

TOWN OF NAMAKAGON MINUTES

For – FOUR TOWN MEETING – Thursday, November 3, 2022

Town of Namakagon, Grand View, Cable, and Drummond

At – CABLE COMMUNITY CENTER – 7pm

(13660 County Hwy M, Cable, WI 54821)

Chairman Rasmussen called to order at 7pm. In attendance were the Town of Namakagon: Chairman Robert Rasmussen, Supervisor Jack McGregor, Treasurer Arlene Skultety, Clerk Laura Bjork; Town of Cable: Chairman Malcolm Haag, Supervisors Tony Merrill, David Popelka, Dean Hambrecht and Kyle Weber, Clerk/Treasurer Bobbi McCauley; Town of Drummond: Chairman Roy Bloom, Supervisor Jeff Hurula, Clerk Andy Tuttle; Town of Grand View: Chairman Jack Iverson, Supervisors Dale Ahlvin and Paul Gilbertson and also approximately 12 others.

AMBULANCE SERVICE – Chairman Rasmussen stated that the town received the subsidy request and was quite concerned with the significant increase. Rob Puls stated that in 2020 the service got crushed with COVID. When it started, we cut crews, as no one was going to doctors. After cutting crews, there was the biggest surge in 2020. In 2021, numbers went down. By 2021 and 2022, transfers decreased because hospitals were on divert. The ambulance was now transferring longer distances, and there was a lot of turmoil. Something that was somewhat dependable has become very dynamic. We are seeing that in our revenues. We are close to the same amount of runs as last year. This past month has been a huge month, bigger than July. Our playbook is constantly re-written. Vehicles are over-age. Five of them are over 300,000 miles. Two ambulances were ordered, and we are still waiting for them. We just purchased a used ambulance from Gordon-Wascott to get us through until the new ones come. We do not have enough medics. All schools in a 200-mile area cancelled their classes because of a lack of enrollment. There isn't a single paramedic program running due to a lack of people. We are running with only five medics and seven EMTs. Personnel is not looking good. We lost two employees this past year. We are doing the best we can with what we have. He understands the focus on the dollar amount of the subsidies, but ethics for the community cannot be forgotten. The four years subsidies were cut in half needs to be remembered. We are currently paying seasoned EMTs \$14/hr. Barnes is paying \$20/hr. for an EMT basic. Washburn had a referendum for hiring Full-Time EMTs at \$23/hr. Prices keep going up. The reason employees stay with this service is due to the amount of overtime. Three years ago, we were hit with a lawsuit because of overtime wages, and everything was paid from funds from the ambulance. Overtime is now mandated. Roy Bloom explained that the ambulance is not allowed to raise their rates; that is state regulated. When we bill out, we may only see 60% of what we bill. Administering preventable medication does not allow for billing at a hirer rate, only those medications that are necessary puts the charge in that bracket. Rob Puls stated that Medicaid pays out only \$7/mile and \$184 per run. Since COVID, we are seeing an increase in public aid. Medicare pays out a little better than Medicaid. Evers just gave out an EMS Flex Grant. Out of the 22 million available, there were 66 million in applications. We got \$122,000, which cannot be put towards budgeted expenditures. We have received more federal assistance from Evers, and he did say he would increase Medicaid rates. We have run into these situations before, and we have worked hard to put money aside to have for such a time. It has been a hard adjustment. The ambulance is dealing with personnel issues and having to consult with Human Resources and attorneys. We are not educated or licensed to handle these issues. We hired an HR advocate, but not full time. Besides costs, we have a good reputation, and if we lose that, it would be very difficult. Even Ashland Fire is having a hard time hiring and retaining people. We had savings a few

years ago and used them for the attorney fees of the lawsuit and the new building and renovations and more. The building is a tangible asset that is owned by the 4 towns. This field is competitive. Laura Bjork explained that the ambulance service has a board that consists of one of each of the four towns board and a Cable Lions Club member. Agendas, minutes, budget information and end year reports are sent out to the board as well as clerks of the townships. Everyone should be informed of what is going on with the ambulance service. Let's discuss sustainability. First, we should consider past sustainability, so let's use the Town of Cable as an example. From 2009 to 2014 subsidies for Cable were \$48,760. The ambulance service was doing well, and reduced subsidies from 2015 to 2018 to \$24,380. In 2019, the ambulance service went through the overtime lawsuit and realized the subsidies needed to be increased. From 2019 to 2020 the subsidies were raised back to \$48,760. After going through those two years, the ambulance service realized that at that rate, the expenses were not being covered. It has steadily increased since this time going from \$67,200 in 2021 to \$144,000 in 2022 and \$184,870 in 2023. Each year of these increases, the ambulance service has taken from their reserve funds to balance the budget. The reserves are depleting. Currently if the towns want to look at sustainability, they need to look at the budget and consider the fact that there are loan payments that need to be made for only so many years, vehicles that are being purchased this year that will not be there next year and reserve funds that are being used in the current budget. The remaining outstanding amount to balance the budget would be \$180,716.01. However, wages need to be considered. If we want to bring in employees and retain them, we need to consider giving raises. To raise wages for EMTs to \$20/hr. and Paramedics to \$25/hr. would add \$400,000 to expenses in the budget. To figure increases according to townships, average percentages are as follows: Drummond 26.4%, Cable 36.7%, Namakagon 25.9% and Grand View 11.4%, however, the ambulance charges towns per improved parcel. There are other costs that have not been considered in these figures, which include, HR employment, IV Infusion Pumps, Equipment updates, and training costs. Laura Bjork encouraged all townships to include a request for donations letter in property taxes when they are sent out. A donation letter was read to the boards. Rob Puls stated that other townships are going through the same thing. Some aren't even responding and then having to call the next township for coverage. We have a lot of smart people in the room, and we need to become creative on solutions. Chairman Rasmussen stated that the Town of Namakagon is appreciative of the service that they get. It was noted that Barnes is paying \$200,000 for their service. Laura Bjork added that a township can raise the tax levy per elector approval for any reason per WTA Attorney Carol Nawrocki. Dave Popelka stated that the way the state statute reads, we cannot levy rates; it would have to come out of the general levy. The only way to increase income for the ambulance is to have more homes. He went to a meeting, and they urged us to write to our legislatures to get this fixed. If considering a Fire District, a fee can be added to increase the subsidies. Dave Popelka stated that we cannot continue to ask for a raise in levy from the taxpayers. This is a statewide problem and small towns need to speak up. Rob Puls added that the monies in grants received from Evers that was put toward EMS is a onetime deal. There was more discussion about sustainability. It was noted that the Town of Grand View, Namakagon and Drummond agreed to pay the requested subsidies. Kyle Weber stated that last year the ambulance switched billing companies, and there was an expectation that the new billing company would be bringing in more money for the ambulance service. He does not see the change in collections reflected in the budget. He inquired about why billing was not getting more money in. The billing company is charging more, and the ambulance is only getting 41%. Kyle Weber added that last year we talked about lawsuit, and that is not the towns problem. Now the ambulance is talking about loans, but before it was the billing company. Rob Puls explained that the state changed the

income received from transfers, which caused a reduction in revenues. There have been several meetings with the billing company to discuss this. Malcolm Haag asked how many employees are on call. Rob Puls responded that there are employees on call to staff two trucks and another medic. Malcolm Haag noted that if we weren't doing transfers, we would have less costs. Rob Puls added that there would be less stress. Malcolm Haag stated that towns are maybe getting 60% back for output. Transports (911 runs) are beneficial for all towns. What most of the towns are worried about is 911 service, not funding transfers and losing money on the investment. We fully support the ambulance in emergency calls. Going to 911 service only would drop costs down to last year's subsidy costs. Andy Tuttle asked what happens if a town does not pay the subsidies? Malcolm Haag stated that per the Joint Resolution, the budget would need to go back to the GDAS board to re-evaluate the budget and adjust. Kyle Weber expressed upset that ambulance rumors are going around saying that the Town of Cable is not supporting the ambulance. Bobbi McCauley read a letter of dissatisfaction to the GDAS in the billing company that she found on a google search. She asked how the billing company could be so good and yet have such dissatisfaction. She stated that there should be a response from GDAS rather than leave that information open to the public. Rob Puls stated that the particular bill was paid in full. We pay a company to do our billing because of these circumstances. That letter was a part of a lawsuit with the hospital; there is more to just the letter. Roy Bloom explained that 20 years ago, when ambulance service was turned over to the towns, we asked North Medical for an estimate on coverage. The cost was 2 million, plus we had to turn over all assets. Barnes tried with Gold Cross, and they told them the same cost of 2 million per year. If the ambulance gets torn down, where would we get service? Kyle Weber asked who was tearing the ambulance down? Roy Bloom stated that it does not take 3 or 4 paramedics to do 911 service 24/7. If it folds because the costs continue to go up, and no one wants to pay subsidies it will fold. Malcolm Haag stated that the towns are then obligated to pay GDAS whatever they request. Roy Bloom stated that the alternative options cost way more. Jack McGregor stated that state law mandates towns to have ambulance service. We are obligated to provide ambulance service. If we cannot provide it, then it will need to be contracted and you won't have a say with what the costs are. Malcolm Haag stated that we have to reduce the strains of the budget. Jack McGregor stated that towns have a priority of obligations: roads, fire service and EMS service. We are mandated by law to have these. Having a Critical Care Service is a lot more important than if the town doesn't get to repave ½ mile of road next year. What we are getting, Critical Medical Care Service, is pennies on the dollar compared to what the cities pay. The employees are staying honed into their care as they work their transfers. If you need medical care, you are headed towards Park Falls, Hayward or Ashland. That's just basic care. If a higher level of care is needed, then there is a transfer. If we reduce the ambulance service to one crew 24/7, they will sit around, and they won't maintain the high level of skill. Using your skills daily has a lot to do with the quality of care. There is also the economics of the area to consider. A lot of people recreate and vacation up here, because of the quality of medical care that we get here. This is an exception, not a rule. It has affected our area economically. He spoke to WI Towns Attorney and was told EMS services are fragile and on the prefaces of becoming unsustainable and need help from the legislature in Madison. The attorney told him that we are too good at compensating up in this area. Basically, you have to fail to get noticed in Madison before a change happens. It is our obligation to provide the service. If we don't do it, and the state steps in, it will be a 2 million price tag. Jack Iverson stated that the conversation turned into pronouns we and I but you are us! We are 4 towns that need to solve the problem. Everything said is true – we have to provide a service and have chosen to provide a gold medal service. He noted that Grand View is only partially covered by Great Divide. We have to

remember we are one unit, and we are to solve this problem together. Malcolm Haas stated they have had plenty of contentious meetings on this. He does not disagree; it is understanding what we can afford. If we cannot afford what is presented, then the ambulance board needs to work on changing the budget figures. Roy Bloom stated that the ambulance service has been through this before when dissolving and becoming owned by the 4 townships. Great Divide is not dissolving again, and it is not feasible to contract for service. The Joint Resolution sets how the service should be managed from the 4 townships and the By-Laws define the parameters of the ambulance board. The ambulance board needs to work to resolve whatever the results may be. It is priceless to have this level of care in this area. We need to come up with a solution, and hopefully it is at a critical care level, as we need that in this part of the county.

CHAMBER UPDATE – Heather Ludzack explained that Cable Lion’s Club founded the ambulance service and is very appreciative of everything that the ambulance has become. She presented \$2,000 to the ambulance to begin to help the situation. She offered her help to solve the issues that are before the ambulance service. Chamber report: The Chamber is doing well and holding our own. There are two new staff members; Alanna Weber and Katie Dunley to replace the outgoing Kennedy Fleming and Ruth Goetz. The new staff share their responsibilities, which results in the Chamber not being overstaffed. Our members went from 82 to 150 in 2022, which is an 83% increase. The dues have been streamlined highlighting the received benefits. Since 2020, a new roof, siding, patio, walls, doors, and flooring were done. There will be more upgrades next year. Room tax is up 14% this year. Second quarter saw a little drop; we will see what third quarter brings in. It is noted that finances reflect a quarter behind; fourth quarter is counted towards the next year. Fall Fest was very successful with a \$10,000 increase in revenues. The event brings a lot of people to the area. Room occupancy went from 15% to 85% for that time of the year. Currently the Chamber is pushing Christmas activities, holiday events. We use the Visitor Guide and Bottom Line News. The Annual Budget meeting, along with dinner, will be hosted by the Chamber at Garmisch on Thursday, December 15th. We would love to see you there; watch for an invitation coming soon for each town. We are currently \$20,000 under budget! There are new ATV and snowmobile guides being worked on. The Chamber has decreased printing media, focusing mainly on local printing and online. There are nearly 7,000 followers and over 1,000,000 impressions, more than Hayward Lakes area! The annual room tax meeting will be coming up. Kyle Weber inquired if there was any feedback from the Cable Special Events Form. Heather Ludzack responded that she will look into.

JOINT EVENT POLICY – Kyle Weber reported that the Town of Cable has a Special Event Policy. They charge a fee, however, there is a spot for exemption of fees if necessary. The main reason for setting up an event policy was to make everyone aware (Fire Dept, ambulance service, Chamber, etc.) of the event that was taking place. It seems the implementation is getting smother and event organizers are more willing to participate. It was noted that Grand View and Drummond do not have event policies. Dave Popelka stated that the form should be shared if an event went across the town borders, depending on where the event started. Cable charges \$50 for events. Kyle Weber stated that they are borderline to having an event every weekend. Shelly Wilson has been a great help with the policy. Malcolm Haas noted that if one organization hosts multiple events then they get charged a higher one-time fee. Chairman Rasmussen asked if the ambulance service charges for coverage of events. Rob Puls stated that the ambulance service rarely gets notified. If the organization holding the event does not contract for service, they are told that the ambulance may not respond, depending on availability of trucks. If the ambulance cannot respond, then Hayward needs to be called. CAMBA contracted with the ambulance

and was charged \$150/hr. per truck and request two trucks. If we do not charge, and we cover for free, then towns pay for the coverage in their subsidies. The event is responsible for ambulance coverage. Kyle Weber stated that the policy forces organizations to come before the board, which would then enforce them to make everyone aware. Malcolm Haag added that they must provide insurance, and they are required to notify the Fire Department and ambulance. Shelly Wilson will work on keeping people notified of upcoming events. Dean Hambrecht stated that the policy is there not to make the organization obligated, rather provide awareness. Andy Tuttle asked if the Town of Cable could require that they contract with the ambulance according to the number of participants. Malcolm Haag stated that the organization would need to contact EMS directly. Kyle Weber stated the policy asks if the event has adequate medical coverage. All five board members review the event, and they can make the suggestion to contact and contract with Great Divide at that time. Andy Tuttle responded that the town could mandate coverage to help relieve the costs on the ambulance service. Kyle Weber stated that the ambulance decides who they contract with, and that decision is left with the ambulance service.

SHORT-TERM RENTAL AND BAYFIELD COUNTY SHORT-TERM RENTAL ORDINANCE – Chairman Rasmussen stated that Bayfield County is working on an ordinance, however it is not completed. The towns need to know what the county does before they address the issue. It was noted there is a meeting on November 17th. If this replaces the Special Class Use permit and the towns continue to do the same thing it won't be a big deal. If the county tries to regulate the town, then there may be issues.

ENFORCEMENT OFFICER – The four towns each described their enforcement officer job duties and limitations. There was discussion on the legal authority of the enforcement officer/constable without him having a law enforcement certification. There was discussion on the use of emergency vehicle lighting under state law. There was discussion of having the enforcement officer direct traffic on highways. There was discussion on the procedures to provide mutual aid to the Bayfield County Sheriff's Department. There was discussion to clearly identify the Enforcement Officer/Constable from a Law Enforcement Officer. The townships will look into their ordinances on job duties to possibly move to uniform policies. It was noted that Drummond does not have an Enforcement Officer.

HOUSING UPDATES – Dave Popelka reported that Chequamegon Bay Housing Coalition is still working with WHEDA on a workforce initiative. Northwoods Tech received a huge grant to provide workforce housing. They want to have twenty units with a training center in it. It would be beneficial for this to be local to provide a training center. They are looking to buy property from a municipality. Zoning sets the stage for amount of property that is needed. There will be a meeting in December to present the results of the study with workforce housing. There will be consideration in changing the Bayfield County Zoning Ordinance as zoning is restricting land use in areas people do not want the restriction.

DELMORE CONSULTING – The Town of Namakagon looked into hiring Delmore Consulting and was wondering if the other towns had used their service. Jack Iverson stated that Grand View used Delmore Consulting last year. He noted that it was quite expensive. It is helpful to have them deal with Paser. He noted that forestry does their part. Malcolm Haag stated that they are helpful. The first-year cost \$22,000, then it is \$3,500 per year. They help with grants as well as bids and getting information to the town. They can get extension for grants. Toni Merrill added that they document everything, which is required for FEMA. Malcolm Haag stated that it has helped keep the road crew working on roads rather than other paperwork. Kyle Weber added that they were able to give a good overview of town roads.

SHARING OF EQUIPMENT – Chairman Rasmussen stated that the Town of Namakagon does quite well in sharing equipment with the Town of Cable. The Town of Cable bought a new woodchipper. It was noted that it is good to share equipment between the towns rather than every township buying the same equipment. The Town of Drummond has shared with the Town of Namakagon. Chairman Rasmussen stated that we need to continue to work together.

WAKE BOATS – Jack Iverson stated that the Town of Grand View is having trouble on Diamond Lake and is working with DNR on the problems. Jack McGregor stated that Hayward has a Wake Boat Ordinance. Malcolm Haag stated that the Town of Cable passed on ordinance for Tahkodah Lake. Roy Bloom stated that the ordinances cannot be enforced. If you put a sign “no wake boats” there might get a better response. Dale Ahlvin mentioned that the state is trying to limit wake boats according to the size of the lake. Jack Iverson noted that wake boat bladders hold water and cannot be drained, which make invasive species an issue. Dean Hambrecht stated that for the town to approve an ordinance it needs to own more than 60% of the lake. This is so dangerous to Tahkodah Lakes acres. Everyone has a cell phone, and if someone is operating a wake board illegally, it would be documented, and then the Town of Cable would have to enforce. If anyone is interested in an ordinance, contact Tahkodah Lake District, and they can give you information.

ROAD PAVING COSTS – Chairman Rasmussen stated that the Town of Namakagon has outstanding contracts with Northwoods paving, and they will not be getting done this year. Jack McGregor stated that prices have gone from \$67/ton to \$101/ton. Dean Hambrecht stated that the Town of Cable bid notices will be going out soon for roads. The price is \$195/mile. The demand is high, and prices have increased tremendously. There was discussion on the timeframe status of Northwoods Paving. Kyle Weber inquired about the status of work on Mill Pond Bridge. Roy Bloom stated that it is complicated; there lacks communication from the involved parties.

Chairman Rasmussen adjourned at 9:32pm