



MINUTES OF A JOINT COUNCIL MEETING OF
THE INDEPENDENCE & MAPLE PLAIN CITY COUNCIL
WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 13, 2023 – 7:00AM
INDEPENDENCE COMMUNITY ROOM

7:00 AM JOINT MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER.

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, a regular meeting of the Independence City Council was called to order by Mayor Johnson at 7:00 a.m.

2. INTRODUCTIONS

Mayor Johnson led the group by asking everyone present to introduce themselves.

3. ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Mayors Johnson and Mass-Kusske and Councilmembers Spencer, McCoy, Grotting, Betts, Burak, Fay, Francis

ABSENT: DeLuca.

STAFF: City Administrators Kaltsas and Kolander, Administrative Services
Director Simon

VISITORS: Director of Public Safety Kroells, Sergeants
Denneson and Howes, Jeff Leuer, Scott
Johnson, Brad Couser and other public visitors

4. FIRE DEPARTMENT JOINT POWERS AGREEMENT

Kaltsas presented information and numbers associated with fire budgets currently, in a fire taxing district with West Suburban and with Maple Plain and Independence combined:

- The consultant hired in 2015-2016 (Mound, Long Lake, Maple Plain, Loretto) to look at fire services reported that the sustainability of fire services is something that cities will need to look at long term and that fire districts are the future. How can residents be served best and most cost efficiently?
- Looked at the difference between taxing district and contract model and noted that for this model, taxing district took into account only market value and not number of calls.
- State statute now allows municipals to establish fire and emergency services districts.
- Estimated fire budget of \$1.5m to combine MPFD with WSFD includes full-time admin staff and full-time fire chief.
- To go into a district with just Independence and Maple Plan would have a higher cost

for both cities long-term with Independence responsible for highest percentage of increase. New or renovated station would have significant cost implications on only two cities.

- The relief association is a huge piece – still gathering information and trying to understand their options.

Independence Councilmember Spencer said that his perception is that it would allow a broader sharing of the equipment and facilities and not have duplicates where it may not be needed. It also would be professionally managed. It would be more efficient and can utilize the equipment where it is needed.

MP Mayor Maas-Kuske said we have to think about the personnel and sustainability. She said we have gone from volunteer to paid on call. It is a struggle for many departments, not just ours to maintain the staff.

MP Councilmember Fay asked about the state statute including the reference to market value and also the voting body. He asked if that dictates in the debt component that there is a basis for population. He asked if it is an election like the park district or can it be based on market value, population, calls, etc?

Kaltsas said statute stipulates having an elected official represent from each body. He noted that population is another factor that could be included in the cost allocation similar to the current formula for contract services. He said the authority exists on creating the district with latitude for how and what is included. Market value was used in this example and is fairly representative of total cost. Population and calls for service would have some impact on total costs for each city.

Independence Mayor Johnson asked Loretto Fire Dept Chief Leuer if they are considering going into a district.

Leuer said that they would like to look at a taxing district since they have seen what Cloquet is like. It is what the future look like. He said this will not be tomorrow. It will take some time. There is so much to be worked out. The relief association is a huge piece of this. Maple Plain relief is half of what ours is.

MP Councilmember Fay asked about an update on the fire relief from the state auditor.

Kaltsas said that representatives from the City and fire relief met with PERA. There are some options relating to the fire relief association. They could merge with the existing WSFD relief association or dissolve the MPFD relief association and join the WSFD relief association by taking what they have existing and then being eligible with the new one in accordance with state statute. He said there are costs associated and the relief association and city are trying to identify those and how it impacts the existing relief association.

MP Mayor Maas-Kuske said one thing that has been important to her is communicating with the fire fighters now. She said she doesn't want rumors. She asked MP Fire chief Denneson what he is currently hearing from fire fighters.

WHPS Sergeant and MP Fire Chief Denneson said he is having group meetings and passing on the information that is available. There are a lot of questions on what happens with the relief and what the options are for that. They are also asking what happens with the command structure. Another is concerned with the community feel of the fire department. He said we will still operate out of the MP fire station even if we would combine. The operations wouldn't change. It would be a different chief model. He said after a conversation with Leuer, it was important not to make huge changes, but make it more efficient with responding to calls and getting more training.

MP Administrator Kolander asked about the timeframe to do this.

Independence Administrator Kaltsas said it may take additional time to merge operations of the two entities, but the cities and WSFD could agree to the final outcome and allow time to go through process. Ultimately direction would need to be provided to begin the process of working towards the end goal.

Independence Mayor Johnson and Loretto Fire Dept Chief discussed the placement of a new fire station. Leuer mentioned that the decision made between Independence and MP on merging would have an effect on the decision so that it was centrally located.

Independence Councilmember Spencer said the direction that we are looking for is that Independence's contracts are a mess with no voice and lots of capital may or may not be met. He said he thinks that a fire district model might be a better fit for our needs for capital expenses in the future. He said we have equipment and volunteers. This might be a better fit for fire services for Independence. He asked MP if that looks like something they might be interested in as well.

MP Mayor Maas-Kuske said that there is value in this and to continue to have conversations. She said that having these numbers has been helpful. She also stated that she wants the relationship between Independence and MP to stay healthy. You can't grow without change. She asked that communication stay open throughout the entire process and that there is a lot of value in getting together to have these conversations.

Independence Mayor Johnson said this is the first time we have met as complete councils. Jacob and Mark need to work together to create a motion that both of us approve so we are on the same step and for Jeff to know the direction we are moving.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:19 am

Respectfully submitted,

Amber Simon, Recording Secretary