

TOWN OF SCHERERVILLE
BOARD OF SAFETY MEETING

SCHERERVILLE, INDIANA
January 30, 2025

The Board of Safety Special Meeting was called to order by Chairman Eric Graf at 4:30 p.m., in the Schererville Town Hall Meeting Room, 10 E. Joliet Street, Schererville, IN.

Attendance was taken with the following Board Members present: Eric Graf, George Kouros, David Eenigenburg, and David Jaroszewski. Staff members present: Fire Chief Robert Patterson, Deputy Fire Chief David Meyer, and Recording Secretary Stephanie Bottiger. Also present: Attorney Christian Bartholomew in lieu of Attorney Alfredo Estrada, Town Manager James Gorman, Director of Operations Andrew Hansen, Town Council liaison Thomas Schmitt and Town Councilman Kevin Connelly. Absent: Robert Volkmann, Chief of Police Peter Sormaz, Deputy Chief of Police Steven McNamara.

THEREUPON, Correspondence

ITEM A. FD – NONE

THEREUPON, Old Business

ITEM A. FD – NONE

THEREUPON, New Business

ITEM A. FD – Consideration of scheduling an election by members of the Fire Department To elect Fire Department appointees to the Fire Department Merit Board

Chief Patterson advised the Board the Fire Department chose to have a Merit Board. He is requesting approval from the Board to set a date for the members of the Fire Department to vote for the members that will sit on the Merit Board. He went on to add they would like to hold the vote on February 21, 2025, at 1 p.m. in the Schererville Town Court as they did with the last election. Chairman Graf inquired of Attorney Bartholomew if the election required a quorum from the Board of Safety. Attorney Bartholomew responded no, the Board of Safety members do not need to be present as it is exclusively for the Fire Department members. Motion made by Mr. Jaroszewski to approve the recommendation of the Fire Chief for the Merit Board member vote to take place on February 21, 2025, at 1 p.m. in the Schererville Town Court, seconded by Mr. Eenigenburg. Motion carries (4 – 0).

ITEM B. FD – Consider any procedural matters associated therewith

Attorney Bartholomew advised the Board, according to the statute, the Board of Safety has the responsibility to set any procedures that might be used for the election. He went on to add, the Fire Department conducted a similar procedure in connection with the Merit Board on December 20, 2024, where the Fire Department held a vote. Attorney Bartholomew requested Fire Chief Patterson explain the process that was used in the previous vote. Attorney Bartholomew stated further, after the explanation was offered, he would elucidate as to how the upcoming vote differs from the last and any extra processes they may want. Attorney Bartholomew stated once they have the explanations, the Board can vote on whether this is the process the Board wants to follow.

Chief Patterson informed the Board the previous vote was to establish a Merit Board. The vote was held in the Schererville Town Court where all full-time, active members of the Fire Department signed in. Each member was given a ballot and then taken to a private room where they could cast their vote and put it in a sealed box. Once all the votes were cast, they were tallied by himself with the Police Chief and the Secretary of the Union as witnesses. Fire Chief Patterson went on to add that he composed a letter to the Town advising them what the results of the vote were.

Attorney Bartholomew advised the Board the last vote held by the Fire Department was a “yes” or “no” vote to establish a Merit Board. The upcoming vote would be for candidates for the open positions. He further stated the Town of Schererville has a candidate application form on their website where a number of questions are asked in order to vet the candidates. Attorney Bartholomew made the Board aware that the Town Council, either through the President, or the Council itself, would also appoint three members to the Merit Board which would take place before the Fire Department would cast their votes for the two members they are to elect. Town Manager Gorman clarified whom would do the choosing of the candidates, stating the Town Council President would have two votes and the Council would have one vote. Attorney Bartholomew recommended these remaining applications be reviewed by legal counsel, staff, or

a collaboration of both to ensure they are in compliance with the statute. He inquired of the Board if there should be a deadline for the submission of the candidate applications before the Fire Department vote. Attorney Bartholomew inquired of Town Manager Jim Gorman if the Council had set a deadline for their candidate applications. Town Manager Gorman advised Attorney Bartholomew and the Board that the deadline to have all members of the Merit Board appointed was March 1, 2025. He went on to state that the Council would pick their members at the February 12, 2025, Town Council Meeting, so all applications are due by February 11, 2025. Town Manager Gorman disclosed to the Board that he believed it would not take too much time to review the applications to ensure that they meet the qualifications. Attorney Bartholomew advised the Board it was their choice to opt to have the same deadline as the Town or to push the application deadline back as the Fire Department vote would not be until a later date.

Mr. Jaroszewski inquired of Attorney Bartholomew if the Merit Board would be comprised of three Democrats and two Republicans depending upon which party affiliations were chosen by the Town Council. Attorney Bartholomew stated the statute states, for the Fire Department appointments, the two candidates must be of different political parties. Town Manager Gorman notified the Board and Attorney Bartholomew that the Town Council President must choose one candidate from each political party. Mr. Kouros inquired whom would receive the applications first. Town Manager Gorman stated his Administrative Assistant receives all the applications and will send all applications to the Town Council and the Fire Department. Mr. Kouros inquired, for clarification, if this was a State Statute, to which Attorney Bartholomew stated yes. Attorney Bartholomew continued the discussion in regards to the State Statute, when it occurred, how it affected the town, and the next steps in the process that would need to be taken.

Chairman Graf queried whom was responsible for the vetting process to which Town Manager Gorman replied they, meaning the Town, would do the vetting. Discussion continued as to the stipulations of sitting on the Merit Board and the requirements of the Fire Department for voting their members in.

Attorney Bartholomew stated the issues in regards to procedural matters that the Board needed to vote on were:

1. Does the Board want to set a deadline for the submission of the applications and what should that date be.
2. How should the vetting process of the candidates be done.
3. Any general procedures for the conduct of the elections.

Chairman Graf requested the vote be taken one-by-one.

Discussion began in regards to the deadline for the applications to be submitted. Motion made by Mr. Eenigenburg for the application deadline to be February 14, 2025, seconded by Mr. Jaroszewski. Motion carries (4 – 0).

Discussion began in regards to whom would do the vetting of the applications once they have been submitted. Motion made by Mr. Eenigenburg that Fire Department staff in coordination with legal counsel would handle the vetting of the applications that are submitted, seconded by Mr. Jaroszewski. Motion carries (4 – 0).

Discussion began in regards to any general procedural determinations that the Board would like to make. Motion made by Mr. Jaroszewski that any further procedures be determined by the Fire Chief and departmental staff, seconded by Mr. Kouros. Motion carries (4 – 0).

Discussion circled back to the deadline for applications to be submitted. Town Manager Gorman clarified, that all applications for the five members of the Fire Department Merit Board must be submitted no later than February 11, 2025 as it is one Merit Board.

The Board went back to the first vote as to the deadline for the applications to be submitted and amended the motion. Motion made by Mr. Jaroszewski for the application deadline to February 11, 2025, seconded by Mr. Eenigenburg. Motion carries (4 – 0).

The Board went back to the second vote in regards to the election portion of the general procedural determinations for clarification and amendment. Motion made by Mr. Jaroszewski to approve the procedures discussed by the Fire Chief for the conduct of the election and the applications to fill the vacancies for the Merit Board will be vetted by the Fire Department and legal counsel, seconded by Mr. Eenigenburg. Motion carries (4 – 0).

Mr. Jaroszewski asked a clarification of the Council Members present as to how many primaries a person had to vote in to be affiliated with a political party. Councilman Schmitt responded that the statute stated political affiliation is determined based upon the voters' registration records with the three most recent primaries. He went on to add that for other Boards it is two primaries, but with the Merit Board it is three.

Attorney Bartholomew advised the Board the last item that needed to be handled was the notice to be sent out the members of the Fire Department advising them of the date, time, and purpose of the vote. He stated no vote was needed, only a signature by Chairman Graf. Chairman Graf stated once the notice was finalized, it would be signed.

THEREUPON, Reports

ITEM A. FD – NONE

ITEM B. Attorney - NONE

THEREUPON, Board Members Chairman Graf

Chairman Graf showed his appreciation for everyone attending the meeting for their guidance and clarification on aspects of the new law.

THEREUPON, Business from the Floor - Collin Zackavec

Collin Zackavec, the Secretary of the local Firefighters Union, 4279, advised the Board the Union has a political advisor whom was able to give the Firefighters Union a list of registered Republicans and Democrats which can help with the vetting process. He is requesting the vetting take place on February 12, 2025, as the three members of the Executive Board of the Union are available that day to assist with the vetting.

THEREUPON, Adjournment

There being no further business, Mr. Jaroszewski made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Eenigenburg. Motion carries (4 – 0). The meeting was adjourned at 5:09 p.m.

ERIC
SCHERERVILLE
SAFETY
A TRUE COPY

GRAF
BOARD OF
CHAIRMAN

GEORGE KOUROS
SCHERERVILLE BOARD OF
SAFETY VICE CHAIRMAN
A TRUE COPY