



## Harsens' Island St. Clair Flats Association

### Minutes November 11, 2017

**Directors Present:** Craig Baloga, Todd Brady, Barbara Crown, Patrick Feighan, Donna Halacoglu, Mike Hilla, Jim Laethem, David Martin, Melanie Most, Kathy O'Connor, Harold Stieber, Dennis Szymanski, Jerry Thiel, Lois Whipple;

**Excused:** Susan Bryson, Neva Covalle, Jerry Freeman, Art Koster, Denne Osgood, Leonard Verlinden, Rosemary Wiczorek;

**Guests and Members Present:** Christine Baloga, Artie Bryson, Alfred Cardinali, Dave Carruthers, Christine Knight, Jane Mount, George Rose, Linda Schoonover, Joanne Shirkey, Daniel Tippie.

Barbara Crown brought the meeting to order at the Lions Hall at 9:00 am with the Pledge of Allegiance.

The October 2017 meeting minutes were presented. **Patrick Feighan made the motion to approve the October meeting minutes, Jerry Thiel seconded to approve; all in favor, motion carried, minutes to be placed on file.**

#### Executive Committee Reports

**Treasurer Report:** Harold Stieber presented the treasurer's reports for October 2017. Harold reported that the balance in the checkbook for October 31, 2017 was \$29,396.28, with total cash on hand being \$52,362.43. The final report for the Bonfire is now available. At the request of the donor of the boat that the Association sold for \$1,600, \$100 of that was donated directly to the Lions Club. As a result of that donation, the Lions Club sent the Association a letter of thanks. Most of the expenses for October went towards repairing and maintaining Browne's Field. Full copies of the monthly Treasurer's Report are available by contacting Harold at stiebha@gmail.com.

**Patrick Feighan made the motion to approve the October 2017 treasurer's report, David Martin seconded to approve; all in favor, motion carried, reports to be placed on file.**

**Secretary Report:** Art Koster resigned from the Old Club, and a Thank-You letter will be sent to Art for his service. Excerpts from Art's resignation letter included the following: "I resigned from The Old Club effective Sept. 30, 2017... I became a member of the Club in May 1977, forty years ago and had the privilege of serving on its Board of Directors as well as serving as OC Liaison to the HISCFA Association since March 1989, twenty-eight years. I am grateful for the opportunity to have associated with so many dedicated association Board members whose efforts have made living on Harsens Island so wonderful. The Old Club will advise you of my replacement early next year."

**Communications:** Donna Halacoglu and Barbara Crown sent a gift basket to Denne Osgood from all the directors. He is currently in the hospital but hopes to be home soon.

**Government Affairs:** Patrick Feighan arranged for Clay Township Supervisor Artie Bryson and Clay Township Fire Chief George Rose to come speak today. The notes from this portion of the meeting can be found in the Appendix.



There has been some activity regarding the way the ferry rates are subject to change, and Patrick Feighan provided background about the history of the situation:

Public Act 246 (PA246), the regulation of Michigan Water Carriers Act (1921) jurisdiction was transferred from the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) to the Michigan State Police (MSP) Motor Carriers Division (MCD) by Governor Snyder under executive order of 2015-10 Item V “Transfer of Authority” dated 3/18/2015. It was under the MSP MCD that the last ferry rate increases were reviewed and ruled upon. Regarding House Bill 6032-6033 written by Representative Dan Lauwers, which called for the total repeal of PA246 (which did not pass) and new House Bill 4807, Mr. Lauwers was requested, in writing (several times) by the HISCFA to come to the island and explain to the residents, business owners, and visitors of Harsen's Island in a Town Hall Meeting why he felt his proposed bill was in our best interests. He never responded to the requests and he did not show up for the Town Hall Meeting. The bill is currently in the hands of the Transportation Committee, and if approved there it will be sent to the Senate. Senator Phil Pavlov is our elected representative in that body. In essence, this new legislation fast-tracks the time period to approve a requested rate change to 30-days. As usual, the timing is poor such that it is proposed during the winter months when many island property owners are nowhere near the island. **Barbara Crown made a motion for Patrick Feighan to write a letter inviting State of Michigan representatives to the island to explain the concerns of the recent bill, and to include the communication on the HISCFA social media accounts as well as including mass media publications; David Martin seconded; all in favor, motion carried.**

Browne’s Field: Curtis McLane brought in a load of gravel to re-grade the driveway where potholes were present. Korthals Lawn Care completed the third and final weed & feed treatment as well as the final cutting of the season. Patrick Feighan and Jim Laethem shut down and winterized the Bates Cut auxiliary water station, as well as the outside taps at the main water station on the North Channel. The inside taps and bulk dispenser will still be available during the winter months. The viability of keeping the auxiliary water station open will be discussed in the spring of 2018. Even after the costly repair of the auxiliary water station, it is evident that it continues to be tampered with. The water lines to the pavilion and pole barn have also been shut off and winterized. The picnic tables were removed and stored in the pavilion for the winter.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

- *Great Lakes Islands Coalition:* Harold Stieber attended this event over September 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The HISCFA has appointed Harold to follow up with this Coalition for next year to be a part of this again to continue to serve our Harsen’s Island community. This event was organized by the State of Michigan’s Office of the Great Lakes (OGL). The objective was to assemble community leaders from non-bridged, year-round Great Lakes islands to review the need for the establishment of a collaboration among the islands to share issues and solutions to assist one another. Over the two days, everyone met and had round table discussions and broke off into smaller groups, and presented their issues and potential solutions. At the end of the two days it was overwhelmingly decided to continue this initiative. The overall consensus was that a united group can solve more than each island can individually. Harold printed up a small report for last meeting, and this week he sent out the draft copy of the report provided by the Coalition for the HISCFA Board to review. Islands throughout the Great Lakes were represented from Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, and the Canadian province of Ontario. Within the document there are links to articles as well as media coverage of the event. Harold stated that Harsen's Island was very unique to the other islands due to its lack of tourism and public amenities since our island is mainly a bedroom community / commuter island. One of the resounding comments made by all islands was that people (governing bodies) are making decisions on the island's behalf without adequate input from the island stakeholders themselves. Next year's



event is going to take place on Madeline Island which is located in Wisconsin, in Lake Superior near Duluth, Minnesota.

- *Directors' Christmas Party:* This year's event will be held at the Sans Souci Landing. Invitations will be sent to directors regarding specifics of this year's event.

## NEW BUSINESS

- *Point of Contact:* A discussion was held about having a point of contact to handle questions from our membership. Several suggestions were made about how to handle incoming questions going forward. Messages are received on Facebook and Nextdoor which Melanie Most typically receives and responds, and there's a few spots on the website for emailing directors and most of those get routed through Todd Brady. Patrick Feighan seems to receive communication directly from community members either in person or in writing directly to him. The main method get this message across is going to have to be to address this topic in the Annual Letter next year.
- *Expense Report:* Harold Stieber created a new form for Expense Reporting for those that spend their own money on behalf of the Association who require reimbursement. This is going to help keep track of expenses and expedite the accounting processes of the Treasurer, especially now that that HISCFA is a 501(c)(3) organization and may be under increased scrutiny of the IRS in the early years or beyond. **Patrick Feighan made a motion to accept the policy of the expense report to be used and put it in the HISCFA Bylaws; David Martin seconded; all in favor; motion carried.**
- *Homestead Properties on Harsen's Island:* A question was raised whether it was possible to get a list of homestead properties on Harsen's Island from the township offices to compare to our membership list. Barbara Crown would like for herself and Neva Covalle to update the mailing list based on these lists, and Donna Halacoglu said she would assist as well. As a point of note, Patrick Feighan has done some work with the assessor and stated that there are approximately 1,910 properties located on the island.
- *Annual Dues:* What the Association receives in dues does not allow the Association to provide for capital growth. Aside from specific fundraisers, the money received in dues does not wholly cover the operating expenses of the Association. Harold expressed that a budget would need to be put together to determine what would be an appropriate amount for an increase. The HISCFA does receive plenty of advertisers for the Delta News which creates revenues from their ads, but it is never enough to cover the cost of the publication entirely. The value of the membership needs to be publicized to justify this increase to let members know what they are getting for their dues. **David Martin made the motion to raise the dues from \$40 to \$50; Jerry Thiel seconded; all in favor, motion carried.** Jim Laethem expressed that a \$10 increase is not enough, but many other members agreed that too much of an increase will not be well-received and will be met with much opposition. David Martin mentioned that individual memberships to the Lions Club are \$65 per person and they don't get anything for free out of that membership. Barbara Crown stated, and others agreed, that the value of their dues need to be communicated and demonstrated by more than just the publication of the Delta News. The Annual Letter outlines all of these things, but the problem seems that no one actually reads them to find out just what their membership dues are doing to the bigger picture.

Additional comments from directors or guests:

- ✓ In a previous meeting, someone mentioned polling or surveying our members to determine which form(s) of communication they prefer (email, Facebook, Nextdoor, mail), and what kinds of information they'd like



to see in those communications. Melanie Most mentioned that we were yet again speculating about how to demonstrate the benefits of membership, and the survey would be a good place to start. Christine Baloga stated that she would help Barbara Crown and Patrick Feighan kick this off ahead of composing the Annual Letter to better reach the members.

Next meeting will be Saturday, February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at **9:30 am** at the Harsen's Island Lions Hall.

**David Martin made the motion to adjourn; Jerry Thiel seconded. All in favor; meeting adjourned at 10:45 am.**

Respectfully submitted,

Melanie Most, Recording Secretary



## APPENDIX

Guest Speakers: Bryson and Rose



### **Guest Speakers:**

Clay Township Supervisor Artie Bryson, Clay Township Fire Chief George Rose

Supervisor Bryson thanked everyone in attendance for being present and allowing him to address the Association and concerned residents about the current situation with the Harsen's Island Fire Station being unmanned several days in the past few weeks. He said it is no secret that the township does have some challenges and he was present at this meeting to explain what those challenges are and what the plan will be going forward to solve them.

Supervisor Bryson stated that there *are* going to be days and hours where the fire station will NOT be manned on the island. The island is going to be covered from the mainland as it was 100% three years ago. Supervisor Bryson stated that the township raised the bar for itself on the island in recent years. As an example: three years ago, the township had an issue with Tri-Hospital EMS on the island with their inadequate response time. The township rattled their cages and now they are responding better than ever – approximately 95% of the time to the bar that was set previously. Supervisor Bryson stated that he gives them a lot of credit for their significant improvement.

Under the SAFER grant, the township had seven full-time firemen. The SAFER grant has expired, and the township fire department doesn't have that staff anymore, although some of them stayed on as part-timers for performing the duty shifts. Even with the SAFER grant in place in previous years, there were still troubles with keeping the island staffed. Supervisor Bryson stated that people have short memories sometimes, and about a year and a half ago people were arguing that there was an emergency on the island and they had to wait for response from the mainland and it was all over Nextdoor. Supervisor Bryson pointed out that the township fire department had the same issues [with keeping the fire department staffed] then – this is not a new issue. Supervisor Bryson stated that the island calls occur mostly at night, so he'd rather the fire department keep the island staffed at night rather than the daytime.

Statewide, in general, it is difficult to find people for fire department and even police department positions. The educational requirements are so stringent and quite frankly they take a long time to finish due to the length of the training. There are currently three applicants for fire department positions, two of which are already trained. These candidates will need to undergo extensive background checks before they are hired since these people are going into our houses when they respond and the township feels better about knowing who these people are [from background checks] before allowing them to do so. Those that require training need at least six months to complete the training to become a first responder.

Supervisor Bryson stated that there are two major issues in the township fire department: manpower and equipment.

Regarding the manpower issue, the township is going through struggles with the fact that the members of the fire department have elected to become unionized. Supervisor Bryson stated that he doesn't have a problem with the union, and that is their right to unionize, and they are currently under negotiations. However, there are a few members who are currently refusing to do duty shifts until their contracts are signed, which Supervisor Bryson feels is a legal strike. Supervisor Bryson feels they are putting themselves ahead of our community, the fire department, and the township. He also stated that he feels the fire department would have less of a struggle filling the island duty shifts if these people would not be "striking." During these negotiations, as soon as they file, the township must remain as the status quo and is not permitted to change anything so the township's hands are tied with what they can and can't do. There was a meeting with all involved parties as recently as Thursday (November 9, 2017), and Supervisor Bryson hopes to have negotiations wrapped up within the next three weeks or so.

About 5-6 years ago, the Algonac Fire Department was not getting along with the Clay Township Fire Department, so Algonac passed a policy that they would not assist the Clay Township Fire Department. Recently Supervisor



Bryson has discussed with Algonac's new city manager about ending or suspending that agreement (since the two fire departments are getting along so well now) and it sounds like that policy might be going away.

A question was raised: How are people in the department refusing shifts? Supervisor Bryson stated that these people claim they are simply never available when duty shifts become open. Supervisor Bryson stated that one of the things that came up in union negotiations was the fact that the township has a significant investment in every fireman. The township must provide "turnout gears" which are approximately \$2,500 per person. Supervisor Bryson feels that if the township is willing to invest time to train someone and provide the proper equipment, if people are continuing to work for the township, they need to work a minimum amount of duty shifts to remain on the department staff. This was discussed in the union negotiations and they seemed agreeable to that.

Supervisor Bryson personally feels that the fire department staff are underpaid, and he stated that he's working to get them paid more money under the current budget. He stated that under this current budget he *could* give them a raise right now but because everything needs to remain "status quo" with the union negotiations, he is unable to make the offer more attractive to them. The duty shift is currently \$10/hour, and when they're on a run call they're getting paid about \$15-17/hour. When they're doing a duty shift, it is \$10/hour, and Supervisor Bryson agrees that is too low, but there will be 2-3 days where there won't be any calls. For example, if someone is pulling a 24-hour shift and sitting there with no calls coming in, they're making \$240 which Supervisor Bryson stated isn't all that bad sitting over there for a day. If the rates are raised for duty shifts up to \$14/hour, they'll be making \$336. They do need more money, but Supervisor Bryson said he is going to accomplish what he can within the budget.

A question was raised: With the union negotiations, what is being negotiated? Salary, benefits, or what? Supervisor Bryson stated that they are all part-timers, so benefits are not something they will need to negotiate. Most of these guys are also working other places. Chief Rose is the only full-time employee on the staff. They are negotiating "everything." When there were full-timers on staff, they did have healthcare benefits. If there were full-timers on staff, the township would be required to have benefits provided to them.

Regarding equipment: it's old. Supervisor Bryson said, shame on the township over the last fifteen years letting it get old. Fire Chief George Rose addressed the meeting attendees and stated that yearly inspections just occurred on all of the vehicles and there are 2 engines on the mainland: years 1993 and 1995. These have to be replaced. One has a pump seal that needs to be replaced (this will cost about \$5,000 to fix). Every time we turn around, Chief Rose stated that we're putting money into old vehicles. In previous years under previous leadership, there should have been a vehicle replacement plan in place but that never occurred. That way, as these vehicles get up there in age they are replaced and the cost is projected and budgeted for ahead of time.

On the island there are two vehicles: a pumper tanker which is reaching its' 20-year mark, and also a mini-pumper which needs replaced. The only pumper within the township fire department, Engine 1, which is located here on the island, is 15 years old and is designated as Class A. As these Class A vehicles reach 20 years, they get bumped down into Class B or reserve or second-run engine because they no longer become reliable. A lot of the vehicles are coming up to where they have reached their life expectancy so they need to be replaced which is going to cost quite a substantial amount of money.

Not only are there vehicles that need to be replaced, but there is other equipment. Chief Rose said they have two thermal imaging cameras that are almost 20 years old. These cameras help to find people much more quickly when the firefighters can't see through heavy smoke. These should have been replaced five years ago as the technology changes. Additional equipment includes rescue boats which have over 1000 hours on the motors. It is important to note that rescue hours are different than recreational hours: response use is that the responders get in, they idle out of the canal, and throttle out as fast as possible to get the response site. That's a lot of wear and tear on a vehicle; much



more so than recreation use. They don't let the engines warm up and then leave; they just get in and go. The motors on those vehicles are constantly being sent to the shop for repair and those need to be replaced.

A question was raised to Chief Rose: On all of the equipment the township has, all of this equipment needs to go through certification. Where is the township at with certification on equipment? Chief Rose stated that he was going to have to write a grant in order to replace the air packs. There are a few years left on those, but the harnesses also have a shelf life of 10 years which means they need to be replaced as well. Hoses are tested every year and as long as they pass the required hose testing they remain in service. There is currently over 18,000 feet of hose in the township's possession.

A question was raised; Are any of our current pumpers or ladders in danger of not being certified? Chief Rose responded that one ladder can't get certification because of a check engine light being on. The source of the light is unknown at this time. Supervisor Bryson reiterated that front line trucks shouldn't be over 20 years old, and ours are. In fact, the township's youngest truck is 15 years old. What the township did find as soon as Chief Rose got into his position was that all of the turnout gears are either very close to being expired or they are already expired. This is the personal protection gear the firefighters are wearing, and this is not safe. Supervisor Bryson feels that this equipment is more important to him than any truck. As a result, all new protection gear has been purchased totaling around \$38,000. Supervisor Bryson said he wouldn't be able to sleep at night if he would have known our guys were in danger while going in for a rescue. Chief Rose is putting a plan in place for where we should be versus where we are with respect to the equipment required to be updated and/or certified. Every year the fire department has testing performed on the pumps on the trucks and they're not passing and it's very expensive for the township to keep on fixing these issues. The township has probably been averaging about \$80,000/year on repair and maintenance of these old pieces of equipment to keep these things going.

Going forward, Supervisor Bryson said to be where we want to be with all new equipment, it's going to take roughly \$2-2.5 million dollars to get there. He stated he's going to get these numbers together more accurately and then next year in August, go to the voters for a bond for new equipment of roughly \$2,000,000 over 20 years which would all go for equipment. For residents, if those numbers are accurate, that would be looking at like 1/10 of a mill because the bond would go across 20 years. A \$2,000,000 bond over 20 years would cost people somewhere around \$10-15/year. That would allow the fire department to get all or mostly new equipment and allow the fire department to shuffle some of the lead trucks back to reserves and would also save a lot of money on repair and maintenance which is money Supervisor Bryson said he could divert back towards wages.

Supervisor Bryson said the township is going to finalize a plan to see what it's going to take to get there to bring it to the voters to see if a bond could be passed. Two million dollars sounds like a lot of money, but spread out over twenty years and our whole tax base is still a lot of money except it is really only \$10-15 per year. He thinks this would be the fastest and best solution going forward. Supervisor Bryson said he doesn't want to take on debt if he doesn't have to. The people who are going to benefit from these new trucks are the people who are here today and who are going to be here for the next 20 years, so these are the people who should be paying for it, not the people who lived here yesterday.

Two to three years ago there were a lot of outstanding bonds in the township, mostly for water on the island and the backroads, and the township was paying 5-7% interest on these bonds. Supervisor Bryson went and talked to Dun & Bradstreet (they perform commercial analytics for business, and the township used them for bonds) and they gave the township an AA+ rating which is the best a municipality can get. Supervisor Bryson took the \$3,000,000 in bonds in which the township was paying high interest and basically re-funded them like you redo a mortgage on a house, and with one \$3,000,000 bond over 10 years, the township was able to sell off the bond for about \$2.25 million at 1.87% interest which saved the township around \$250,000. Attempting this new bond in August of next year will earn the township some really good interest.



A question was raised: Algonac, Clay, and Ira are all on mutual aid agreements. What is the condition of their fire equipment? Chief Rose responded that Algonac's equipment is much newer than Clay's, and he knows that Ira is thinking about replacing theirs because it is coming up to that 20 year mark and they're going to replace them so that they can have up-to-date and new equipment.

Supervisor Bryson also stated that the former Clay Township Fire Chief did purchase a new truck around 2005 and they had it for a short period of but they rolled it and totaled it. With that insurance money, they purchased 2 used trucks in its place which is how the fire department got into this situation in the first place. Supervisor Bryson reiterated that all of the trucks are between 20 and 30 years old, so that means that someone was buying a new truck every five years or so. Then all of the sudden the township stopped doing that around twenty years ago, and that's how we're in the position we are now.

A question was raised: How are going make sure we have the best service possible on the island? Supervisor Bryson stated that in the short term, the island fire station is going to have many unmanned shifts during the day because there are more call volumes at night. If there are people here on the island and there is a medical emergency, it doesn't speed the ride to the hospital any because Tri-Hospital still has to come over here, get them, and take them back to the hospital. It matter if the fire station on the island is manned or not, it's not going to speed that situation up much. Yes, the township is not meeting their goal of having the island fire station manned 100% of the time right now. It's not an economic thing; it's more just a manpower thing. Also, because there are fewer people employed, Chief Rose is currently paying 50-100 hours of overtime every two weeks.

If they can man the station, Chief Rose stated he will make sure of it. It just all depends on whether these people put in to pull duty shifts. As an example, today Chief Rose had two people that put in for today's shift, but they're on the mainland and as a result there is no one here on the island today – because nobody put in for it. A lot of the Clay Township firefighters have full-time jobs and they're wiggling in this position or this part-time work with us in between their full-time shifts. Some of these people work for Detroit EMS: if they get a phone call offering them overtime in Detroit and they are faced with a choice of working for \$10/hour here or \$30/hour there, of course they're going to take the \$30/hour. If Chief Rose gets a phone call the night before or the morning of saying that someone is not going to be at work, he can't justify leaving someone on the island by themselves because it's not safe. He'll put three people over on the mainland so that when a call comes in, two come to the island, Chief Rose backfills the mainland station with the third person so that there is coverage there, and then they respond over here. There have been times that Chief Rose has pulled duty shifts on the island to make sure that there was 24/7 coverage, and he stated that he doesn't have a problem doing that.

A question was raised: Where does the certification report go, when certification testing is completed on equipment? Year over year these things are checked, so who is reading the reports and why hasn't anyone acted on anything? Supervisor Bryson responded that the township has been after asset replacement plans under previous leadership but hasn't received anything. The township would, under previously leadership, not see the reports until things break and money is needed for repairs. In general, you don't just say, "No." You fix it because you need it. Chief Rose added that the vehicles and hoses are inspected yearly by an independent agency that comes in and tests them. They also pump-test the trucks, and Chief Rose gets a report that tells him whether they passed or failed. Chief Rose takes that report to his boss to discuss the results of the report and whether any action is needed. In previous leadership, reports were not shared despite the board asking for them.

A question was raised: What does the fire department do for recruiting? Chief Rose stated that recruiting is done on the township webpage, the sign out front, as well as The Voice publication and with speaking to other local departments. A suggestion was made by a meeting attendee to perhaps have a job fair at the high school since trades are suffering as well, and this may be a good opportunity to recruit some different people. Supervisor Bryson stated that there is also a cadet program which has gotten two or three people out of that, but the best resource is from



neighboring communities. Chief Rose added that one of the cadets is filling out an application to go to the fire academy in January. However, the academy takes four months to train someone, and once they've accomplished that, Clay Township likes to send them to EMT training (because the township is BLS) and that takes 5-6 months to get them certified with that. With those two things, you're still looking at about a year to get someone certified to serve in the township if they haven't had that certification previously.

Patrick Feighan thanked Supervisor Bryson and Chief Rose for coming, and also stated that the primary mission of the Harsen's Island St. Clair Flats Association is the safety of our residents. Supervisor Bryson stated that it is the township's mission as well. Patrick Feighan reiterated that if there was anything we could do to help, to keep the Association apprised and we will be there to assist with getting the participation that is needed.

Supervisor Bryson went on to say that people might go by the island fire station and there's no one there during the day, but at night there's going to be someone there most of the time. If Supervisor Bryson thought we were severely at risk on the island, he stated he would not be able to sleep at night and reminded everyone that his family lives here (on the island), too. In all honesty, if there's a rescue on the North or Middle Channel, the fire department can respond as quickly (in the same amount of time) from the mainland station as they can from the island fire station. Where they can't respond as quickly is down in The Flats and the South Channel, simply due to logistics and geography.