

**RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS
SPECIAL MEETING – 2025 BUDGET WORK SESSION
MONDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2024 - 5:30 P.M.
MAYOR WILLIAM G. KOONS PRESIDING**

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

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

The Mayor called the Special Council meeting to order. The Fiscal Officer read the roll.

Police Department/Safety Fund

The Chief reported his research findings relative to savings in changing from Chagrin Valley Dispatch to Geauga County. The IT costs would be greatly reduced after onboarding with ADP, which would put the Police Department on the same network as the other Village departments. CVD had grown exponentially, and the atmosphere was described as chaotic with a high rate of turnover, dispatchers unfamiliar with South Russell, and errors occurring due to the demands of larger communities. The IT staff is also shorthanded, and the Police Department has ongoing IT and software issues with the new multimillion-dollar program implemented by CVD. Other CVD participants are seeking alternative options as well. The Village has had a good working relationship with CVD; however, the service has changed over the years and there are benefits to joining Geauga County. The Village already uses the following Geauga County services: Juvenile Court, Chardon Municipal Court, Geauga County Prosecutor, Geauga County Job and Family Services, Ravenwood Mental Health, Geauga County Animal Warden, the county Coroner, and Geauga County Jail. This is not a knee-jerk decision based on a rate increase by CVD. There is a long-standing relationship with Geauga County with the aforementioned services. Other benefits to the Village switching would include electronic court services and Geauga County staff performing expungements, redactions, and sealing of records. The prosecutor would have access to the Village's incident database and the Village would be on the same channel with all Geauga County agencies. The residents are already paying for the service, which the Village has not taken advantage of due to the level of service and technology it had with CVD. However, circumstances have unfortunately changed. The Police Department would like to cease IT operations with CVD and join the Geauga County ADP network. \$15,000 is currently being paid for CVD IT services. After onboarding with ADP, the annual recurring costs will about \$2,200 annually. Three years of CVD IT service would be \$45,000. The onboarding and three years of ADP would equate to about \$30,000. Over five years it would save the Village \$25,000. The residents would not notice the difference because nothing would change, other than the potential for improved response times. Currently, 911 calls from cell phones automatically go to Geauga County and then get transferred back to CVD. The change would allow for a faster police response ahead of Fire/EMS. In sum, the savings would be about \$40,000 for police dispatch. Over five years, it would be \$200,000. There would also be \$15,000 in IT service savings, which would be \$75,000 over five years. The total would be \$300,000 over five years.

The Chief read a letter in support of this change from Geauga County Prosecutor James Flaiz (attached).

Canton relayed that the Safety Committee was provided the information about Geauga County Dispatch. After discussion, the committee recommended it go forward. He added that the CVD increase is not good for the Village's residents.

With the proposed change, Cavanagh asked who would respond if she were to call 911 for a medical emergency. The Chief explained that there would be no change with this service because the Village would continue to use CVD for FIRE/EMS dispatch. His proposal would reduce the \$90,000 CVD expense by pulling out \$40,000 for police services. Instead of paying \$90,000 for combined service, the Village would be paying about \$47,000 for fire dispatching.

Porter recalled that the reason the Village stayed with Chagrin Valley Fire Department (CVFD) was partially because the dispatch was CVD. He was unaware that it could be split. The Chief explained that the Village was not looking for separate services at the time because it had a superior system with CVD. However, over the last two years, a new software system was implemented which has been a continuous struggle. Things have changed with the technology and the dispatching services. Porter also recalled that at the time, Geauga County was behind technologically compared to CVD but verified that things had changed in 10 years. He concluded that the Chief was saying the Police could split away from CVD and save the Village \$40,000. The Chief said it would be more like \$62,000 between IT services and dispatch. Although there are onboarding costs associated with this, ultimately it will be a savings to the Village. Porter asked how long the integration period would be, and the Chief said about a month for ADP and as early as December 1st for Geauga County Dispatch.

The Chief conveyed that to end services with CVD, it would have been necessary to give notice by July 1st for services to end by December. As a result, the Village is locked into paying the remainder of the contract until the end of December 2025. When CVD implemented the rate increase, it was late September with an early October notification. No CVD members can get out of the contract at this point. The Chief made inquiries about opting out early, and the director indicated that the Mayor would have to approach the other mayors and state his case to see if they would be willing to release South Russell from the contract early. The Solicitor stated that the contract is worded that the effective date of a cancellation of the contract is December 31st of any given year, but to get this effective date, notice must be given by July 1st of the same year. The Village would have to give notice by July 1st of 2025 to have the effective cancellation date of December 31, 2025. Porter clarified that the Village would have to pay for this time, and the Solicitor replied that it would unless an exception were obtained. Berger asked if the CVD contract specified a cost rate, and the Solicitor said it has a schedule that allows for increases based on members' votes, which just happened in September/October of this year. Porter asked what the advantage would be to switch at this point to Geauga County, and the Chief explained that it would eliminate the IT and tech problems the department has been experiencing with CVD by migrating to Geauga County's software and network, which the police were already considering. In the meantime, the police can improve response time and have more of a central dispatch center. The Chief concluded that by switching now, the Village can start taking advantage of the available services immediately. Furthermore, the Village police officers unanimously felt that moving to Geauga County would be in everyone's best interest. Galicki reiterated that in the meantime, the Village will be paying the increased CVD rate until December 2025. The Chief agreed and said that it was because of how the contract was written and how the rate increase came at the last minute with no opportunity for anyone to get out of the contract this

year. The Chief added that there will be savings to the Village with the termination of the CVD IT contract, which requires a three-month notice.

Porter said it bothers him that the Village is paying for a service it will not be using. The Chief pointed out that it probably would bother the community that the Village had been paying for a service that it was not been utilizing with Geauga County. Porter said the fire truck comes faster was the old answer. Galick suggested comparing apples to apples. This concerns the police. Response times for CVFD are a totally different issue. Police dispatch costs are being addressed. The Chief offered that although the Village would not see a savings the first year, it would thereafter. Cavanagh asked what would happen in a year with the fire service. The Chief said it was up to Council. If they were satisfied with CVFD, there was no reason not to engage in another contract and continue without change. The Village also has the option to look to Bainbridge or Russell for quotes on a fire contract. If that were the case, there would be no more costs with dispatch. It is necessary to consider what the community likes and whether it likes the services it receives from CVFD. The Chief has worked with CVFD for 27 years. The department has done a fantastic job and is very professional well trained.

Cavanagh asked how many dispatchers Geauga County has, and the Chief said there were four. There was further discussion about the process of severing the contract with CVD. Berger asked if the Village could arrange a face-to-face meeting with CVD. The Solicitor reiterated that the suggestion was for the Mayor to bring the issue to the other mayors and seek an exception. The Chief concurred that he was told by the CVD director that the Mayor would have to approach the rest of the CVD mayors to state his case as to why the Village wanted to get an exception to the rule to cancel the contract because the Village was put in a position of the rates increasing when no one had the opportunity to opt out. Berger added that the Village did not know what the numbers would be as of July 1st. The next step would be to have a meeting. Porter cautioned that they should be prepared for a yes or a no because it means removing money from dispatch. The Chief advised that the reality is that CVD would increase the rates of the 31 remaining members by about \$1,600 - \$1,800 to make up for \$40,000 deficit that the Village would create by leaving. He added that the Village may not be the only municipality leaving. Berger observed that if the Village were to stay with CVD and other municipalities left, the Village's costs could increase further. As it is, CVD has determined the increases for 2026 and 2027, with the rates being raised 2.8% and 3.2%, which would push the Village's share to \$98,000. Over the next five years, it will be over \$100,000 per year.

Porter asked if there were any communities that just had fire services through CVD. The Chief thought some had just police.

The Mayor told the Chief he felt blindsided. He knew they said they would look into this. He arrived late to the Safety Committee meeting when the Chief discussed visiting there. The Mayor attended the OML Conference and heard from three different communities that the Village was leaving CVD. The Mayor responded that the Village was not leaving. Then he came back and saw a motion on the agenda. He explained that he serves on the Executive Committee of CVD and the Chief has painted a picture that the Mayor has not seen or heard in terms of chaos. They have some issues which are mainly financial. He further stated that the Village has gone from saying CVD is the best to CVD not being the best and the Chief is slamming poor leadership. The Mayor said he had learned to wait to send out emails because the initial email he composed Friday night was not very nice. He has a list of questions which he sent to the Chief and the Chief has

pretty much come close to some of those. The Mayor said he was surprised that all of a sudden, the motion is there, and this is the first real discussion Council has had about the issue. The Chief explained that the Safety Committee discussed the process, and the Mayor said he was in favor and agreed. The Chief thought the Mayor was on board with the Safety Committee recommendations to move forward. The Mayor said he was not at all in favor. He thought they needed to go back to CVD to say look at this. If anyone deserves blame, it is the seven-member Executive Committee of which he is one for allowing this situation to happen. The Mayor guessed he did not see the tea leaves coming this way.

Cavanagh asked if the Village could switch back to CVD after leaving if CVD were to come up with some better solutions. The Chief did not see why they could not. However, the Police Department is moving to use a service it is already paying for. Cavanagh agreed. The Chief reiterated that in the past, the Village always had a better quality and level of service with CVD, but since it changed to the new software, things are not good for the Village and most of the other agencies. The Chief wants more stability and to move to a platform that is tried and true and has been in operation for several years with the county. At this point in the game, there is a better opportunity for improved services and efficiencies.

Bell asked how the software issues effect response time. The Chief explained that the information is dispatched over the air, but a lot of details are provided through the mobile data terminals. Often, the department has been logged off remotely by dispatchers. He did not think that all the bugs were worked out with the Motorola platform. In the test environment with the demo provided, it worked well, but on the road, the officers are constantly being logged off the system. Additionally, other important features become unavailable when they are disconnected and trying to reach the dispatcher on the radio can be difficult due to how busy they are with the tremendous growth. Sometimes it is tough to get airtime. The technology is a big piece of the puzzle for the Police Department. The Chief spoke in detail about the struggles with the system and how cumbersome it is. Bell recognized that the problems could result in increased response time and increased risk for the officers due to information that was missed while the system was down. The Chief concurred. Bell asked how long the problem had been going on, and the Chief said it had been about two years. Bell asked if Geauga County was experiencing the same staffing issues with dispatch as CVD, and the Chief said no. CVD is currently down 10 dispatchers, and the IT group is also losing people. This generates significant amounts of overtime which will be handed off to the communities.

The Mayor said he attends the Executive Committee meetings and cannot recall the last time there was a complaint about the software, nor did he recall a complaint by the Chief in Safety Committee meetings. Now, all of a sudden, CVD is terrible. It bothers him. While the Chief appreciated the Mayor's observation, he did not think the Mayor was dealing with the boots on the ground. He is dealing with the executives of each municipality who may not know. The Chief does not burden the Mayor with every issue the Police Department has. There have been continuous issues and offered that the Mayor could verify this with the officers in the department. Additionally, other agencies have struggled with the software, and some have just ceased to use it due to the difficult transition. He reiterated that the tech issues could be alleviated by going to a more solid established platform. The level of service has changed with CVD. The Mayor referred to the complaints the Village has had with the ADP transition, which are monumental compared to what the CVD Executive Committee has dealt with. They have not heard these concerns and

issues. The Mayor concluded that he felt caught completely off guard. The Chief offered his apology but reiterated that he thought the Mayor was in agreement at the Safety Committee meeting with the Police moving to Geauga County Dispatch. The Mayor clarified that the Village should look at Geauga County because there is an obligation to the taxpayers and recognized that the Village is the only CVD entity not in Cuyahoga County. In speaking with some of the mayors in Columbus, he was aware they were looking but were not just leaving. He felt things were moving too fast. The Village will be paying for the CVD service until 2026 no matter what, so they have plenty of time to look into this. Berger offered that this would be the case unless an exception were obtained, and he thought every opportunity should be taken to have this discussion with CVD and to make the Village's case. Berger reminded the Mayor that on Thursday, October 17th there was a Finance Committee meeting. The Chief and Lieutenant were there, and according to the notes, the Mayor was also there. There are two pages of notes specifically discussing this issue. There are three members of Council who had in depth discussion on this matter. He thought a meeting should be scheduled with CVD to see what the options were before deciding the Village is stuck with them for another year. The Mayor said that he walked out of the Finance Committee meeting early. He stated he would get the matter on the next CVD Executive Committee meeting.

Porter verified that CVD can and will do only fire dispatch. The Chief advised that he spoke to the Director and Finance Director, who provided a spreadsheet of what it would cost the Village to have only fire services. They are aware that the Village is looking to Geauga County for dispatch and is understanding about it. The Chief added that the Village will remain with the Valley Enforcement Group (VEG) as well as CVFD. Porter explained that he was concerned about the possibility of being cut off from fire services if the Village were to terminate police dispatch. While no other community has only fire with CVD, there are some that have police only. Porter asked the Solicitor if the contract allowed the Village to go with CVD for fire only. The Solicitor explained that the contract was from 2013 and was not well written in that it does not explain the services specifically. It is just referred to as dispatch services for public safety. Porter wanted it in writing that fire dispatch can be done alone in a contract going forward after 2025. If this is true, the Chief's plan would make sense to have Geauga County dispatch for the police even though the initial year will cost the Village more. To the Mayor's point, this is a big deal and perhaps Council should discuss it more at the Council meeting. The Chief stated his goal is to start migrating before the end of the year. While the Police Department could stick with CVD until the contract was terminated, he thought it was in the Village's best interest to make the move and figure out what could be done with the contract as soon as possible. Canton asked the Chief what the percentage increase was with CVD, and the Chief said 48%. Canton acknowledged that prices had gone up everywhere and he did not mind paying for quality. If the Village can get better coverage at a better price, it should go forward. The quality has to be improved and have value. He agreed that they needed to be thorough. Porter reiterated his concern with the 2013 contract.

Galicki asked Council to keep in mind that the CVD business model is like a restaurant chain that expands too much too quickly and finds they do not have the staffing and cannot provide the same quality of service. The result is that franchises start closing. Although it was well intentioned, the expansion did not result in getting better and less expensive. Instead, they are in a position where they cannot support some of the communities adequately and service suffers. Porter asked about a timeline, and the Mayor did not think it could be accomplished with the Executive Committee by the next Council meeting. The Solicitor recommended they make sure the Mayor is prepared for

the meeting with the Executive Committee because the pitch is to cancel or get an exception to the rule and have the reasons why the Village is asking for an exception. The Mayor said that from his conversations at the OML Conference, there are other members who are looking to get out and he hoped it would be handled in a systematic way. He disagreed on the comment about the service. CVD is a big organization, but no one in the meetings they have had this year complained about the service. He did not think they would have seen any changes in CVD if it were not just a money issue. The Mayor planned to take a trip to see the Safety Center.

The Chief explained that there are three Police Department projects that are still in process, the tornado siren upgrade, the garage project, and the crosswalk. He explained the delays preventing the completion of the projects this year. The Mayor noted that on the drone related expenses shows an estimated expense of \$150,000. He asked if the money was in the bank. The Chief said that it is now, but he did not anticipate the project being completed in 2024. The Mayor asked about the tornado siren, and the Chief explained it was \$5,720 which was an approved estimate, but he is waiting on parts for the project. It could potentially be done by the end of the year. Porter asked if the Chief wanted another vehicle next year, and the Chief said yes and it would be a hybrid, which should be available for 2025. The Mayor questioned the entry under new equipment for a one-year subscription for the BWC and ICD system for \$46,000. The Chief said this is the body worn camera and the in-car video system. This reflects the equipment and the annual cost, which will be \$25,000 annually for years 2 through 5. He is applying for a body worn camera grant, which would reimburse for half of the body worn camera portion.

Porter asked for an update with the School Safety Officer. The Chief said everything is working as it should and the Village is being reimbursed at 70% of the officer's salary and the Village pays 30%. There are times when this officer is on the road for the Village, which is a benefit as well.

Expenses Fire and Ambulance/Ambulance Fund

The Mayor asked about the entry for a donation to the fire department. The Fiscal Officer explained it pertains to the Village's donation for CVFD building renovations.

Street Maintenance

Bell reported that there are very large expenses for next year for two projects, which are Bell Rd. east and the salt structure. The Fiscal Officer explained that what the department budgeted for Bell Rd. east will come from the Road and Bridge Fund and part from the Street Maintenance fund. There is an increase in storm water. The Fiscal Officer stated that the committee previously budgeted some money in storm water and some in storm sewer. There was no explanation as to why they were separated, so the committee decided to put it all in storm water.

Bell advised that under Street Maintenance Fund, the Street Commissioner was hoping to do more cold patching next year since other roads will not be repaved with the focus on Bell Rd. east. Given this, the line item for Road Supplies reflects a \$5,500 increase.

Regarding road salt, the price was locked in May. The Street Commissioner hopes to keep a closer eye on the amount of salt use so that perhaps less will be ordered in May.

Under State Highway Fund expenses, \$32,000 is listed under traffic signals, which is for a crosswalk. Bell asked if this was for the Alderwood crosswalk or the Gurney Crosswalk. The Fiscal Officer explained that the Alderwood crosswalk was budgeted for in 2024 and may not get

done this year. The one to which Bell referred is for the intersection and not Gurney. This was included in the budget based on Council discussion at a previous meeting.

Nothing was changed in the Cemetery Fund other than an extra \$500 for foundation supplies and an extra \$1,000 for material costs. Cavanagh clarified that this was for both cemeteries, and Bell concurred. The Street Commissioner included work that needs to be done in Rarick Cemetery.

Regarding the Operating Fund, there is an expense increase for health insurance. The uniform matter and the Cintas agreement are still being discussed. Porter explained that if the Village terminates the Cintas contract before the end of the 5-year term, it will end up paying anyway. Efforts to terminate the contract continue.

Bell noted that the Road and Bridge Fund was for Bell Rd. east and is significantly less because of the decreased collection by the Village due to the revaluation.

Nothing changed under the Special Road Fund. The Hemlock Rd. culvert was discussed.

Currently, \$775,000 is budgeted for D03, Special Land and Building Fund. The Fiscal Officer reported that she spoke to the Engineer about obtaining quotes for the salt structure prior to going out to bid. She recalled that Porter offered to obtain the quotes. Porter and Bell had not heard any updates.

The Fiscal Officer advise that the park restroom will not happen this year so it will be necessary to encumber this money for 2025. The purchase order will remain open so that it will be paid in 2025 but from the 2024 budget.

For D12, Bell Rd. east, \$1.27 million is in the budget. \$1.019 million is from the Northeast Ohio Area Coordinating Agency (NOACA) grant. This is an estimate based on when the Village applied for the grant and were notified two years ago that it was received. Until it goes out to bid, the Village will not know if the numbers are still good. However, the Village is committed to doing Bell Rd. east in 2025 because that is the year of the grant. Bell clarified that the bike stuff is still 2026 with the \$800,000.

With D13 – Large Equipment, currently there is \$100,000 for a 1-ton dump truck. According to Bell, the Street Commissioner discussed the benefits of a swap box truck which is three vehicles in one. However, Bell was hesitant to include this because of the money the department will be spending next year. Porter noted that the 1-ton is on its way down. Bell reported that replacement of the backhoe was also discussed, and the Street Commissioner thought it could be pushed back to 2026. The swap loader truck would be a ‘love to have’ kind of budget. Bell explained that the swap truck would be the replacement for the 1-ton but would give the department the ability to do a few other pieces of equipment. The Street Commissioner was also considering a skid steer and mini ditch machine instead of a backhoe. Bell thought they needed to focus on one piece for next year and figure out what that might look like in reality. There needed to be more discussion.

Building Department

Bell noted that there was an increase in the Inspection Solutions contract. The Fiscal Officer estimated \$60,000 for Inspection Solutions and \$7,000 for Dagg Inspections Services. Bell also noted there would be a computer expense due to changing from City Force to iWorQ. The

Solicitor reviewed the contract, and it was acceptable. Bell explained that iWorQ purchased City Force and will no longer service it. The software is a little more than City Force. The second item for the Building Department is the replacement of the copier. Three quotes were obtained and should be covered by the \$9,500 budgeted.

Parks and Recreation

Cavanagh noted that the burn in the park would cost money. The Mayor said they were asking for a donation.

The Mayor addressed Miscellaneous/Other, \$13,580. The Fiscal Officer offered that this included yearly mowing, trees or planting, bench maintenance, etc.

Regarding the Fall Festival, the Mayor thought it should be increased to \$10,000 for changes to the Fall Festival. He thought the current format was stale. However, even with no hayrides, no Life Flight, or bounce houses, people had a good time. Porter agreed with the Mayor's suggestion to increase the budget and improve the event.

Under Land and Improvements, the Mayor suggested \$5,000 to update the CT Consultants Park Master Plan. There was a Parks Committee meeting where changes for the park were discussed, to include a burn. Most of the people at the meeting opposed the burn, but it was explained to them that it was the simplest way to get the hay out of there. While he appreciated the members of the Parks Committee, he felt that the Village needed to get experts to make recommendations for the park.

Although there is no line item, the Mayor suggested the Village hire CT Consultants to do a Master Plan for trails. There are currently a bunch of amateurs looking into trails and ideas and the feeling that the Village needs to spend \$800,000 because NOACA gave it to the Village, but there is no plan other than 'I want this and I want that.' He wants CT to determine what the Village should or should not do. It makes sense to him to have a path from Gurney to the park, but he is not a land person. The Master Plan for the park cost \$12,000 two years ago and he thought they should budget \$15,000 for a master plan for trails. Berger asked the Mayor to define trails. The Mayor described it as a limestone or asphalt trail maybe through the Interurban line. Other people want bike paths as far east as the Village can go safely. Berger clarified that the Mayor was defining trails beyond the scope of the park to include the entire Village. The Mayor agreed and said he was talking about the Village and wondered if there was something the Village should do on East Washington St., etc.

The Mayor also requested \$25,000 to plan and implement some changes to the corner lot on Bell and Chillicothe Roads. He admitted it was a luxury, but the corner did not look the greatest and improvements were needed. He would want CT Consultants to make a recommendation with what to do with corner lot.

In total, it would be a total of \$45,000 to do some nice things.

The Fiscal Officer verified that the Fall Festival would be changing from \$7,500 to \$10,000; Land and Improvements would be increasing \$5,000 for donation burn/Master Plan; \$15,000 would be

designated for CT to create an overall plan of the Village; and \$25,000 designated for CT to create a plan for the corner lot.

General Fund

The Fiscal Officer reported that her financial software will need to be replaced. She has researched the States financial software, UAN, which would cost about \$5,000. She will also have discussions with the current software vendor to determine cost of their new software. For budget purposes, she included \$15,000 for ADP for all departments excluding the Police Department; \$5,000 for UAN; and the newsletter will stay the same amount. Research is being conducted about utilizing an app or text messaging to communicate with residents.


The Fiscal Officer increased the Cemetery Fund budget \$500 to include a CIMS software feature that would allow residents to search the database for grave location, etc. She added that there is money in the Cemetery Fund that can only be used for the cemetery itself.

Canton asked the Solicitor if there were a limit in the Ohio Revised Code (ORC) of how much a village mayor or council member may earn a year. The Solicitor said she would have to check. Canton explained that this was his 9th year on Council, and he was proud that they take care of their people in that they make a fair wage and salary and have healthcare. He wondered if Council would consider what Mayor and Council makes and perhaps bump it up a little bit. They are responsible for a multimillion-dollar budget. The Solicitor reminded Council that it could not be an in-term increase. Canton concurred that it would not take effect until the next election. The Fiscal Officer further explained it would be per term. Bell acknowledged what Canton was suggesting, but said he was not a big fan, and it made his skin crawl. He was not serving for the pay, and thought it was a volunteer gig. However, he respected what Canton was saying and agreed to discuss it. Cavanagh said she was the opposite and said she was a big fan of increasing the pay. Porter advised that the mayor and council of Hunting Valley serve without compensation. The Mayor suggested discussing it at the next Finance Committee meeting.

Under the Expenses Service Fund, A02-01C-231, Buildings Cleaning, the Mayor asked about the service and increase. The Fiscal Officer explained she budgets slightly higher than the monthly charge to cover special projects like window washing, floor waxing, etc.

The Chief reported that during the course of the meeting, he had been in contact with the CVD Director who verified CVD would continue to dispatch fire services if the police transitioned to Geauga County.

Canton made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:07 p.m., seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.


William G. Koons, Mayor


Danielle Romanowski, Fiscal Officer

Prepared by Leslie Galicki



James R. Flaiz

Geauga County Prosecuting Attorney

Assistant
Prosecutors

Laura A. LaChapelle
First Assistant

Nicholas A. Burling
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October 28, 2024

Chief Michael Rizzo
South Russell Village Police Department
1228 Bell Road
South Russell, OH 44022
mrizzo@southerussell.com

Re: Geauga County Dispatch

Linda M. Applebaum

Christan A. Bondra

John W. Bosco

Neil L. Harrison

Melissa J. Lee

Paul E. Miller

Kristen Rine

Sheila M. Salem

Alexandria R. Scheid

Jared Thomson

Susan T. Wieland

Administration
Richard Warner
Lead Investigator

Scott M. Christopher
Kendra Yurgionas
Criminal Investigators

Amy M. Reinhart
Alyson Satterfield
Jullann Workman
Kelly Mansi
Legal Assistants

Erica Apperson
Legal Assistant
Child Support Division

Samantha Harris
Fiscal Coordinator

Cindi Haycox Wellman
Victim Assistance Advocate

Dear Chief Rizzo:

I am writing to you regarding South Russell possibly switching from Chagrin Valley Dispatch to Geauga County Dispatch. This is an issue that the Village Safety Committee spent a lot of time examining while I served as a member of Council and dispatch is an issue I am very familiar with in my role as Prosecuting Attorney. I wanted to express my support for a switch and articulate a few reasons why making this change would be in the best interests of our residents, business owners, and the police department.

Technology has evolved significantly since the Village last evaluated dispatch services. There has also been a change in how people seek emergency services as cell phone usage has steadily increased while landlines are disappearing. Most of the cell calls in the Village, even West of 306, are connected to towers in Geauga County. These calls are usually directed to Geauga County Dispatch, which are then relayed to Chagrin Valley Dispatch. Before calls can be relayed, information must be ascertained to determine where the call is coming from. This also presents problems with 911 hangup calls and open line calls. When it comes to emergency services, seconds count, and the delays associated with transferring these calls are unacceptable.

Cost is also a major issue. Our residents already pay for Geauga County Dispatch through our sales tax. Geauga County has invested this sales tax money over the last 20 years into our 911 system, dispatch technology, and tower upgrades throughout the County. South Russell residents have paid their fair share of these investments but are not reaping the benefits.

In addition to the millions of dollars of infrastructure upgrades, Geauga County has also invested in placing the entire County on the same law enforcement technology platform. The Spillman system that is primarily utilized by every law enforcement agency in the County, except South Russell, is available at no cost. By making this the primary system, South Russell Police will save thousands moving forward as the Village benefits from technology

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upgrades. This system is currently in the process of integrating with our court systems. Again, South Russell will be left behind the rest of the County.

Finally, Chagrin Valley Dispatch is a completely different entity since a change was last evaluated. Simply put, it is much too large to provide the level of service that our residents expect and deserve. As I write this letter, Geauga County Dispatch has one active call, while Chagrin Valley Dispatch has 20. Our dispatch employees know our community and know our officers, because they live here and raise their families here. When our residents call for help, they should immediately be connected to someone who can help them and knows where South Russell is on the map. Unfortunately, that is not always happening now.

Change can be difficult, but Chagrin Valley Dispatch left the Village behind a long time ago. Transitioning to Geauga County would just be recognizing that. If you or any Village officials would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,



James R. Flaiz
Prosecuting Attorney