

**JO DAVIESS COUNTY BOARD SPECIAL MEETING
PUBLIC HEARING
SPECIAL SERVICE AREA #6
MINUTES
AUGUST 13, 2015**

- 1) Call to order: Chairperson of the Jo Daviess County Board, Ron Smith, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, August 13, 2015 at the Jo Daviess County Courthouse, large courtroom 2nd floor, 330 N. Bench St., Galena, Illinois.
- 2) Roll call was answered as follows: Present-Brandon Behlke, Merri Berlage, William Bingham, Richard Dittmar, Randy Jobgen, Steve McIntyre, John O'Boyle, Brad Petersburg, Steve Rutz, Ron Smith, Terry Stoffregen, Martin Werner, RJ Winkelhake and Don Zillig. Present: 14. Absent-Gerald Bennett, Robert Heuerman and Dan Hughes. Absent: 3. A quorum was established.
- 3) The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairperson Ron Smith.
- 4) The invocation and thought for the day were given by Merri Berlage.
- 5) Citizens' comments: There were no citizens' comments at this time.
- 6) Reading of the Meeting Notice into the minutes: Chairman Smith read the meeting notice that was published in the July 29, 2015 edition of the Galena Gazette.
- 7) Summary of proposal to establish Jo Daviess County Special Service Area #6: Jack Zane representing the Galena Area Emergency Medical Service District summarized the current structure and operating budget of the Galena Area Emergency Medical Service District. He explained the need to organize a Special Service Area #6 due to increased equipment costs and third party payers not keeping up with the rising costs. He said the minimum dollars needed to cover the Capital Reserve Fund contributions and a possible 20% payroll expense increase of \$21,732.00 would total \$126,128.00. Based on the 2013 equalized assessed valuation, a .035 rate would generate \$134,012.00.

State's Attorney John Hay read procedures from the State Statutes on continuing a public hearing. John said based on the information that some property owners received their notice informing them of the public hearing for the Special Service Area #6 today and others have yet to receive it, he recommends continuing the public hearing to a later date so property owners have an adequate amount of time to review the information. John Hay also said this would allow time for any interested party to be heard orally or supply written testimony.

John also reviewed the statutes for filing a petition objecting to the creation of the Special Service Area.

- 8) Opening of the Public Hearing: John Grizzoffi from Galena asked how this objection by petition is generated. He asked if it is up to him as an individual to go door to door. State's Attorney John Hay said it would be up to the taxpayers or individuals to proceed with the process. Mr. Grizzoffi asked why this proposed Special Service Area would not be on a ballot for a vote. State's Attorney Hay explained that Illinois State Statutes do not require a referendum for the formation of a Special Service Area. Mr. Grizzoffi asked what the Rural Galena Fire Protection District was. Board member William Bingham said that the Galena Rural Fire Protection District was for fire protection only and has nothing to do with the creation of this Special Service Area that would provide ambulance service.

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Steve Rutz reminded everyone that in the presentation by Jack Zane representing the Galena Area Emergency Medical Service District it is their intention only to ask for a rate of .035 not the .10 as was presented in the public notices.

Randy Jobgen said anyone can come to the County Board to voice their objection if the rate goes higher than the .035 since the Special Service Areas must request their yearly funding through the County Board.

Kathleen Behof from Galena asked if there were other options considered, such as raising fees, to acquire the needed funds to operate the ambulance service. Board member Steve Rutz said he was not aware of other options that would work as well as creating the Special Service Area. Steve said the Special Service Area would allow everyone to share the cost. Jack Zane explained the fees from townships are only figured on residents of the townships.

Randy Jobgen asked if anyone talked to the townships to see if they were going to reduce their levy amount to offset the fees the townships pay which will now go directly to the Special Service Area if approved. Jack Zane said he has not talked to the townships about this.

RJ Winkelhake reminded everyone that fire districts are separate taxing entities from Special Service Areas. He said fire districts are for fire protection only and will continue to be listed on tax bills. Special Service Areas are an additional tax entity for ambulance service.

Kathleen Behof asked why there is a five year replacement for an ambulance. Jack Zane explained the Galena Area Emergency Medical Service District runs three ambulances and they have a service life of 15 years. He said they try to replace one every five years.

Kathleen Behof asked if the Special Service Area would accumulate an excess amount of money how would that impact the rate. Jack Zane stated that if his budget showed more money than was needed he would lower the requested amount at budget time.

RJ Winkelhake asked what the total current revenue is for the Galena Area Emergency Medical Service District. Jack Zane said approximately \$231,000.00.

Steve McIntyre said if this Special Service Area was approved the townships would not be contributing money to the ambulance district and could possibly lower their levy, users would continue to pay a user fee and a small additional amount of money would be collected to cover the increased costs of doing business.

Ron Leonard from Galena stated that he pays approximately \$1,000.00 less in taxes on his home in Florida than he does on his home in Galena, even though the Florida home has a higher assessed value. He feels it is not right to take the property tax route for all of the money solutions. He said it does not entice people to establish and keep a residence in the county. Mr. Leonard said he would rather write a check to cover his cost.

George Petitgout of Galena reminded everyone that EMTs are volunteers and we need them. They respond at night, holidays and whenever they are called. He said he has had the EMTs to his house on

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three different occasions and has high praise for every one of them. He said he doesn't know the answer, but he knows he doesn't want to lose the EMTs.

William Kimball from Galena said we all know how important public safety is and he knows the great service the EMTs provide. When he read the notice of the creation of Special Service Area at a tax rate of .10 he was upset. He said he was happy to hear that the Service Area intends to ask for .035. He said at some time the additional taxes have to stop. He said he wants to applaud the EMTs for all their service but he is happy the rate will be .035.

Gary Deidrick from Galena echoed the concerns of William Kimball on the rate of .10 per \$100 assessed valuation. He said he was happy to hear the requested rate would be .035. Gary said he and his wife have been caretakers for five immediate family members and are on a first name basis with many of the first responders which have been to his house many times over the last 13 years. He said he is extremely appreciative to the EMTs for their fast response and the help they gave. He said he will support the Special Service Area and hope we will be able to live with the rate of .035.

Kay Weibel from Galena stated that she was glad to hear the hearing would be continued to a later date where she hopes more people will be able to attend and get their questions answered. She feels there was some confusion and it was good to get a full explanation. She said she fully supports the Special Service Area and feels EMTs are heroes. She feels it is a reasonable solution to a problem and should get the support it deserves.

At this time Chairperson Smith read two emails he received commenting on the proposed Special Service Area.

Ken Rudd from Galena wrote: It would seem that the new EMS district is way out of line. They seem to want excess new ambulances etc. To go from \$6.00 to nearly \$300.00 is ridiculous. The board needs to see what the proposed costs are compared to income. If we have run our EMS on \$6.00 they need to show what has changed. As a retired person our money does not grow on trees. I am sure you will complete a real grilling of these folks!

Jeff Budgell, property owner in the Galena Territory wrote: The current system of funding the EMS Service is and has worked fine and fairly. If the system is in need of new equipment it should be dealt with through the existing system by increasing the per person cost paid by the underlying municipalities and townships. If I understand correctly, currently a family of four (outside the Territory) pays \$24.00 (\$6x4) and under the proposed "SSA" that same family living in a \$100,000.00 home will pay \$50.00 based on a five (5) cent tax rate. That is an increase of over100%! However, for a family that owns a home in the Galena Territory and let's say it is worth a modest \$250,000.00 then that family of four is now going to pay (based on the same five (5) cent tax rate) under the proposed "SSA" \$125.00 or an increase of more than 500%!!!! This for a majority of people who are part-time residents in the area (Galena Territory residents). This is utterly and completely shameless! And, unfortunately, standard operating procedure in Jo Davies County. You actually want to abandon an inherently fair system that equally divides the cost of EMS service over the entire population who benefit from it and foist the lions share onto the backs of a small percentage of part-time property owners? Amazing. Will the underlying municipalities and townships be required to reduce their tax levies so the tax payers are not effectively being taxed twice for the EMS District? I question the use of a Special Service Area for providing EMS Services? Why is this not part of the

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already existing Fire Protection Districts? Or more appropriately, leave the system as it is today. Fair and Equitable! The last thing that Jo Davies County or the State of Illinois needs is another taxing body!! Have you heard the term "Out Migration" with respect to Illinois? A quick google search will blow your mind. Tax paying Businesses and tax paying families are leaving Illinois in shocking numbers and taking their tax dollars with them because of this very type of thing. We all know that once the new system is in place it will only be a matter of time before the SSA is up against the proposed taxing limit ceiling and in need of more money. Lastly, I question the legality of the Notice provided for this Public Hearing. Illinois Statute is very clear regarding the process to create a Special Service Area. And proper notice is required. I will not be there due to the fact that I only learned of this Public Hearing this afternoon through an email that I received from the GTA not a notice from Jo Davies County. I doubt that I am the only taxpayer who finds themselves in this position. My objections are not based on a rejection for the need of a viable EMS system. I agree that a viable EMS system will support the value of all properties within the EMS district. My objection is to the method of funding a viable EMS system. The existing system is both fair and equitable. What you are proposing is simply not!

County Administrator Dan Reimer reviewed the process of how Special Service Areas bring forth their budgets and levy requests to the County Board. He explained it is a yearly process and the County Board actually levies for Special Service Areas after reviewing their requests at the budget workshops in September.

Brad Petersburg asked what are the actual rates of the three present Special Service Areas. Dan Reimer said all three are at their maximum rate.

Ron Smith stated that you need to compare the size and the EAV of each Special Service Area. He said this proposed SSA is much larger than any of the other three Special Service Areas.

Steve Rutz asked about the requirement of the mailing notice to property owners. State's Attorney Hay said it is required to be placed in the mail ten days prior to the hearing.

Terry Stoffregen asked if this SSA is approved when it will appear on the tax bills. John Hay said it would be on the 2015 taxes payable in 2016.

Steve Rutz asked where the .10 rate originated. John Hay said it is required to put the maximum rate into the ordinance, it does not mean you have to levy for that amount.

Rick Dittmar agreed that a formation of a Special Service Area should go to a public vote, but understands it is not provided for in the Statutes. He also commented that he is on the Elizabeth Ambulance Board and they are at the maximum rate. He feels with this larger district and a higher EAV the .035 rate is a bargain.

William Kimball asked what happens when a party does not pay their service bill. Jack Zane said it is turned over to a collection agency.

Bill Bingham stated that the rate could possibly go down when you figure the EAV and the immediate concerns of the Special Service Area.

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Jack Zane stated that if this Special Service Area is approved the contracts with individual townships will be terminated. Randy Jobgen said people need to go to their townships and ask if they are going to reduce their levy since they will not be contributing money for ambulance service.

- (9) Continuation of Public Hearing: A motion to continue the Public Hearing to September 10, 2015 at 7 p.m. in the large courtroom, 2nd floor, Jo Daviess County Courthouse was made by Merri Berlage and seconded by Randy Jobgen. The motion carried by voice vote.
- (10) Postponement of adoption of Ordinance: A motion to postpone the possible adoption of an ordinance establishing Special Service Area #6 was made by Merri Berlage and seconded by Randy Jobgen. The motion carried by voice vote.
- (11) Citizens' comments: There were no citizens' comments at this time.
- (12) Adjournment: A motion to adjourn was made by Steve McIntyre and seconded by John O'Boyle. The motion to adjourn carried by voice vote. Chairperson Smith adjourned the meeting at 8:25 p.m. until September 10, 2015 until 7 p.m.