

**RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS
SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2024 – 7:00 P.M.
MAYOR WILLIAM G. KOONS PRESIDING**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Bell, Berger, Canton, Cavanagh, Galicki, and Porter

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Fiscal Officer Romanowski, Chief Rizzo, Solicitor Matheney

VISITORS: Nick Dicicco, CVD; Andrew Recker, CVD; Chief Todd Dietzel, Moreland Hills; Mayor Ethan Spencer, Moreland Hills

The Mayor called the Special Council meeting to order. The Fiscal Officer read the roll. The Mayor provided a history of Fire, EMS, and Dispatch services utilized by the Village through the years. He explained the origins of Chagrin Valley Dispatch (CVD) and said it is the largest regional dispatch center in Ohio with 30 Cuyahoga County municipalities, the sheriff's office, and the Cleveland Metroparks system as members. The municipalities range in size from Chagrin Falls Township which had 58 calls last year and South Russell that had 1,944 calls to Euclid with 59,000 calls. There were inequalities that have been addressed through the work of the CVD Executive Committee and Finance Directors. The Executive Committee consists of the mayors of Euclid, Solon, Highland Hills, Independence, South Russell, and University Heights along with the trustee from Chagrin Falls Township. At the last meeting, the Executive Committee voted 4 to 3 to accept the new formula for participating members. It will be discussed Wednesday afternoon with the 32-member Council of Governments (COG) for a vote. South Russell is the only member not located in Cuyahoga County but pays Chagrin Valley Fire Department (CVFD) over \$1,400 per day for fire and EMS protection through a contract expiring at the end of 2025. Since 2013, the Village's CVD dues have gone down 5%. In 2013 it was \$62,000 and in 2024 it is \$59,000. With the rate of inflation, the Village should be paying \$82,000 per year. The proposed increase is \$28,000 or 48% increase. Some municipalities are receiving reductions and some increases. The Mayor felt the proposed cost for the CVD membership is in the best interest of the residents of South Russell and this is why he voted as a member of the Executive Committee to support the proposal. The Mayor invited all the communities that share the CVFD and stated that the purpose of the meeting was to get a better explanation of the proposal.

Nick Dicicco, CVD, provided an overview of the organization. CVD is a COG and is a government organization. It is governed by its Executive Board which are elected from the COG mayors. They serve a 2-year term. The president is Mayor Gail, City of Euclid; Vice President is Eddy Kraus, City of Solon; Mayor Koons is the Secretary; and John Finley, Chagrin Falls Township Trustee, is the Treasurer. The facilities are in Bedford, Brecksville, and Cleveland Heights. Each facility has an elected representative that serves on the Executive Committee. These are mayors from University Heights, Independence, and Highland Hills. When CVD began, billing was based on billable calls which are 'real' police and fire calls. When COVID hit, it broke everything, because in the smaller cities, no one left their homes but in the larger cities it was chaos and call volume skyrocketed. During the COVID era, CVD did not think it fair to penalize the larger cities since they were in a worldwide pandemic. The mayors voted the first year to increase everyone's rate by 1.75%. He explained that the billable call volume went from July 1st of the preceding year to June 30th of the current year. The reason for this timing was to allow time for the CVD to come up with the budget to give to the police and fire chiefs and ultimately to the municipalities before the next

fiscal budget. In the second year, CVD was not eligible as a COG for CARES Act funding, so the mayors approved a flat 7% increase based on the 2019 call volume and no other adjustments were made. In year three, it was a flat 5% and in year four, which is this year's budget, it was a flat 4%. This was all based on 2019.

Last year, a Finance Committee was created from finance directors, which recommended that CVD hire a full-time Finance Director who understood government finance. Two years were spent looking at different funding models. The committee went to a variety of regional government dispatch centers that had different approaches to billing. Some had very complex formulas, some based it on population, while others were based on land value, etc. Not one of them, however, solely based billing on call volume because it was not fair. Call volume fluctuates and makes it difficult to predict cost. Instead, it was based on what it costs to run a channel. For CVD, there are four full-time dispatchers per channel on 12-hour shifts. South Russell shares a channel with eight other communities. It was not possible to have the dispatchers calculate time spent on each type of call, so the Finance Committee came up with the cost formula. The first iteration had the admin section being \$44,000 because the thought was that a buy-in was needed for a city to be part of the organization. Participants are paying for a service to be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. There is also cost for capital improvement like with equipment. Regardless of call volume, the equipment is still needed, and the cost should be shared equally.

After the last COG meeting, they asked for CVD to hold three meetings for all partners who each have one vote. Through this, it was determined that the \$44,000 admin cost should be split in half.

Dicicco continued that as the Mayor stated, since 2013, the Village is not only 5.3% down over its 12-year membership, but it was also refunded \$14,500 for the Village's capital buy-in. The original Capital buy-in of 2013 was \$62,000. The addition of new members allowed for the refund. Cost efficiencies are not being seen at Bedford when new members come on anymore because they are built out. Dicicco addressed the increased call volume from The Lantern, which had not been included and was addressed through the flat increases. If the Village's costs were based on the fluctuating call volume with The Lantern, the Village would have been paying much more four or five years ago. Over its 12-year membership, costs have gone down 5.5%. Bell asked if the 800 calls from the Lantern referenced by Dicicco were annual or total, and Dicicco explained it was total since it was built and included police and fire.

Cavanagh thought that perhaps the Bedford and Brecksville facilities would be moving somewhere else. DiCicco said that during the three meetings with the mayors, they made it clear that they wanted to see efficiencies. Finding a way to consolidate under one roof would be the goal. Plans to build a facility were explored, but it came in at \$100 million. There are currently two sites they are considering that are 75% less than that. They have also approached the Port Authority to issue bonds. The mayors overwhelmingly conveyed that if they can show them through efficiencies that they will be paying the same and will be able to pay the note, they would support one facility under one roof knowing their costs would go down. This would allow new members to join, which would lower costs of existing members. Another efficiency being explored is streamlining the channels which would then require less staffing. He offered, however, that staffing is also a challenge. Cavanagh verified that CVD would purchase and not rent the new facility, and Dicicco advised that they are considering a building they can get for free but that would require rehabbing. It was built in 2008. Bell asked what the expansion would mean in the way of maximum channels and potential communities. Dicicco explained that if they go with one facility, it would be built out for 100

positions, so they have room to grow. Bell asked for clarification about the four dispatchers, and Dicicco said it was per channel. Berger verified that when it was created, CVD had six members and with the idea that over time, reduce individual member costs by spreading costs over more communities. Dicicco explained that when the House Bill passed that proposed limiting the amount of dispatch centers in Ohio, all the municipalities panicked and wanted to be able to pick their partners versus being told where they had to go. This is how CVD grew so quickly. Were it not for taking on these municipalities, however, many of the partners would not be looking at reductions. Berger pointed out that South Russell is not looking at a reduction but a 48% increase. He noted that the previous model spread costs over all the participants, but now the Village is looking at a 48% increase. He wanted to know what the model will be going forward. Dicicco explained that CVD knows its budget for 2026 and 2027 which is 2.8-3.2% for each of those years. Once the band-aid is ripped off on the new model, it resets itself and is back to normal. The Village will not see another 15-40% increase. Andrew Recker explained that in 2026, the potential increase will range from \$3,500 to \$5,500. Berger noted that even at \$3,500 over \$88,000, that is more than 3%.

Porter asked if they would consider a population-based model. Recker said that it would not work with consolidation because it could not be adjusted for the Sheriff's Department or the Metroparks. Canton asked where the Village's call volume ranked amongst the 32 entities. The Mayor said he would look into this. Canton asked if there were entities that had more calls who were paying less. His point was that the Village's bill should be based on calls. If the Village does not use as much, it should not pay as much. Dicicco explained the costs based on the number of departments that share a channel. The number of entities on a channel depends on the number of officers and call volume. It comes down to how many people and officers can a single dispatcher effectively manage. The Chief observed that out of the municipalities on the same channel as the Village, five of the nine will see a reduction with the proposed model even though the Village has the third lowest call volume on the channel. He asked how they arrived at the Village's increase. The best explanation Recker could offer was that the price was so low in 2019 that when the call volume was examined for the last few years and plugged into the calculation, this is where the spike came in.

Berger asked if phasing the increases in over time was considered. Recker said a three-year phasing was discussed but never grew any following. The Finance and Executive Committees decided to have the year one realization which basically rights the ship. Berger asked what the options would be for any of the 31 Cuyahoga County members who choose not to continue with CVD. Dicicco said it is difficult due to the state law that requires dispatch centers to have two dispatchers on duty around the clock. This is in the Ohio Revised Code. It would mean having 12 dispatchers, benefits, and capital equipment. Discussion continued about alternatives for the Cuyahoga County members. Berger indicated that the Village could go to the Geauga County Sheriff's Department dispatch for \$0, but it would not work with CVFD. It would be necessary to pursue a different contract for fire service within Geauga County. The options would be Russell and Bainbridge. Porter said the last time this was discussed, the difference between them was response time. However, if it will cost the Village more than \$28,000 to switch, then they would just be spinning their wheels. Berger advised that there is one more year on the CVFD contract, which allows time to evaluate options. Porter added that all the taxpayers of Geauga County fund the Geauga County Safety Center, including South Russell. Dicicco cautioned that calls made for Chagrin Schools automatically go to CVD, which would then have to transfer the call to Geauga County.

The Mayor referenced Canton's earlier question about how the Village ranked in call volume. He stated that the Village had 1,944 calls and out of the 32 groups using CVD, the Village ranked 30th.

Only Bentleyville and Chagrin Falls Township had fewer calls. The reason he voted to bring this matter out of Executive Committee was because he thought it was the best for South Russell. They have next year to look harder at what they are doing, and he thought this was best for the residents.

The Mayor invited visitors from Moreland Hills to ask questions. Ethan Spencer, Mayor of Moreland Hills, addressed the topic of channels. He heard the discussion about channels at the mayor's meeting and had subsequent conversations with people who believe that the channel is not an independent entity and that they share costs and resources. It is not as simple as saying that one entity is cheaper because there are many entities on a specific channel versus a single entity on a single channel being more expensive. He asked how the group thought through this concept. Diccio explained that the gentleman to whom Spencer was referring feels that the rates should be based on call volume. However, the Finance Committee's research revealed that call volume is not strictly used because of the problem of call spikes. The effort was to level out the costs with this model. Recker provided details of the Dayton dispatch which based its rates on call volume. This resulted in having to categorize the calls because not all calls are the same. He offered that with the new system implemented by CVD in January, it might be possible to do this in the future once there is more data with averaging the different types of calls. Spencer offered that Moreland Hills' calls are simpler than Euclid, and if municipalities were paying the same per call, they would be paying a lot more. Todd Dietzel, Moreland Hills Police Chief, explained that outside of homicides, every municipality has the same call types. Maple Heights has more homicides than Cleveland Heights, Shaker Heights, and Euclid almost combined. Everyone has domestics, shots fired, etc., but some do not have the quantity that the bigger cities have.

Spencer asked for clarification about the admin charge. Why would Chagrin Falls Township which has hardly any activity be paying the same admin charge as Euclid? Diccio explained that they looked at admin in terms of salaries and fringe benefits and divided the total by 32. Admin consists of Diccio, the Deputy Director, Finance Director, two finance clerks, the IT Director, and the Training Manager. That was the original \$44,000, but there was push back and it was reduced to half of the admin, which they felt was equally allocated amongst the communities. The other half of the admin is placed into the reserve pools and adjusted by calls. Diccio pointed out that all the members of Valley Enforcement Group (VEG) are paying a flat standard rate for services that are available 24/7/365. Recker added that it is the HR piece more than anything right now with trying to find and retain dispatchers. They are trying to keep their nose above water and keep the overtime within budget with not having adequate staffing.

Berger asked if there was an action required with respect to CVD. The Mayor said that there could be a motion instructing the Mayor to vote. The Solicitor said that she would think Council would want to weigh in on the matter. Berger said he wished Council would have been able to weigh in last week on the Executive Committee vote, and the Solicitor agreed. Porter asked for clarification about the representation on the Executive Committee. The Mayor reviewed which members represent which communities. Porter asked if the Mayor was representing a number of communities on the Executive Committee or just South Russell. The Mayor replied that he looked at it as what was best for CVD. The Solicitor asked if the vote this week was for each member community, and the Mayor concurred. She verified that the Mayor would be there representing the Village only. The Mayor said yes. The Solicitor further clarified he would not be representing CVD. The Mayor said this was correct. Galicki asked if the roll call vote would determine whether all the communities buy into the proposal. The Mayor said yes that this would be the decision. The

Solicitor asked if it was a simple majority, and the Mayor concurred. The potential vote was discussed.

Porter cautioned that if the Village planned to leave CVD and CVFD, the planning would need to start well in advance. Galicki offered that Bainbridge Fire Department has a levy on the ballot for significantly increasing costs, and they are discussing laying off personnel. It may not be a simple solution.

Cavanagh clarified that Council would be voting for just this coming year. The Mayor said his vote at the Executive Committee was to get the proposal approved for 2025. Then the Village can do its research to see what the community wants. Porter described the process involved with the last time the Village considered a different fire service.

Canton asked what would happen if the CVD vote failed, and the Mayor thought they would just do a simple percentage and spend 2025 coming up with something else. Bell clarified that agreeing to this plan means saying Council is in favor of a central dispatch center, instead of three, with a 48% increase to the Village. If it fails, there would be a percentage increase. He suspected it would pass. The Mayor said it does not matter to the Village if it passes if the Village wants to leave at the end of 2025. Galicki offered that it does matter because costs go up 50%. The Chief advised that there is an ordinance that allows the Village to bill individuals for false alarms and asked if the Village could recoup money from The Lantern for the substantial increase in calls. Berger determined that related to the 48% increase in cost, this would be a small percentage comparatively. The Mayor said that since 2019, the Village has been underpaying in terms of inflation which would be \$82,000. Berger clarified that the concept in joining CVD was that the costs would go down over time because communities would be added. He did not think the argument of underpayment flies in the face of what the Village was promised in 2014. Porter noted that the costs did go down for a number of years and now they are going up. Berger stated that the reason for the increase was because CVD expanded, and this is the disconnect with the concept of cost reductions with the addition of new communities. Porter added that there was never a thought given to a ceiling or maximum number of communities CVD would take. Would Council wish to make a motion to instruct the Mayor to vote one way or another on the issue? Should Council make a protest vote about whether the Village wishes to stay with CVD? Galicki advised that the vote should be geared towards whether the Mayor should vote for a cost increase to the Village residents, which is what is being discussed. Porter stated that the Village would get an increase if it failed, but the question would be how big it will be. Galicki offered that it would not be 50%. Berger said if it was 10% it would be \$6,000 versus \$28,000. Porter suggested saying no this time around to see what the increase would be. Galicki agreed. Canton supported a protest vote. Porter added that the Village could then investigate other options and if necessary, go crawling back to CVD. Galicki argued that their vote does not mean they would be crawling back to CVD, it means that if the majority goes for the increase, the Village must go with the increase and at the end of the contract year investigate other options. The Fiscal Officer clarified that if it does not pass, CVD would have to go back to determine another option for the members. They do not necessarily know what a flat percentage would be. The Chief said if CVD runs out of time to develop another formula, then they would probably do an across-the-board increase. Berger stated that in looking at the bottom-line number, the increase for this year is \$508,000 on a proposed budget of \$14,600,000, which is about 5.5%. This should be the increase as opposed to a 48% increase. The Mayor raised the question again about whether the Village had been underpaying for the last 10 years, and Galicki said this was off the board because the Village entered the contract under the terms that the Village was given. He

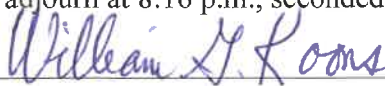
did not know what their reasoning was in overcharging other communities, but he did not care because he is concerned about South Russell. The Village did not cheat them out of anything and agreed to the terms provided. Porter said that the Village would have had to pay more if other member communities had not joined. Whether the Village under or overpaid in years past was irrelevant to him although the Village was facing a \$28,000 hit now if it passes versus 5.5% if it does not. The Mayor called for a motion. Bell stated that with the information Council currently has, he found it hard to justify 48.41% increase. It might be that it is a good idea for the residents a year from now, but Council has not had time to think about the future yet. Porter concluded that the Village must have dispatch. Canton suggested that Council ask the Mayor to vote no, but to explain why to the group. The Mayor replied that the best thing for the Village is to approve this thing which gets them into 2025 and then the Village has 14 months to talk to Chagrin, Bainbridge, Russell, and the county to see if they have a better deal. Canton verified that regardless of whether the proposal passes or not, the Village has a year to make decisions. The Mayor agreed. Berger clarified that this is because of the CVFD agreement which locks the Village into CVD.

There was discussion about why CVFD is not part of Geauga County Dispatch. The Chief provided the history of dispatch services in the area. Canton asked if CVFD could use both Geauga County and CVD. He suggested approaching CVFD to let them know if they want to keep the Village, they will have to respect Geauga County Dispatch. For CVFD to be on both dispatches would be a huge undertaking and the Cuyahoga County entities serviced by CVFD would not be eligible for Geauga County Dispatch services. The Chief added that CVFD can get into South Russell much more quickly than Bainbridge and Russell Fire Departments.

Berger said he would make the motion in the affirmative. **Berger made a motion that Council should instruct the Mayor to vote yes at the Wednesday CVD meeting to approve their 2025 budget, seconded by Cavanagh. Roll call – ayes, Cavanagh and Porter. Nays – Galicki, Bell, Berger, and Canton. Motion failed.**

Porter addressed the solar panel and Police Station upgrade projects. The goal is to get the solar panel project finished with electrical work this year. They wanted one contractor to do everything in terms of replacing the panel, tying in the solar panels, connecting to the transformer, and bringing the electrical from the pole to the Police Department. Quotes were obtained by the Chief and Building Inspector. The lowest is Kenco Electric to do all the work for \$2,538.00 which includes the cable. The Solicitor advised that it appears there is an agreement with terms, which would require an ordinance. Porter introduced an ordinance permitting the Mayor and Fiscal Officer assisted by the Chief and Service Department Director and the Building Inspector with Kenco Electric, Inc. for the purposes of the upgrade to the Police Department electric system and the tie in of the solar panel project in the amount of \$2,538.00. Porter made a motion to waive readings and declared an emergency, seconded by Berger. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. Porter made a motion to adopt, seconded by Berger. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **ORD 2024-85.**

ADJOURNMENT: Being that there was no further business before Council, Porter made a motion to adjourn at 8:16 p.m., seconded by Canton. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.


William G. Koons, Mayor


Danielle Romanowski, Fiscal Officer

Prepared by Leslie Galicki