications and training. Jerry Nuss stated, that the state law says that you have 2 years to attempt to get your fire 1, fire 2, and medical training. If you're attempting to get it. But I don't think that pertains to a chief. Pete Walters stated that he recalls 3 sets of SOG's 2013, 2017 and an earlier set that he has a copy of at home. The SOG's being currently used are the original from when Ralph Monroe, Tom Skeleton. Supervisor Molesworth stated, that other updated SOG's were presented to the Board but, were never approved. So, we currently have to use the SOG's that were approved.

Asst Chief Nick Engel advised that going back, we now have 2 assistant chiefs because I've accepted James Vincent letter of reinstatement.

Mike Johnson asked to speak stating that he was a trustee on the Yale School Board and also a Kenockee Township Firefighter. He stated that he believed that Jerry Nuss would be addition to the fire department. He has a ton of experience. He ran a successful fire department in Emmett. Their budget works and their department have newer trucks than we currently do.

Treasurer Shappee stated, that she would like to say that she doesn't like the perception that we are anti fire department. I am going to be the first to tell you, that I am Not anti-fire department. Trustee Hawks agreed. She stated that her father and father-in-law are on the wall in Roscommon and her son in law is an active fulltime firefighter in Hamtramck. I am not anti-fire department I just want it to be run properly. I understand a fire department. Supervisor Molesworth and Clerk Hill agreed. Gerry Nuss stated, that I think we all do. Treasurer Shappee stated, that she just doesn't like the perception being made that were anti-fire department. Jerry Nuss stated, that I hope you're not saying that I am indicating you are. Treasurer Shappee stated, no it came from the last board meeting.

Nick St. James stated that he felt that the interim position should be hired from within the department. And if we hire a Chief, it can be decided if you hire internal or external. But at this time, I feel that it should remain inhouse at this time because they don't know the culture that they are going into. Supervisor Molesworth stated, but then again, that culture needs to change.

So wouldn't a person from the outside be able to make that difference than somebody that's from the inside.

Asst Chief Engel asked, why can't someone from the inside do it?

Clerk Hill stated, with it being an interim position, can we bring someone from the outside. We have the 30-day posting we have to do for the position, review, background check, etc. Can we bring an interim from the outside? I thought interim positions were usually filled in house; I don't know that is why I'm asking the question.

Nick St. James stated, that he has never seen it. Usually with the rankings the way that they are; the captain would move up to assistant chief and lieutenant 2 would move up to captain and the lieutenant 1 would move up to lieutenant 2 leaving the lieutenant 1 position open. So, when Jim Vincent returned to work all the ranks would return to their previous ranks upon his return to service. Nick Engel stepped up because proper procedure wasn't followed when Keith Fones stated that He would step up to Assistant Chief.

Trustee Hawks stated that if you want to hire someone on an extern that would mean they couldn't be a committee or anything. They've never been in a fire department and that's how you're going to change it.

Jerry Nuss asked if there are motions on the floor. Supervisor Molesworth advised yes, 2 and no one 2nd the motions. Jerry Nuss stated, then those motions are dead. He stated, that your agenda say that you're going to appoint an Interim Kenockee Township Fire Chief. Doesn't say that it doesn't it's going to be hired from within department or outside of department. I hesitate to say this but I think I am the most qualified person in this room to take an interim whether it is 30 days, 60 days. I do not want to be on the fire department full time. It would be for the benefit of the township, not the fire department, not the board, but the best interest for the residents. I have sat on the fire committee for a few years. When issues have come up with the board regarding the Emmett Fire contract I've assisted with those changes, budget costs etc. I've run a fire department. Am I going to come in and be their best friend. No. I would expect them to act professional and be professional firefighters. I will not take an interim position unless that officers are on board with it. I will not butt heads with them. I asked them what problems they had with the last chief. What they wanted to see improved. In my opinion they need an outside person to sit down with them and straighten out the problems.

Supervisor Molesworth asked, if they were aware of the letter. Treasurer Shappee inquired to what letter? He stated, from Jim Vincent. The letter from Jim Vincent. Supervisor Molesworth stated, that she gave names at the meeting Tuesday. Treasurer Shappee stated, there were no names on the letters presented to her.

I didn't state anyone's names. Trustee Schieweck verified; she didn't give any names at the meeting. She stated that there were letters presented to the board.

Clerk Hill advised that she is the only board member that has read them. Trustee Schieweck stated, but she is the only board member that has seen them. Treasurer Shappee stated that is why she is asking for clarification on what letter Supervisor Molesworth is referring to. Supervisor Molesworth stated, ok. Trustee Schieweck stated that he didn't really want to vote on it. Somebody is looking to fill in for 60 days, why we accept resumes. See what it is. I'm not opposed to Jerry, me and Jerry don't see eye to eye.

Trustee Hawks set a motion to put James Vincent back to take this position for the 60 days, so that we may do further investigation on what we need to do to correct our fire department in the right manner and that's where I would stand.

Trustee Schieweck stated, how would Jimmy have time to do everything. He runs a tree business, works at Port Huron Township, is a father. Clerk Hill stated, but they said the same thing about Nick too. Trustee Schieweck stated, that Jerry is retired and home.

Treasurer Shappee stated, I would 2nd that with Jimmy using Jerry Nuss as a Liaison. Jerry Nuss stated, that you can't do that. He made a motion and you're trying to adjust the motion. Keith Fones stated that he just wants to comment about not having time. James Vincent he was in the top 3 of the fire department and he shows up the most.

Treasurer Shappee stated, I'll 2nd the motion and won't say anything more. Clerk inquired if the motion could be stated again.

Trustee Hawks stated, that we put James Vincent back in for the 60 days, while we do our investigations. Supervisor Molesworth stated, as interim Kenockee Township Fire Chief until November 9th, 2022, Trustee Hawks stated, yes. Supervisor Molesworth stated, that it was the next board meeting, which is a Wednesday due to the election on Tuesday.

James Vincent asked for clarification on the motion. The interim Chief will be identified as the interim, not known as chief or chief 2, that it is only temporary. While board goes through the process of job posting, reviewing resumes and backgrounds are checked out. Trustee Schieweck asked if all spending was on a freeze. Supervisor stated we can't vote on a spending freeze. It's a decision that can't be made at this meeting. There are only 2 things on the spending or anything of what we already have as our ordinance. Treasurer Shappee stated, it picks up where we left off. Trustee Hawks stated yes, we're not adding or taking away, it stays the same.

Clerk Hill stated, Trustee Hawks made the motion, 2nd by Treasurer Shappee.

Motion made by Trustee Hawks, 2nd by Treasurer Shappee, to put James Vincent back in for 60 days as interim chief expiring on November 9th, 2022 while we do our investigations of hiring a new Kenockee Township Fire Chief. Motion Passed. 4-0 Trustee Schieweck abstained from voting.

Supervisor Molesworth stated, that anyone wishing to apply for the permanent Fire Chief position please present the applications by the October Board Meeting so that we may review it with plenty of time. Job posting was not able to be voted on at this meeting. It will be on the October Board Meeting agenda.

Comments from the floor:

Mike Cooley asked, does this mean that Nick Engel will stay assistant chief at this time. Supervisor Molesworth advised yes.

Mike Cooley: please make a good decision and not hire a chief that is on 5 different fire departments. Supervisor Molesworth asked, has this happened? Mike Cooley replied, I don't know but we would be the ones that did first. I've been on the department a long time, back in the day we voted on our own stuff. Supervisor Molesworth stated, that it was taken away following the tanker incident. Mike Cooley stated, to please consider a chief that is going to dedicate to the department and I believe Jimmy Vincent would. I have nothing against Jerry Nuss we've had many discussions.

Pete Walters: I don't know where the culture discussion came up, but there are personnel issues and can we can always use better communication. He stated that I was here for the truck issues and the personnel problems and those were things done behind the boards back. Communication is needed. When they do their budget, they shouldn't have to report to the board unless it is something unforeseen expense. Supervisor Molesworth advised James Vincent that if you have an emergency, you would then call me to get the blessing to go forward with it.

Jerry Nuss: stated that he went to Fire safe about the truck. I found out there was a problem, because the board just stated it was on delay. Talking about emergency spending just recently the fire department had their pressure washer go down. But we can only spend \$3000.00/\$2500.00 he knew and he had them double bill. First half the first month then the next month the 2nd half was billed. This is the culture that has to change. Being truthful with the board and working together. If that chief sit there and said it was an emergency purchase, then the Supervisor should have already known about it, that's an emergency purchase. This is the culture that I am talking about.

Pete Walters stated that he had previously voted against something to do with pay cut at the fire dept. He stated it was to do with bringing some compliance. You can't just do whatever you want. It's the board that runs the township. Anybody that doesn't want to tell on people they should all be fired. In a culture like this it needs to be different.

Treasurer Shappee stated that she would like to agree with Jerry Nuss regarding the culture, because it's not a very good perception on the street.

Supervisor Molesworth stated, that a meeting was held on Thursday following our last board meeting and those who attended the fire meeting were asked to tell their grievances. I will say there were and are some issues.

Asst Chief Nick Engel presented the board with the issues and solutions that were discussed at the fire meeting to the board.

Clerk Hill asked Asst Chief Engel if the Chief had turned in his gear, keys to him yet. Asst Chief Engel advised he was meeting with him later that evening. Clerk Hill stated that she will need to receive the credit card to close the account and destroy the card.

Supervisor Molesworth advised James Vincent, you're interim Chief run the department like it is supposed to be run with open communication. James Vincent acknowledge him with yes.

Motion to Adjourn meeting. All in Favor 5-0. Meeting Adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Minutes prepared by:

Clerk Hill