The Public Hearing on the Sheldon Fire Department contract, held October 5, 2010 at the Sheldon Fire Department Hall, was called to order by Supervisor John Knab at 7:30 PM.

Present: Supervisor John Knab
Councilmembers: Lynne Metz, Mike Armbrust, Brian Becker, Paul Kirsch
Recording Secretary: Town Clerk Carol Zittel
Speaking on behalf of the Sheldon Volunteer Fire Department: Rick Brzezicki, President and Ron George, Treasurer

A list of all those present is on file in the Town Clerk’s office.

Supervisor Knab stated at the start of the hearing that no decision on the contract would be rendered this evening. The Town Board will make a decision at their next Board meeting on October 19, 2010.

Fire department President, Rick Brzezicki, notified the Board that the fire company would like to increase the fire contract from $40,000 to $100,000. He stated the following to support the need for the increase:

- In 1997 the Fire Department’s insurance company notified the Fire Co. that the Fire Hall is very outdated.
- Approx. 7 years ago, in 2003, six acres of land was purchased by the Fire Company in hopes of building a new hall. This purchase of land was paid in cash and was funded by tax dollars and fundraisers.
- The Sheldon Fire Co. fleet of trucks is adequate, but not top of the line. The trucks are functional and the equipment is very well taken care of. Even the 40 year old truck is ready to roll.
- A new hall would cost approx. $500,000. In order to have a 20% down payment, which is required in order to get a commercial loan, the Fire Co. would have to accumulate at least $100,000 for the down payment.
- The Fire Co. would not want a mortgage longer than 15-20 years.
- The Sheldon Fire Co. has not had an increase in their $40,000 contract in 10 years. Not asking for a contract increase in the last 10 years may not have been the best decision but we did so thinking it was the best thing for Town residents.
- The Fire Co. must continue to meet NY State mandates that may cost the Fire Co. additional funds. If the State requires a 20 year maximum on a certain vehicle than the Fire co. has no choice but to meet these mandates.
- The Fire Co. is very cost conscious. Money is not wasted. Thanks to a good relationship with Fire Companies in Erie County, especially the City of Buffalo Fire Dept., the Sheldon Fire Co. has been able to get good used equipment.
- The area fire companies work together to prevent duplicating equipment. Harris Corners, Strykersville and Sheldon have different pieces of equipment that we can all utilize.

Treasurer, Ron George, stated the following:

- There is a designated purpose for this increase. A fund would be established to save for the down payment on a new fire hall. At the end of the three year contract, the Fire Co. would like
to reevaluate their financial situation. Mr. George stated he would have no objection to decreasing the contract amount after three years.

- At the end of three years, the Fire Company would have approx. $150,000 saved towards the down payment
- The Fire Co. has managed to function very frugally over the past 12 years when other things/costs have skyrocketed.
- By not asking for an increase for the last 12 years, it has been to our own detriment
- We need a new hall, it is not just a want or a wish list
- The cost to build a new hall will never be cheaper than it is right now. The longer we wait the more the project will cost.

Questions addressed by the Town Board:

Councilman Mike Armbrust asked: Not much of the land purchased is flat, does the Fire Co. have a plan to address this?
Rick Brzezicki: There are a couple of designs we are looking at

Councilman Brian Becker: What would you do with the existing hall?
Rick Brzezicki: Hopefully sell it to a neighbor or a nearby farmer for storage

Councilman Armbrust: How many fire calls does the Fire Co. respond to a year?
Rick Brzezicki, Jr.: 50 – 60 calls.

Councilman Armbrust: How many are with mutual aid?
Rick Brzezicki: We get mutual aid on all of the calls. It is now standard operating procedure to call other companies in.

Councilman Armbrust: Not sure if it makes sense to pay off the loans
Ron George: Compared to what we are getting in interest at the bank, it may make sense to pay off the loans. The 2007 tanker is at a 4.25% interest rate

Councilman Armbrust: When was your last new member?
Rick Brzezicki Jr.: We are averaging 1-2 new members a month. Our #’s have increased drastically.
Ron George: We got an influx of new young guys. The building we have will not be good for the next 50 years.

Jason Kehl: How much cash is available to the Fire Co.?
Councilman Becker: I have asked for a full statement of what your fundraisers have brought in and have yet to receive anything.
Ron George: Our total cash assets are $140,000-$150,000. $89,000 of which is owed in loans.

Councilman Armbrust: How is an additional $60,000 going to make Sheldon a better fire company and better protect the Town?
Rick Brzezicki: It will give us a place to keep the vehicles we have. We cannot make the needed improvements that the existing hall needs. We need another bathroom. We need a septic system.
Ron George: We anticipated this long before today. I remember at the last contract renewal, Councilmember Metz asking when we were going to build a hall on the new land. We were not ready then, but we are prepared to move forward now.
Councilman Armbrust: Can the Fire Co. keep up with the increased cost that a new hall will bring with it?
Supervisor Knab: The insurance on the building is nothing compared to the insurance on the equipment.
Rick Brzezicki: The layout has to be different, not necessarily a bigger hall than the present one. We are trying to plan for the future.

Councilman Becker: You are asking the taxpayers for an increase of 150% on the last ten years of contracts
Ron George: We are asking for a down payment on a new hall

Councilman Becker: Why not ask for a 5 year contract that shows a decrease after year 3?
Ron George: I don’t have a crystal ball. This money will be dedicated to a new hall. We haven’t had an increase in over 10 years. In 2000 the tax rate per thousand was $1.43. If it was $1.43 today our contract would be worth $243,000. We are a bargain. We are asking for the next generation because we have a need for a new hall.

Councilman Armbrust: Any prediction from the State or speculation on downsizing fire departments?
Ron George: I see no benefit to it. Just like the new talk of consolidating Town Boards. There doesn’t seem to be any cost savings on consolidating.
Councilman Armbrust: Let’s say you merge with another company, this would just be a storage building.

Rick Brzezicki Jr.: Every year there is a 7% increase in cost of equipment and supplies. It costs approximately $2,500-$3,000 to equip each member.

Councilman Becker: Other fire companies will ask for large increases too.
Rick Brzezicki: Other fire companies have already built new halls.
Jason Kehl: Don’t you think going for a 2 ½ times increase smacks of some urgency.
Rick Brzezicki: We bought the land for the new hall seven years ago.

Mike Armbrust: Now Invenergy steps in...
Ron George: Before Invenergy was in Town, the tax rate per thousand was $1.02. Now it is .27 per thousand. Yes, most of the money will come from Invenergy.
John Knab: Approximately $73,000 of the $100,000 will come from Invenergy.
Ron George: Questions Mary Kehl, Invenergy employee: How do you feel about this?
Mary Kehl: We have a major issue with this contract being one of the largest property owners in district.
John Knab: As a company the fire tax goes from $28,000 to $72,000 a year.
Ron George: We really can’t talk about the total. You have to talk about the increase as in a rate per thousand. I don’t think it will break them. My personal fire tax bill will also be affected but the rate will still be lower than it was in 2008. The Invenergy brochure states that the Town will benefit from increased revenues through taxes paid. We are asking for a designated fund to build a new hall.
Jason Kehl: It is the precedent. They (the Town Board) are running the Town frugally.

Mike Armbrust: Where did you come up with the cost of $500,000 to build the hall?
Rick Brzezicki: We looked at what other fire companies spent.

Rick Brzezicki: in 2009 the fires in our Town had a potential loss of $4.5 million. Instead there was only a loss of $250,000.
Ken Martin: This fire company has come a long way. I think we are doing mighty well. We are not asking for a big extravagant hall. It will have a small dining area.

Chris George: We are also a first responder now. We have done great on only $40,000. We are asking for $100,000 now and we are asking for your help because eventually we will be shut down if the improvements are not made. We really need your help. We can’t use all of our savings.

At 8:48pm a motion was made by Lynne Metz and seconded by Brian Becker to close the public hearing and adjourn the meeting.

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Motion Carried.