

1
Bear Creek Township Special Board Meeting
April 21, 2022

Called to order at 12:01p.m.

Roll Call: Keiser, Hoffman, Urman, Golding, Radatovich

Click Rd Fire Station

Keiser explained that the purpose of this meeting is for the board to discuss the future plans for another fire hall on Click Rd. He shared his perspective: he feels this started as a second fire hall and has now become a main building.

Urman explained that this started with a small committee of himself, Hoffman, and Welsheimer. They took the feedback of staff of what the township needs and reached out to two architects. After the board agreed to go with Elaine Kaiser as the architect, the committee shared the perceived needs with the architect. She has developed a plan that we are here to discuss today. This is a starting point for discussion and is a work in progress. They have been in discussion with Bendzinski and Miller Canfield about financing.

Hoffman noted that about three years ago, the cost of building was \$250/ sq ft. Today, building costs \$500/sq ft. The plan that Kaiser has developed is very user friendly, but may be more expensive than we can afford. Hoffman asked if the community room was more expensive than the apparatus bay. The architect confirmed that they are about the same. The next most expensive area after the two large rooms is the staff lounge. The least expensive portion is the office space. Hoffman was surprised by the architect fee.

Welsheimer explained that the reason the community room is so expensive is because of the air handling system. The apparatus bay is currently full span, but it can have columns if that is more reasonable.

Keiser noted that he is supportive of the fire department and township needs. He envisioned this as a second location for the fire department to meet the five mile radius for fire protection. He envisioned a T- shaped building that we would build onto for future needs. He was not imagining a “thirty year building now”. The current township hall is approximately 7,000 sq ft. Keiser wanted this to be the main location and the Click Rd station to be secondary. This plan proposes the building department down at this new station. Keiser feels this was never discussed and wanted to know where that idea came from.

Urman explained that when the committee had a work session with Elaine Kaiser, she asked what the future needs are for the township. The committee shared that eventually, we would like to have a full building department, with a plumbing and mechanical inspector. We will need office space for them. As a result, Kaiser added some building offices to the plan for future growth.

Keiser feels we need to prioritize our township wants and needs. The location for this station was picked based on the five mile radius. A while back, we discussed the possibility of a regional training facility with Resort Twp, however, Resort did not want to pursue that idea. Instead, they went out and purchased a location for the trucks. We could do the same on Howard Rd.

Welsheimer clarified that the fire radius is five road miles, not five miles radius.

Keiser noted that if we are planning to build a larger fire facility, then Resort should help pay for it. Keiser noted that he spoke with the city about their voting agreement. They currently rent out a facility for a per election cost. We currently have voters out at the snowmobile club. There are many laws for voting, but the reality is, more people are voting absentee. He acknowledged that we will have to split into three precincts, whether that is for 2024 or 2026. If we have a T-shaped building, we can add onto it as we grow. Keiser noted that many of the upcoming developments are on this side of town, not where this new location would be. We need to figure out where the new precinct splits would be. In addition, Keiser believes that if the snowmobile club ever disbands, that the property would come to the township. We are not going to invest money into the snowmobile club unless it would come back to the township. Keiser is against the idea of renting out the new meeting space, because he thinks someone would have to be there to man it, and there could be damage. He is supportive of the needs of the fire department and voting, but is concerned about the cost.

Hoffman suggested a smaller version of the plan, with two bays and a community center half the size. If you made these cuts and took out the offices, it would be about a \$7 million dollar project. He suggested that people vote in the fire hall.

Radatovich noted that she would like to speak to the hall rental idea, as she was the one to originally present the idea. She noted that it was simply a suggestion for the board to discuss. She feels that it would offset the cost if we could rent the meeting room out in between elections, to help pay to maintain the building. In addition, when you rent a venue, you have a security deposit to cover possible damages. Not all halls have a full-time staff person. When you rent out the fairgrounds, someone is there to unlock the facility, but they are not on staff during an event. The hall rental idea was just that, an idea, and it is one we can discuss as a board. In regards to elections, Radatovich feels that she is the primary board member that is qualified to speak about the election needs of the township, as she is the one who is working with it daily. She explained that we are quickly approaching the cap number for active registered voters in each precinct. Within the next two to four years, we will need to open up a third precinct. Each precinct needs to have its own voting booths, equipment and workers. Election law dictates one voting booth per every 100 voters. As it stands now, we can barely fit precinct one

into the township hall, and precinct two does not properly fit into the snowmobile club. In addition, the snowmobile club is not completely ADA accessible. Because we can barely fit precinct one into this township hall, she suggested that the meeting room at the new station be 2.5x this size, in order to properly fit two precincts (the future precinct 2 and 3). When we split into three, they will be evenly split population wise, regardless of where the developments are. Precinct sizes are based on voter totals, not the total number of in person voters. This is due to the fact that people who vote absentee may decide to switch to in person voting, and you have to have the space for them. The precinct lines will change. This is an immediate need that we need to start planning for now. If we do not proceed to build this hall, we will have no where for our precinct 3 voters to vote. Just as you consider the capacity of a sewer pipe when a new development goes in, you also have to consider other forms of infrastructure, including elections. In addition, she encouraged the board not to be afraid of the price tag. The key is all about voter education. We need to hire someone to help us educate the voters on this project, to explain to them the need. We cannot assume that voters will shut this project down. We will never know unless we put the question before them.

Hoffman feels voters would support a smaller plan. As he has been talking to people, some understand the need and some don't. We will need to work hard to explain it to people.

Keiser feels that the key is timing and that the timing is off for this project. When he makes major decisions, he likes to look to the past to go forward. Keiser noted that when the current township hall was built, it is likely that the decision made is why Joe Hoffman's dad got voted out of office. Taking on this current township hall was a huge undertaking. Keiser noted that when he first became supervisor, there was a zoning mess, and he supported the staff, and unfortunately that went down; we lost our zoning in 2004. At the time we discussed a regional fire hall with Resort, Keiser stated that he felt we should have one, but Resort was closed off to the idea. Keiser does not feel he can go out and sell this current idea. How many mils are people willing to accept? Keiser feels you will never be able to educate 6,000 people on this issue. We should talk to other townships in Grand Traverse and see how they handled "growing pains". As a board, we need to be a united front on this project in order to get voter support.

Hoffman noted that at the MTA chapter meeting, the county mentioned the overwhelming need for infrastructure. We want to make sure we do not lose this opportunity. Hoffman wants to ensure we "do this right the first time".

Radatovich noted that she would prefer to ask for the full amount we need to do the project correctly the first time around, rather than shortchanging ourselves and asking for more money down the road. If we were to do that, it is unlikely the voters would support us again. Not only that, but it would cost the voters more in the long run if we were to build small now and add on several times in the future. In addition, Radatovich noted that the duty of an elected official is to act in the best interest of the township, not to act in a way that will make us well liked or that will make us get reelected. From her perspective, she wants to build this project out for the best interest of the township, regardless of how voters think of her. We are never going to make every voter happy. But the key is not to look at this project from the lens of cost, or the lens of how voters will feel. The key is to look at the project through the lens of the need of the township. It is our duty to put the best interest of the township first.

Hoffman is in support of a \$7 million dollar scaled down building.

Keiser shared that he had \$2.5 million as an estimate he felt comfortable with, but maybe that is not realistic. Regardless of if it is \$7 or 11 million, Keiser does not feel comfortable with asking voters for that.

Urman asked about the difference between a millage and a bond, and asked about the bond in relation to population growth.

Keiser shared the history of the \$15 million bond for Emmet County. The commissioners picked that and it was then subject to referendum. When you go for a bond, you can either pick the amount and let it go to referendum, or you can give it directly to the voters. The bond takes into consideration population growth.

Golding feels that this project is a need at some point, but feels that this is the wrong time because of the cost of materials. As an elected official, she doesn't feel comfortable asking for this when things are so expensive. She thinks costs will settle down in a year or two.

Keiser noted that we can look at other funding sources as well, including grants and the upcoming infrastructure bill. We need to lower the cost and get the timing correct. We will need to get a plan together to be ready.

Urman noted that we can reach out to other townships, as Keiser suggested, to see how they handled growth. He will speak with Bendzinski next week. The committee will need to know what direction to go.

Keiser noted that the committee had a tough job, but now it is time for full board involvement. It is time for a pause. We need to discover what is our immediate need. He asked what fire equipment we have to go in this new station. We will need to get Resort on board if we are planning for a regional training facility.

Urman suggested board work sessions with the architect present. Keiser feels the work sessions should be at night, when the public can attend. He asked the committee's internal time frame for the project.

Urman noted that the original time frame was to have this ready for the ballot this fall, however, due to some setbacks with the architect, it will likely be next year.

Welsheimer explained that the plan here is for four bays double deep. The original plan years ago for this new station was four bays double deep. That has not changed. In regards to the regional training center, that is not what was discussed. Yes, the fire department is going to use the new meeting room as a training facility. But the reason for that is because the current training room at Bear Creek, we have discussed making it into building department storage.

Keiser noted that the proposed fire station is three times the size of the current township hall.

Radatovich stated for the record that she is projecting that we are going to need to split into three precincts in the next 2-4 years. We need to start planning for this now, otherwise we will have nowhere for these people to vote. She is asking for board support on this so she can have somewhere for people to go. If the board is not supportive of this plan, she asked if the board had other ideas of where people could go vote.

Welsheimer noted that the snowmobile club area is not buildable and not ADA accessible. He asked if \$6 million is what the board is willing to spend.

Hoffman noted that the parking lot is a huge expense.

Radatovich feels we need to decide on the total amount we can spend. After that, we can take out the cost of the infrastructure and see what we have left for a building. At that point, we need to decide if that building is the right size. We shouldn't build small if we need large.

Keiser asked how building department offices got added to the plan.

Urman clarified that the architect asked about future needs and that was one that was suggested. He feels it is really important that we make this right for the community.

Keiser asked if we had the second station, if the fire department could lose a bay here.

Welsheimer noted that they may be able to, and it could be used for a property maintenance person.

Radatovich feels we need to prioritize the needs. On this plan, what is an immediate need? What is a 5-10 year need? What is a 30 year need?

Hoffman asked if voters could use the fire hall for a polling place.

Welsheimer noted that it would be very cold during November elections. There would also be an accessibility issue.

Radatovich noted that there would also be a staffing issue, as we will need the two precincts to be together for the deputy to man them. In addition, every time we change polling locations, we need to re-notify voters, which will be costly and also confusing to voters.

Welsheimer noted that there are a few bathrooms that may be able to be removed from the plan.

Hoffman asked if we reduced the plan, if we could reduce the size of the parking lot.

Golding suggests building this plan in phases.

Keiser noted that this plan only has room for expansion onto the fire hall. Welsheimer noted there is a small area to add onto the entry way.

Urman asked if we have ever had a major capital improvement project? Keiser noted that we have not. The current building additions have been made out of the general fund. Urman noted we have never gone to the voters for a capital millage project.

Public Comment

Karla Buckmaster understands the need and is supportive of more space for elections and fire. It will give residents a better insurance rate. She asked if any of the board members had drawn up their own plan for this new hall/fire station. There are areas we can consolidate. For example, she suggested putting the restrooms by the kitchen. There can be a slider door between the kitchen and the community room and that can be used as the break room. The conference room can be eliminated, and they can use the community room. She feels there are superfluous items on this plan. She feels it would be better for the fire department to come off Click Rd. She is concerned about the location of the parking lot. When the EMS building went in, people have to walk across where the ambulances come out. She asked about the amount of people that would be in the meeting room. In regards to the \$15 million dollar bond from the county, Buckmaster noted that she went to the county about a referendum and the county clerk would not tell her how many signatures she would need. Referendums are “not people friendly”. As a voter, she thinks people will remember the \$15 million dollar bond, and she noted that someone may submit a few letters to the editor to remind them. At this time, she would not support this.

Keiser noted that the flow of the building makes sense, and the railroad won’t give us access for the general public. River Road would only be for emergency vehicles. Parking will be separated from the fire department.

Welsheimer noted that you have to build to the code for the capacity of that room, based on square footage, even if you’re never going to have that many people in there at once. He asked about the timing, when is the right time?

Karla Buckmaster noted that now is not the time, and we should wait to see what the supply chain does.

Welsheimer noted that building costs are not likely to come down anytime soon.

Sheldon Buckmaster feels that there are lots of extras that can be cut out of the plan. He asked if the board would rent the hall out for a wedding reception?

Radatovich noted that we have not formally discussed renting the new hall yet.

Karla Buckmaster asked how many fire trucks we have in total. She asked how they man the Bay Harbor station. If it is going to be a manned station, she feels we should make voters aware of that too.

Welsheimer noted we have 11 trucks in total: 5 in the Bear Creek Station, 4 in the Resort Station, 1 at station three, and one sitting outside along with a fire extinguisher trailer and a light tower. He noted that there is a full-time staff person for Bay Harbor, and when he is not there, part-time people are there. Within five years we are projected to need a manned station. There are townships smaller than us in growth and population and they have a fully staffed station. There are lots of big developments and hotels on that south side of town that will be covered by this new station.

Keiser suggested hiring a consultant to help us.

Mitch Brown noted that there is a demonstrated need. We have been discussing a new fire hall for a while and splitting into a third precinct is inevitable. We need to get something out there and do it soon. Brown views this plan as a master plan over the next 10-15 years. It can be built in phases and future boards can decide when the right time is to implement the next phase.

Keiser noted that he had pictured a \$2.5 million dollar project, and now we are at \$11-13 million and he cannot support that.

Urman noted that no one knew how severely inflation was going to go up. His original idea was to have this on the ballot this fall and to have a shovel in the ground in 2023, but now that is unrealistic.

Golding appreciates all the committee has done.

Keiser noted that we started a good discussion and the next step is for the board to meet with Elaine Kaiser. We will meet with her Tuesday at 1pm.

Adjournment: 2:01p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Emma Radatovich

Emma Radatovich, Bear Creek Township Clerk