

CALL TO ORDER

The September 07, 2023, special meeting of the Buchanan Charter Township Board of Trustees was called to order by Supervisor Malinda Cole-Crocker at 6:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL:

Members Present: Malinda Cole-Crocker, Supervisor; Wendi Heyliger, Clerk; Amber Ramirez, Treasurer; Lynn Ferris, Trustee; Brad Huebner, Trustee; Adam Byrdak, Trustee

Members Absent: Tom Gordon, Trustee

Others Present: Robert A Krauss, Robert W Krauss & wife, Greg Hines, Mike & Jerie Balos, Carl Woodrick, 4 other unnamed residents

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NEW BUSINESS

Motion by Ramirez, second by Heyliger to approve Resolution #2023-22 Bank Signature Updates as presented.

Roll Call Vote:

Ayes: Huebner, Byrdak, Cole-Crocker, Heyliger, Ramirez, Ferris

Nays:

Absent: Gordon

Abstains:

Motion carried unanimously (6-0)

The Special meeting of the Buchanan Charter Township Board of Trustees was called to recess by Supervisor Malinda Cole-Crocker at 6:32 p.m.

The SMCAS Public Hearing September 07, 2023, meeting of the Buchanan Charter Township Board of Trustees was called to order by Supervisor Malinda Cole-Crocker at 6:32 p.m.

Cole- Crocker

SMCAS presented the budget this year and our portion of that budget would equate to \$27.00 per parcel.

Robert W Krauss- 366 E Wagner Road

So, by not agreeing to it last year and \$50 is now going to be \$27?

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Cole-Crocker

Where they're doing it by population as opposed to every municipality paying a flat rate per parcel. Each municipality is doing something different.

Robert W Krauss

Is somebody from SMCAS that can question? Is somebody here right now?

Last year at the meeting, I'm going to repeat a little bit of it was, it was stated that the largest percentage of calls were from Niles. And the problem I had with it was the volume, and I understand there's nothing we can do about it. But it's more palatable if we didn't have to pay for it on vacant land. Mostly because I have 3 parcels, two of which are vacant. If something happens to me, if I call SMCAS, they wouldn't know where I am. It would be hard to describe it, but that's my biggest problem is we live out less, probably less than 1/4 of a mile. There's no way in hell that maggots can make it to my house. The money that I'm going to pay per parcel to give the donation to SMCAS. I had a life threatening event many years ago and I'm not going to go into details with it, but my wife took me and I was profusely bleeding. There's no way in hell that SMCAS could have come out to my house, picked me up and done anything. To me it's useless. I would prefer that

you guys keep quotes from the ambulance services closer to me. Because I'm closer to Weesaw Township as far as ambulance service is concerned. When I worked as a materials manager when I had a job, I was responsible for getting the best prices I could for the services. For me, it would be very good. If townships would look into other facilities, for example, my winter tax bill for Weesaw Township, the ambulance service, which is medic 1 is only \$6.64.

Cole-Crocker- Is that on a vacant parcel? Is that a millage?

Robert W Krauss- I think the millage was .35 or. Something like that. It's a donation. I might as well just throw the money out as I go by SMCAS. One more thing. Not everybody got a letter this time around as a reminder of the meeting, I have an example of that right. There sitting next to me, you didn't get a letter from this meeting.

Cole-Crocker- Thank you for that. I will say that SMCAS is municipally owned. We are one, owned by 6 municipalities, one of which is Buchanan Township. We do have a stake in it. We could pull out, it would be a matter of looking at liability, we would have to get attorneys involved. I don't know what that would look like, but for this season especially, we are fully vested and we are an owner and therefore responsible for our portion.

Robert A Krauss, 452 E Wagner- Well, it seems to me that last year, which was determined that not every Township paid the \$50 and that there were townships that didn't even participate.

Cole-Crocker- You're correct. Anybody else have a comment?

Greg Hines, Able Road- I learned today because I love the election. With the count you know. That on, ballot that day went down, so I understand the process of this assessment in those.

Cole-Crocker- Lynn, help me with this one, SMCAS was created I want to say back in the 60s or early 70s.

Ferris- Yes, around that time.

Cole-Crocker- I am assuming that was a voted item at that time. We have been an owner since inception. Which dictates ownership and responsibility to the liability.

Greg Hines- Why was it on the ballot?

Cole-Crocker- This wasn't on the ballot. No LMC; Lake Michigan college. If you are thinking Fire Millage, yes.

Greg Hines- I remember something about SMCAS was. Right back in May and. Then I worked with elections, but the memory is a little short.

Cole-Crocker- Fire department?

Greg Hines- So this never was on the ballot, OK.

Cole-Crocker- This has not been on our ballot, no. Thank you. Anybody else?

Robert A Krauss- Why is everybody different.

Cole-Crocker- Based on this year's projections, it's based on population. Obviously the larger municipalities are paying larger share. Niles, City and Niles Township, of course, paying the biggest portion because they have the most population. I will point. Out if you've said Medic 1 in Weesaw Township. I know Cass County has just lost their ambulance service. Pride Care has folded, closed their doors. There is nobody to call there. The only options are Medic 1 to the north or. Indiana tri-county, I think, hope somebody can get there, but we're not owners of those organizations. We don't have the responsibility to them.

Carl Wodrich- Just a question of kind of along that line of just wondering, I'm new, I just moved in like a month and a half ago and just wondering what other ambulance services have been around just because it's you have SMCAS as you just mentioned that pride just closes. I've heard that before and Medic 1, so just wondering. And you know what, we've been there. For availability and are they staffing up staffing down because like it cries out? Then have Medic 1 and you have SMCAS.

Cole-Crocker- I am only aware of Medic 1. Wendi is our liaison for the SMCAS board. And Wendi, if you want to touch on that, I know that they are helping Cass County, but they are paying for that service.

Heyliger- There are two or three others joining in to help cover calls, they are participating with the Cass County loss of service. Pride Care did close, and if we would not be part of this municipality for SMCAS, we could possibly contract with South Bend, and that would be a longer trip. It would be more detrimental to us than good.

Carl Wodrich- I was worrying if that puts strain on the SMCAS then. Serve with pride. Pull out of the put more. Strain on smack us and then. Are the prices maybe going to go up?

Heyliger- They went with the temporary contract with Cassopolis, and they are paying for that service. They are paying for the medics and the paramedics to keep them in the area for when they do get a contract service back and running. They don't have to run all over the state and look for paramedics. SMCAS is Covering with an old truck that was sitting. But they are paying for all the service and the supplies.

Carl Wodrich- OK, so they're paying in for what they are taking.

Huebner-Cass gets an ambulance in Cass and they're paying.

Heyliger- It's borrowed, but they are. They are also paying SMCAS a fee to use it.

Cole-Crocker- And providing employment for medics also.

Heyliger- Yes, and they're providing money from all of it.

Mike Balos- Where are they keeping that ambulance?

Heyliger -That part I don't know. I assume in Cass County

Huebner- I've been very vocal about the disappointment and the fact that Buchanan Township doesn't or City of Buchanan, for that matter, it doesn't have an ambulance in it and we pay for SMCAS. It's very disappointing because that trip to your house would be much shorter if there's an ambulance next door.

Robert W Krauss- I mean, I'm only one person, I probably represent 10 of my neighbors right now that are watching television.

Huebner= Probably more than that. Because it will take a minimum of 13 minutes to get to my house and I live right down the road.

Ferris- We have talked about that. There is the money expense. Our portion would be a lot higher if we have the car sitting here because of the expense of you know the extra equipment, the extra people. That would, that's been the answer anyway.

Huebner- Mike, are you raising your hand?

Mike Balos- How many ambulances do they have out there?

Heyliger- They have three on the road and this one was sitting as a backup in case something broke.

Mike Balos- If there is 3 sitting there in Niles, why couldn't one be sitting over here and covering this area.

Heyliger- We do not have as many calls as other areas do. That is the reasoning behind it.

Huebner- But by population, we pay the same amount of money as they do.

Robert A Krauss 452. East Wagner Rd.- You heard from my neighbor. So I'm kind of curious. First I got to state for disappointment that it isn't a representative from SMCAS here to help understand some budgeting. What I'm saying is again, it is my father's works doing some things with my I have to create budgets. I have to have plans. I have slide shows, I have graphs, I have the why with the one when it comes to concerns with money and there was a lot of this discussion last time that. There was going to be that type of representation of, OK, we're going to put together a budget . I'm going to ask because I didn't fully understand it. We're talking 27 dollars of every parcel. Is that on top of something of top of the \$30 or is this 27 dollars period?

Cole-Crocker- For this, December's assessment would be flat \$27. We paid \$30 last year, but based on the budget that was presented this time \$27.00 per parcel. Thank you.

Robert A Krauss- We're in the right direction. Now we were talking about based on population. My thought on that is. OK, you said something about 7%, so forgive me.

Cole-Crocker- We're 7% of the total budget by population. If you want, welcome to look at the form.

Robert A Krauss- Have a total budget on that form or what they're expensing?

Cole-Crocker- This is what they get for special assessment which is almost \$ 900,000 from the municipalities. The total of seven. But we've had municipalities two that that contract in.

Robert A Krauss- And we're 7%. Of the 900.

Cole-Crocker- Correct.

Huebner- Do the contracts then pay more money than the owners do?

Cole-Crocker-They do not. Does one sit at Milton?

Huebner- Yes, they have one of them.

Heyliger- I don't know if it sits there. I do know they have the training facility that Milton donated to them.

Robert A Krauss- There's also some research that had been discussed. I can't remember if it was at that time or another time about, obviously, these first responders that are amazing people that we need, but pension programs and things like that, some of the benefits that they have that others don't. And I'm just wondering what other cost cuts were implemented to help. Us as Municipalities co-owned all of us. Again that's not something you can answer. This is my stressing disappointment and no representative to say, "Well, we did find that we trimmed here and we no longer offer this type of benefit to our employees, but we did raise their wages.", we're not hearing any of that. That's it's hard to swallow \$27.00 for every parcel, including vacant. That again who is on it to get hurt? That needs a response by again I. I fully, believe in the medics. We need them. Amazing people, but again. Give us the why, with, the well, when it comes to the money. That we're trying. We'll have no problem spending money like I said. For those that have the parcels with the houses on, we would even volunteer to pay more than having vacant properties pay the same amount. But again, I don't put this on the Township. Board. I'm putting this on SMCAS. With my disappointment. Hopefully on the record five times now, that they did not send any representative to answer these questions or hold themselves accountable to us that are paying their wages, whatever they had in the past. with their finances and people doing things they shouldn't have. But that's the past. They got to earn some trust back this is not the way to do it. Hopefully our representative will send our liaison with that board can share some of the public commentary that. We could use their assurance tonight. So thank you.

Cole-Crocker-Thank you. We can do a millage based, but otherwise if you create the district, it includes every parcel whether it's vacant or improved. We just choose a flat rate. As opposed to a millage rate.

Huebner- But millage? A millage rate you still pay on vacant land.

Cole-Crocker- You would.

Huebner- Would it be lower than a millage, but then probably without doing the values and stuff, so I would imagine a lot of it would balance itself.

Cole-Crocker- Yes, Sir.

Greg Hines

I'm trying to understand, I guess what changed and now this comes necessary to create discussion assessment that Mr. Ferris stated that was voted for by people in the 60s or whatever. So what's changed?

Ferris- To create the district.

Huebner- To become a partial owner of smack. Is that right Lynn?.

Ferris- Yes. Like this the 5 municipalities that created it back then.

Greg Hines- What changed this year? Because I've been in Township 20 years, 20 or 21 years. I don't remember this coming up in the past. So what's different this year? That's what I am trying to understand.

Cole-Crocker- It has usually been a 5 (five) year assessment, but last year we only did it for one year to see what would change with the money.

Greg Hines

I guess I am not looking in the right place and on a periodic basis unless it comes to me in the mail. Or look at the Firehouse door, the door here to see what's coming up. What's going on? It's nice to get this letter. It's not the amount of money, I just wanted understand process, that's why I'm here.

Cole-Crocker- We only set special assessment for one year last year. We can't put it on the December tax bill until we create the new assessment, this one that we're looking at now would extend for 10 years, but we will be able to set the amount every year. It won't be a flat amount, you know go up \$5 and become fifty. That's not how that's going to work. We will have a hand in creating their budget. And then determining our portion of it based on the population each year going forward.

Huebner- It would have been renewed 6 years ago.

Greg Hines- OK, that's when I saw words. I think it says to create special creating the Special Assessment district that. Sounds like a completely new methodology.

Cole-Crocker- It's the same method, we just have to do it every time every time we create the district, we must have a public hearing to do so.

Greg Hines- OK.

Cole-Crocker- It's always the same district with that part does not change, but we must go through the process by statute.

Carl Wodrich- What you just said, this is going to be a 10 year when it goes in in December, so the Special Assessment District will be locked in the methodology for it for 10 years.

Cole-Crocker-For 10 or we can rescind the resolution if we do not want to be a. Part of it anymore, it's.

Carl Wodrich- So, if we want to pull out?

Cole-Crocker- We can do it.

Carl Wodrich- SMCAS and the issue about empty land.

Huebner- If we wanted to go to a millage that now was allocated.

Cole-Crocker- Yes, we could change that.

Carl Wodrich- It's going to be set for a 10 year basis? And then what happens? With the dollar amount for next year, will there be something sent to the public about what the dollar amount is?

Cole-Crocker- There won't be a personal invitation like this one, but there will be a published in the newspaper. Put it on the fire station sign, here in the building on our website. About same time of year because this is about when we get their budget, they get it finalized and get it to us. It will be a public hearing just like this, we just will not send out a letter to each tax payer.

Huebner- What does it cost to send a letter to the entire Township?

Buchanan Charter Township Board of Trustees
SMCAS Public Hearing September 07, 2023
Held at Buchanan Charter Township Hall
Heyliger- \$2200 for just postage.

Huebner- \$2200 every time we send out a Mailer, so please understand why we don't send out a Mailer for every. It'll get pretty expensive pretty quick.

Anonymous Resident- You have got to keep the public informed. I mean, everybody don't have internet.

Cole-Crocker- Everybody doesn't have Internet. You are correct, Sir, and that is another issue that we're working on. We've applied for the grant money and we are very hopeful that comes through with Berrien County.

Cole-Crocker- Third Tuesday of every month is our meetings here.

Robert A Krauss- Is there a place to go to get information about SMCAS. As an entity. Like how it's performing and running. Like what their total budget says about the special assessment.

Heyliger- You could contact Brian Scribner. He is the director. Check their website. They are more than happy to talk to people.

Carl Wodrich- And to be completely wrong, to make the assumption you've been part owner and a company for 50 some years and. Not only is their side of the representation of the business not here to defend themselves. It also seems, or it could be thought to seem that way, I don't know. That we're not looking at any other alternatives because we are in bed and in business for 50 some years. I think it would be a good idea every few years to check and see if there are alternatives, and maybe you do. From what I've seen my first night that doesn't seem to be the case, we've been in this since the 60s or 70s. You can excuse the populous for thinking that . Why would you be willing to take the time and the effort and the resources to look anywhere else? Times change, things change, and they're right. Doing 2 ambulances I have never seen in 23 years phone company or on Lincolnway near us, the old AT&T warehouse. I guarantee you they are not making it to my house in less than 25 minutes. They are useless. We will die before they get out to us. If it's anything serious. Other alternatives might not be the worst thing. They are only. 2 1/2 miles or two miles from the Mayflower Rd. They are relatively close to Buchanan. And once you start getting West of town and northwest of town, you are better off hoping there's family or neighbor that can get you where you need to go. Because you might as well wait away here. Throwing money out the windows mentioned earlier. They won't make it now, unless the fire department comes out. Just having one in bed with everybody else that only has for all intensive purposes, for us 2 ambulances doesn't seem great.

Ferris- Again, I wish I wish they were here tonight. That would be a big help. But I do know when they dispatch an ambulance, our services overlap. You know, so our people can't make it out there. Whoever is closer will make it out there. We're not locked in an area. They work mutual aid.

Huebner- To me it would make sense that if it was 25 minutes to you, why wouldn't they dispatch medic one if it was 10 minutes, do you? I don't know that they do that. But I mean, that makes sense that.

Carl Wodrich- With the public meeting concerning SMCAS, maybe we should work harder that business partner actually shows up.

Greg Hines- I was wondering how the ambulance is paid for, does it go on the person's insurance of people being served or and this kind of help where they're on government medical or Medicare, Medicaid or private insurance. Most cost probably that's there. Right. Kind of what percentage fee. So what this is for really? It is to keep the services available basically.

Huebner- Exactly. So unfortunately, the insurance companies will only pay a certain amount of money for your ride. Basically they try and keep the prices around what the insurance will pay, which obviously the insurance company wants to pay as little as possible. So yes, you are correct and it's a very large battle because it obviously costs more to run an ambulance service than what insurance will pay.

Robert A Krauss- I'm trying to be mindful of time. The budget you said \$900,000?

Cole-Crocker- Correct, that they get from the jurisdictions, yes. It's not their entire budget. That's what they get from special assessment from the owner municipals.

Robert A Krauss- So basically, Buchanan Township will pay a \$900,000 bill.

Cole-Crocker- All of them, the municipalities together paying 900,000.

Robert A Krauss- Because my math is horrible, I was looking. At \$27 parcel and I'm like. Only come up with 250 parcels and how does this work?

Cole-Crocker -Our portion is like is \$66.126.00 and. \$26thousand plus approximately, that's our portion of the 900,000. Their total budget that they estimate is like 3.5 million.

Robert A Krauss- The big break? I'm sorry, but did they break that down to what's for equipment, training? What's the call value? Things like that. Do they actually break that down into categories?

Cole-Crocker- And they have some expenditures, but yeah.

Huebner- They do have it. I know I've seen it before I used to be. On the SMCAS board before.

Heyliger- It goes through every meeting and you're welcome to attend any of them. We would appreciate it if people started coming. It's on the same night that we have our shere, But they start at 4:00p.m.

Robert A Krauss- Is that all on the website by chance?

Heyliger- It is. It should be. If not, contact me and I'll give you the information.

Huebner- It's still public and held the Milton Township.

Heyliger- Now it's on Chicago Trail because of the road being closed over there for the round-a-bout.

Robert A Krauss- I only asked last time they were here. They were talking 250,000 for a stretcher. Which? You know, do they need them? Or they have what they need.

Heyliger- They have a shelf life.

Robert A Krauss-It's stuff like that where I don't know if it broke that down into.

Cole-Crocker-Do you know? Wendy has said they've applied for multiple grants this time, and I don't know how much of that they were doing before to help offset costs for training as well.

Robert A Krauss- Oh, there's a lot of. COVID dollars still out there that were being shared between so it's little things like that.

Huebner-While SMCAS frustrates me with certain things, they are frugal and work hard for what they get.

Robert A Krauss- Sure, makes sense, I mean. We need them. It's just again... Accountability of building the trust from the public so that. I have no problem spending that money on a parcel that's just got trees or one that's got a house if. If they could have just been here and said this is what we need. Sell it to me, again business.

Huebner- I couldn't agree with you more. And they were invited.

Robert W Krauss- Just out of curiosity, who determined that the vacant properties are taxed? Did you all do that as a group of townships, or how did that come about?

Cole-Crocker- My understanding is that it only used to be on improved parcels, but from a legal standpoint, if you create the district and it's the entire municipality. You can't differentiate between. It's the entire district. They all are supposed to be the same.

Robert W Krauss -OK. Is there any way to undo that?

Cole-Crocker- Not that I am aware of that would be more of a legal question for our attorney, but not that we've come up with at this point. It's the entire district, we can do a millage or we can do a flat rate.

Robert A Krauss- And that was saw all decided in 60s, right?

Cole-Crocker- Yes. Just for this one, because otherwise you're going to have folks like the trailer parks have higher values funding the largest portion of the bill. So, someone with a higher valued property is going to fund a much larger portion of SMCAS us than someone with a lower value for the same service.

Robert A Krauss- They could pass it along to the lot fees.

Cole-Crocker- Yes, they could.

Mike Balos- A, farmer, he's got 200 acres, he's charged for each parcel?

Cole-Crocker- Yes, \$27.00 per parcel or combine them all and pay at once.

Robert A Krauss- I was just going to say do we see the Assessor, Township assessor for combination or do we go through county?

Cole-Crocker- Me. Come see me, we will take care of it. All right. Anybody else? Yes, Sir.

Greg Hines- So 1 parcel, 1 tax amount, for one parcel.

Cole-Crocker- Correct, correct, correct. Yes, Sir.

Robert W Krauss- If I may, now that you've heard. My neighbors and my objections to this. Does that mean you're going to vote on \$27.00, you give them less or you're not going to give them anything. And and voice our displeasure. How is this resolved now?

Cole-Crocker- So once the public hearing is finished, we'll close the public hearing portion and then we have a resolution we can discuss the amounts. We'll vote from there. And that will be done tonight.

Robert A Krauss- You said this is for 10 years?

Cole-Crocker- For 10 years, yes, if we choose to go that long or, you know, whatever we happen that we can rescind, we can amend, we can pull out. We can't extend it past 10 years and 10 years if we're still doing this, they will have to create another special assessment district.

Huebner- But we can rescind the resolution. What's the process of doing that?

Ferris- We are still assessed the same amount. Is just how we divide it out, but we cannot pull out. I mean, we're part of that. We're locked in as a municipality, unless we vote on it.

Cole-Crocker- To get a divorce and to get out of the authority. Look at their liability responsibilities. That's a different avenue.

Robert A Krauss- My only thought is, if I may We don't want to do this every year, have a special meeting and figure out an assessment. But without the representation here, I don't know if I really want to give me 10 years. That's just my comment there. I want somebody come back here with the budget?

Huebner- But we can still vote to not give them anything next year. All it's doing is creating a special assessment. We still vote on the amount every year, so it's. This creates the special assessment and we agree on the amount for this year. Next year we can vote on it. We have to vote on a different amount.

Robert A Krauss- They could ask. For more or they could ask for less.
That is correct.

Robert W Krauss- But if I may, you're not going to send out a notice of the meeting.

Cole-Crocker- No, we won't mail to every parcel next year.

Huebner- You are more than welcome to come. It will be around this time.

Cole-Crocker- Come to any meeting. Absolutely.

Huebner- Every 3rd Thursday. We would love to have everybody. The more people here, the merrier. We would love to have everybody.

Byrdak- As much as we love Jeri and Mike, we want to see more people.

Huebner- We we do encourage that more people come because your opinions do matter, that the more opinions I have, the the easier it is for us to make a decision.

Greg Hines- Does it have to be for 10 years?

Cole-Crocker- That's what it is slated for this time, all it does is create the district for 10 years. We can make the adjustment.

Wodrich- Then we have to go with 10 years?

Huebner- We don't. We don't have to, but we the thing is we can rescind the resolution. If we want if we decide we want to go a different route.

Wodrich- They don't have to have this meeting of origination.

Huebner- We still have a we'll still have a public hearing about the amount we're going to approve or if we're going to rescind the resolution, we have that public hearing as well, we still have one every year and we can back out anytime we want.

Wodrich- I mean, if you vote 10 years tonight next year you can next year back out of the 10 years?

Robert A Krauss- 10 years is just the creation of the district, not commitment of funds, right.

Cole-Crocker- If nobody has anything else. We'll go ahead and close the public hearing portion 7:10.

Special Meeting was resumed at 7:10p.m.

Motion by Huebner to approve Resolution #2023-23 as amended.

Roll Call Vote:

Ayes: Byrdak, Cole-Crocker, Heyliger, Ramirez, Ferris, Huebner

Nays:

Absent: Gordon

Abstains:

Motion carried unanimously (6-0)

ANNOUNCEMENTS-

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 7:23 pm.

Wendi Heyliger, Clerk

Malinda Cole-Crocker, Supervisor