

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
October 2, 2025, 2:00 p.m. – Russell Township meeting room

Present: Chairman Gerald Canton, Council Member Mark Porter, Council Member Chris Berger, Trustee Jim Mueller, Trustee Kristina Port, Trustee Christopher Hare, Fiscal Officer Karen Walder, Assistant Fire Chief Nick Sambula, Fiscal Officer Danielle Romanowski

The Finance Committee attended the Russell Township meeting to give an update on the Hemlock Culvert Project status as well as to request a quote from the township to provide Fire and Ambulance services to the Village for 2026-2028.

Council member Porter addressed Russell Township Trustees Jim Mueller, Kristina Port and Christopher Hare. The estimated quote for the Hemlock Culvert project is \$92,400 with a grant for half the cost up to \$46,200. The Village bid opening for the project is October 3rd at 12 noon at Village Hall. The next Council meeting is October 13th where it is expected Council would accept a bid. Port asked if the Village could let the township know Council's decision so they could address the issue at their October 16th meeting. Porter stated the Village would be in contact with the township on October 14th.

Port asked that a copy of the Village's grant paperwork be forwarded to the Township so they could review it. Fiscal Officer Romanowski said she would forward it.

Porter addressed the Trustees and stated that he, Canton and Berger were in attendance to represent the Village in asking the Township for a quote for Fire and Ambulance services for 2026-2028. He explained that the Village's current contract with the Chagrin Falls Suburban Volunteer Fireman's Association (CFSVFD) expires December 31, 2025. The proposed contract includes a 12% increase each year compounded over the next three years. By the end of year three, the approximated cost will be close to \$800,000. He knows the Village receives assistance currently from the township for mutual aid and the response time is good.

Porter explained that the Village is currently working together with the township on the Hemlock Culvert project and may be able to partner on other projects and issues in the future. He said the Village and Township have a good working relationship and perhaps they could work together with Fire and Ambulance services as well.

Port said she attended a recent Village meeting where the Fire and Ambulance issue was discussed. She heard positive feedback about Russell Township and believes response time and the EMS claw back should be a part of the conversation going forward. Porter stated the Village currently also pays Chagrin Valley Dispatch (CVD) approximately \$50,000-\$60,000 per year for dispatch services which they could get for free from the Geauga County Sheriff's office. The Village recently moved its Police dispatch from CVD to the Sheriff's office, and it was a seamless transition.

Mueller said the Fire Chief would need some information from the Village in order to put together a proposal. He said he wanted to make a motion to proceed ASAP to get the necessary information gathered and a proposal put forward.

Hare said the request said 24/7, 365 staffing, and comparable vehicles. Mueller said they needed the Fire Department to work with the Village to gather the detailed information to put together a proposal. Mueller said he spoke to the Fire Chief who said they received 98% of the information they needed from state reporting made by the community. The remaining information needed would need to be provided by the Village.

Fiscal Officer Walder said she supports investigating the costs but doesn't think it should be done in an artificial timeline. It would take time and resources of the Fire Department, Fiscal Officer, Legal, etc. to investigate and

review. She did not know if the current staff and equipment would be ready to start 1/1/26. She also stated she did not know what the contract would look like. She did not want to put the communities in a bind or the Russell Township residents to suffer.

Mueller stated the Chief said they could do this and that the Village and Township shared fire services until 1976. He did inform Porter that the Village has its own legal counsel, but the Township uses the Prosecutor's office, and sometimes there can be a delay. Porter said if the numbers came back favorable, the Village could have its Solicitor draft the contract and Russell Township would have their legal review it.

Assistant Fire Chief Sambula stated the Township already does automatic aid for the CFSVFD on a regular basis. Russell Township goes to all fire calls, smoke, gas, etc. They do not go to carbon monoxide calls for automatic mutual aid. He said last year Russell Township went to 80-90% of South Russell Village fire calls as part of automatic aid.

Mueller said he was not going to let this opportunity slip away. If the numbers looked good, the Village could have their Solicitor prepare the contract and Russell Township's legal could review it.

Assistant Chief Sambula said he understands this is a sensitive matter, but that the Russell Township and the CFSVFD have worked well together for the past 50 years, and they respect them as a department. They train and work well together. Regardless of what happens, the relationship between the two would remain positive to serve the greater community as a whole.

Porter said he wanted to make it clear that the Village approached the Township for a quote, the Township did not try poaching the Village.

There was discussion about response time and whether it would be comparable to CFSVFD and if the traffic light in the Village would change by the sirens of emergency vehicles. This would be researched.

Port said the Russell Township Fiscal Officer would need to be kept in the loop regarding equipment and personnel costs. Fiscal Officer Walder said the Board approved the budget for 2026 and the Township received its Certificate of Estimated Resources. She said perhaps this should be pursued for 2027 to allow time to adequately plan. She is very uncomfortable with a change of possibly a half a million dollars with no specifications. The township did a strategic study for \$20,000 and now would be diverting resources to this initiative.

Port said sharing services with another community may be a good idea. She said the Fire Department can look at what they need to do, and it might be a good time to review the points and factors of the plan.

Mueller said he didn't want to miss the opportunity due to bureaucratic nonsense. In 2013 this could have saved \$300,000 for the Village and would have benefited both communities. He is willing to ask the Prosecutor to review legal or he would like to go to outside counsel. He said this is a good opportunity rather than placing another issue on the ballot that would cost the taxpayers more.

Hare said he was okay with extending help as long as there was no harm and not taking anything away from the Russell Township residents. Russell Township is already providing mutual aid to South Russell.

Fiscal Officer Walder said she did not want Russell Township to subsidize this additional expense.

Porter replied that the Village is not asking Russell Township to subsidize the expense, he is asking for a proposal for services.

Mueller made a motion that the Board of Trustees directs the Russell Township Fire Department leadership to pursue informational inquiries and subsequently to prepare a bid for the Russell Township Fire Department to provide the Fire/EMS services as requested by South Russell Village, seconded by Port. Roll call vote, ayes all.

Village officials thanked the Township officials for approving the preparation of a proposal and excused themselves from the building. The committee members agreed they would like to work with the township in a manner where the township would not incur any out-of-pocket upfront costs.

Meeting adjourned at 2:58 PM.