

Indian Creek board OKs new fire department funds

Trustee says new department is operational as of Friday; private department still running

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Indian Creek Township residents will have two fire departments as early as Friday.

Township Trustee Linda Hollingsworth confirmed Thursday morning that she has started her own department, which will be based out of a barn on Rockeast Road.

"Everything's under control," she assured a group of citizens — including a few from the private Indian Creek Firefighters Inc. — who had gathered to hear the township's additional budget appropriation proposal for 2009.

However, the vast majority of those in attendance didn't appear to be calmed by the news.

The rift between Hollingsworth and at least half the township residents only widened after Thursday's meeting.

"We know you are starting the fire department," Beverly Himes told Hollingsworth. "But I think a lot of people think you just say everything's OK, that we're covered. You don't have the building permits, you don't have the correct zoning. And the fire department is supposed to start on June 30?"

At one point, Hollingsworth said the department would be operational then, but she later said it would be ready Friday.

Township residents questioned whether the property the department would be on has the proper zoning requirements and building permits to serve as a spot for a new fire department. Board President Mike Lucas said he believed the site was zoned for agriculture, noting that the property owner runs a construction company from that location.

Some taxpayers demanded to see documentation from Hollingsworth, including building permits, zoning ordinances and proof of insurance.

"One of the reasons we don't have all the information you want is that we're here for the budget," Lucas said. "We're here for additional appropriations!"

But since a large portion of the budget will go toward fire protection, many felt the issues were germane.

"The questions you've been asked today concern me as a taxpayer," Christine Conrad said. "And I'm a little troubled you haven't done research into the content of our questions in advance of the meeting. Clearly you hadn't done that research or you'd have documents that show they've been properly investigated."

Hollingsworth said she did have documents, and that township residents could make an appointment to come view them. The board eventually voted to approve the additional appropriations, but with only two voting board members present.

Cheryl Munson, an advocate for the private fire department, was out of town.

One man told Hollingsworth that she'll be voted out of office in two years.

Hollingsworth has differed with the Indian Creek Firefighters, to the point that the two couldn't agree on a new firefighting contract when the old one expired.

The department then went to a subscription-based service and has been able to get roughly half the township signed up.

Bud Rodman said he supported volunteer firefighters in any capacity.

"Volunteer fire departments are very important to small communities," Rodman said. "The problem is that Linda offered the volunteer fire department a contract and they didn't want it. We're now forced to have a real fire department."

That prompted a gruff exchange between Rodman and some of the Indian Creek Firefighters.

"I tried to help you son-of-a-guns out," Rodman said. "If you want to keep this system going, it's going to be difficult for everybody."

If Hollingsworth's plan to start up a new township fire department has many backers, they've been outnumbered by supporters of the now-private department.

Still, the trustee is moving ahead. She said Thursday that she's borrowing a fire truck and has a deal in the works to obtain a second one for the new firefighters to use.

And who will staff the new department? Hollingsworth said she'd be happy to share the department roster. But not at the budget discussion meeting.