

**JO DAVIESS COUNTY BOARD  
SPECIAL MEETING AND PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES  
AUGUST 28, 2020**

**CALL TO ORDER:** Chairperson of the Jo Daviess County Board, Scott Toot called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. on Friday, August 28, 2020 in the Jo Daviess County Large Courtroom, Jo Daviess County Courthouse in Galena, Illinois.

**ROLL CALL** was answered as follows: Present – William Bingham, Robert Heuerman, Don Hill, John Korth, Robert O'Connor, John Schultz, and Scott Toot. Present: 7. Present electronically - Steve Allendorf, Diane Gallagher, John Lang, Hendrica Regez, Ron Smith, and LaDon Trost. Present electronically: 6. Absent – Lucas Bourquin, Staci Duerr, Andrew Townsend, and Don Zillig. Absent: 4.

**THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** was led by Chairperson Toot.

**AGENDA ITEM I - CITIZENS' COMMENTS**

There were no citizens' comments at this time.

**AGENDA ITEM II – READING OF THE MEETING NOTICE INTO THE MINUTES**

Chairperson Toot read the meeting notice that was published in the August 12, 2020 edition of the Galena Gazette.

Don Zillig entered the meeting at this time.

**AGENDA ITEM III - SUMMARY OF PURPOSE OF PUBLIC HEARING**

Chairperson Toot explained the requirement of holding a Public Hearing to address the request from Elizabeth EMS to combine the current Special Service Area #2 & 4 and Special Service Area #5 into a new Special Service Area #7 and to increase the maximum property tax rate from \$0.10 per \$100 of assessed valuation in Special Service Area #2 & 4 and from \$0.11 per \$100 of assessed valuation in Special Service #5 to \$0.30 per \$100 of assessed valuation for Special Service Area #7. He then read a statement prepared by Dan Schleicher that outlined their efforts to continue to operate. This proposed change would generate an additional \$179,000.00 per year and allow them to continue to pay three (3) fulltime Paramedics, hired on August 1, 2020. These new hires are currently being paid from their ambulance replacement fund, which will be depleted in August 2021. The Elizabeth EMS provides 24/7 ambulance service to 210 square miles of Jo Daviess County, servicing the townships of Derinda, Elizabeth, Guilford, Hanover, Rice, Thompson, and Woodbine, as well as the villages of Elizabeth and Hanover. With this increase, the cost for a home valued at \$100,000.00 would be a total of \$99.90 yearly, or just \$0.27 per day. These additional funds will allow Elizabeth EMS to continue to provide timely and quality care to everyone in their service area.

**AGENDA IV - OPENING OF PUBLIC HEARING**

Chairperson Toot opened the public hearing at 6:09 p.m.

Julie Mark Helman, Elizabeth is concerned the zoom information was not included in the mailing, nor was a map of the proposed Special Service Area #7. She noted there was a mistake in the mailing regarding the taxation of personal property, which no longer happens in Illinois. She agrees they need paid EMS, but why can't this be done county-wide? She would like to know the current tax rate and who is managing the three (3) new hires. Dan Schleicher responded to her questions with the current tax rates, which are \$0.10 per \$100 of valuation for SSA #2&4 and \$0.11 per \$100 of valuation for SSA #5. The EMS Board of Supervisors will oversee the operations of the service and the new hires.

**Jo Daviess County Board**  
**Special Meeting and Public Hearing Minutes**  
**August 28, 2020**  
**Page 2 of 6**

Paulette Wiley, Elizabeth sent her comments by email, but would also like to speak of her concerns. Regarding the process to protest the ordinance, she believes during a pandemic, citizens could and should not circulate a petition to secure the required signatures of 51% of the registered voters. She believes there should be a sales tax levied for EMS and that the entire issue should be on the ballot.

Bonnie Kalbantner, Elizabeth also believes it should be a sales tax and that the issue should be on the ballot. She also heard that Elizabeth EMS plans to purchase a new \$300,000.00 ambulance. Dan Schleicher addressed her concern by stating they have three ambulances, years of 2004, 2009, and 2015, and they have no intention or plan to purchase a new one.

Robert Hutchinson, Hanover read a statement on the issue. *In my capacity as Resident Commissioner for Special Service Area #5, I affirm my support for both legs of the SSA #7 consolidation proposal submitted to the County Board by the board of directors of Elizabeth Ambulance: the first leg being the merging of SSA #5 with SSAs #2 and 4, and second leg being the increase of the current maximum tax rates in these three SSAs—in the case of SSA #5, 11¢ per \$100 of assessed value—to 30¢ per \$100 of EAV, chiefly to enable the hiring of three full-time paramedics.*

*The assurance of sustainable and competent EMS in SSA #7 by a 19¢ increase in the SSA #5 tax rate is an incredibly good deal for SSA #5 property owners. Thirty cents per \$100 of EAV for significantly improved and securely professionalized EMS would come in at just two-thirds of the 45¢ rate that we currently pay Hanover Fire. Looked at from another comparative perspective, the insurance we'd pay for high-quality and high-dependability EMS at the proposed 30¢ rate would amount to less than one-half of one percent of what the typical SSA #5 household pays for medical insurance. I urge all my neighbors in SSA #5, whether owners of record or electors, to support the SSA #7 consolidation proposal.*

*I would like to advance one tentative suggestion for the consideration of the Elizabeth Ambulance board. As much as those of us who live in Hanover, Derinda, and Woodbine Townships, and in those portions of Rice, Guilford, and Thompson Townships located within the boundaries of SSA #7, honor the name of Elizabeth Community Ambulance Service, which has served us so well and conscientiously, we are conscious, at the threshold of the proposed consolidation, that Elizabeth Township (37 square miles) constitutes less than one-fifth of the area of SSA #7 (204 square miles).*

*The last time these seven townships concerted such a consolidation was in the creation of the River Ridge Community Unit School District, notably featuring the burying of the hatchet by erstwhile rivals Elizabeth and Hanover High Schools, uniting under the neutral neologism, "River Ridge High School". The boundaries of CUSD #210 are roughly congruent with those of SSA #7. In view of parochial sensitivities in certain quarters of the SSA #7 electorate, would it be too great an inconvenience and sacrifice of tradition and emotional attachment if the Elizabeth Ambulance board were to follow the historical precedent of our consolidated school districts and declare its intention, in the event that no petition were to succeed in blocking the creation of SSA #7, of renaming Elizabeth Community Ambulance Service: "River Ridge Emergency Ambulance Service"?*

Bonnie Fine, Elizabeth received her mailing, but did not know what it was or what it meant. She would like to know the breakdown of how the money will be spent. She also would like to know where the ambulance building is located. Dan Schleicher responded to her questions to say the increase would pay each of the three (3) new hires \$50,000.00 salary per year, no benefits are included and that the ambulance building is across from the Post Office in Elizabeth. Regarding the breakdown of tax received, she believed the increase was going to amount to over \$3 million dollars. County Administrator Dan Reimer explained how the tax would be extended and that on a \$100,000.00 house in SSA #2&4, the additional tax would be approximately \$67.00 per year.

Mike Dittmar, Elizabeth Village President stated while no one wants to pay more in taxes, until the state of Illinois changes the way these things are funded, this is all they have to work with. For far too long, Dan

Jo Daviess County Board  
Special Meeting and Public Hearing Minutes  
August 28, 2020  
Page 3 of 6

Schleicher and Dick Robinson have volunteered so much time and it has become unsustainable. The Elizabeth EMS is still supplemented with volunteers. He also stated the village supports the ordinance.

Richard Robinson, Elizabeth addressed the concerns regarding the new hires. He stated that even though it's three full-time positions, it really only replaces one person answering calls 24/7. They still need volunteers to be able to respond to calls.

Robert O'Connor, County Board #15 represents two townships in the proposed area and he received many calls against the increase of tax. He asked if the board hired the three Paramedics before knowing they had the increased tax revenue. Dan Schleicher responded the discussion to hire paid EMS started when he announced he would be retiring on July 31, 2020. In order to continue to service the area, the new hires started August 1, 2020 and are paid using the Elizabeth EMS ambulance reserve fund. If the tax isn't approved, they will run out of money by August of 2021. Robert wanted to know why people aren't being charged for the service. Dan responded that they do charge, but over half of their calls are Medicare and Medicaid and it doesn't matter what they charge because in reality, they will only get paid what those agencies approve to pay. The same goes for insurance companies and state funded agencies. Robert would like to know why the proposed tax rate is so much higher than other SSA's in the county. Dan responded they calculated how much the three Paramedics would cost and that resulted in their request for the \$0.30 maximum rate. They are on record back to 2015 as reporting their difficulties in recruiting volunteers and saw this as the only way to continue to safely serve the area. Other areas still manage with a volunteer crew, so don't have the additional expense.

Wayne Beyer, Elizabeth felt the mailing could have been more informative.

John Hay, Jo Daviess County State's Attorney addressed the recurring questions of sales tax and referendum. There is no statutory authority for the county to either impose a sales tax for EMS or to place a binding question on the ballot, so those options are not available. The only methods the county has is to impose a special service area tax or to create a county-wide ambulance service, whereby all EMS would be county employees.

Chairperson Toot read into the minutes all comments received via email.

*Ben Steffes: I first of all apologize for the crudeness of this letter. I only found out today at 3:45 today the day of this meeting that this was an option to communicate with the board. I am just questioning why this whole process is being done and pushed forward with this pandemic going on. More time is needed! I do not feel comfortable coming to an in person meeting or using "Zoom". I do not feel that the process of this levy has been followed in good faith with this pandemic. I also question if a different form of tax would be a more viable option for our area. Example sales tax. Please tell the public what options there are! Could this be something that could be voted on at the elections?*

*I do feel we need a strong ambulance service I just feel the whole process seems shady at best. More time and thought is needed by all. Nothing good ever happens hurry!*

*Again, I feel the board should strongly consider delaying any decisions with the current pandemic situations.*

*Thank you for your time.*

*Eugene Zink, Dianne Zink, & Lee Zink: I oppose the 0.30 per hundred you are trying to put on my taxes as of now you have enough money.*

Jo Daviess County Board  
Special Meeting and Public Hearing Minutes  
August 28, 2020  
Page 4 of 6

Loren Heidenreich: *This issue is going to be decided by the county board and not the tax payers. We don't have any say on the issue. The ambulance district was voted down by the taxpayers to begin with. The county board at the time decided they knew better and allowed the district to go ahead. Now again you get to decide what's best and not the taxpayers.*

*We will be paying for a service and when used we will be sent a bill besides. This is not the big city but powers to be seem to think it is. We will be stuck with this tax forever.*

*Next year they will be back for more money because they will come up short on funds. Why do we need an administrator getting 20 hours a week? The big question is why have they hired help and don't know if they have the ok yet. Or maybe this deal is all cut and dried.*

Paulette & Bill Wiley: *I recently received the updated information on this meeting scheduled for tonight at 6:00pm in Galena at the Courthouse. I received the pamphlet but until yesterday knew nothing about this meeting being able to use Zoom or phone or email.*

*Let's start this email off with not enough information to properly hold a meeting with the people who it will impact.*

*I dropped you an email yesterday to see Angela Kaiser on the email I sent her and I have not heard back from either of you on receiving these emails. But I do understand that you probably have a lot of emails to go through. Again not enough time for either side to fully think this out and follow up on the issues.*

*Of all the property owners and electors residing within the special service area, how many do you honestly believe read the pamphlets sent out, saw the notice in the Gazette or even get the Gazette, have a computer to look up this information or even know to look it up?*

*In this time of Covid-19 how are petitions to be signed by the 51% when we can't and should not be going door to door.*

*Do you have the statistics on how many property owners and electors have utilized the ambulance services in the past, say, 5 years compared to the people who own nothing but are already on government housing (which taxpayers are already paying for) or tourist traveling here every day or racing through on motorcycles or the semi-trailers? These numbers need to be forthcoming.*

*Why can't we just put a sales tax on everything in Jo Daviess County and then put that money in a pot for all the ambulance services and divide it out per capita. This way everyone who could and would use the services will have added to the cost of keeping these services available. There will come a time when we will be needing to pay all the ambulance services.*

*Why did they hire three people to take Dan Schleicher's place if there is no money there for these positions?*

*Plain and simple this is being slipped through without enough information. The public should be better informed and the entire thing should be put up to a vote by the county.*

*Thank you for hearing me out. I wish I could attend the meeting. I can't use Zoom – its taking me over a week now to update my Garmin maps as it is right now with the internet I have!*

Bonnie Kalbantner: *As residents and landowners of Derinda Township in Jo Daviess County, this is to advise you of our opposition to the levy increase to fund an expansion of Elizabeth Ambulance. We believe that the increase in taxes is much too great at a time when many people are not working or job insecure. Our township is mostly family farms and a low population that would have to support this service. It may be a good idea for some place that has a larger population base to spread the cost. We have discussed this with several neighbors who share our opposition to this levy increase.*

*Also, we have learned from one of the present ambulance workers that they are already looking at purchasing a new ambulance at a cost of \$300,000. So it would seem that this is a "done deal" before it is formally approved at tonight's meeting.*

**Jo Daviess County Board**  
**Special Meeting and Public Hearing Minutes**  
**August 28, 2020**  
**Page 5 of 6**

*Because of COVID, we have chosen not to attend the meeting. We can be reached at 815-598-3025 if you have questions.*

*Anthony & Susan Curcio: Please accept this email as an announcement of our opposition to increase the tax levy for the expansion of Elizabeth Ambulance to include Derinda Township. We are all facing difficult times and this is an unfair burden.*

**AGENDA ITEM V - CLOSURE OF PUBLIC HEARING**

Chairperson Toot closed the public hearing at 7:00 p.m.

Don Zillig, County Board #2 said the County Board represents all of the people in the county and has been trying to get an additional 1% tax added to the Hotel/Motel tax rate to be used for emergency services. Andrew Chesney is sponsoring the bill.

Robert O'Connor, County Board #15 would like to separate in the ordinance the action of consolidating the two Special Service Areas from the increase in maximum rate.

John Lang, County Board #3 reminded the audience that EMS is not considered an essential service by the state of Illinois, meaning it is not mandated to be provided.

John Schultz, County Board #14 stated while no one likes paying additional property tax, everyone wants to have ambulance service, so it is necessary and needs to be done.

Ron Smith, County Board #9 said he monitors a pager and with the high volume of calls, having an ambulance service is important.

John Korth, County Board #8 has received comments and concerns regarding the level of pay for the newly hired Paramedics.

Robert Heuerman, County Board #16 stated the rate is three times higher than others because other services have volunteers.

Scott Toot, County Board #13 addressed the suggestion that something "shady" is going on. He assured all participants that everything regarding this issue was done in accordance with the law. The mailings and the newspaper notice were done properly and in a timely fashion.

**AGENDA ITEM VI - NEW BUSINESS**

A motion to adopt *An Ordinance Establishing Jo Daviess County Special Service Area Number Seven* with a maximum property tax rate of \$0.30 per \$100 of assessed valuation was made by John Schultz and seconded by Robert Heuerman.

An amendment to the motion to add *and a levy rate of \$0.30 for the initial year* was made by John Schultz and seconded by John Lang.

The amendment carried by roll call vote. Ayes - Steve Allendorf, William Bingham, Diane Gallagher, Robert Heuerman, Don Hill, John Lang, Hendrica Regez, John Schultz, Ron Smith, Scott Toot, LaDon Trost, and Don Zillig. Ayes: 12. Nays - John Korth and Robert O'Connor. Nays: 2. Absent -- Lucas Bourquin, Staci Duerr, and Andrew Townsend. Absent: 3.

The amended motion carried by roll call vote. Ayes - Steve Allendorf, William Bingham, Diane Gallagher, Robert Heuerman, Don Hill, John Lang, Hendrica Regez, John Schultz, Ron Smith, Scott Toot, LaDon Trost, and

**Jo Daviess County Board**  
**Special Meeting and Public Hearing Minutes**  
**August 28, 2020**  
**Page 6 of 6**

Don Zillig. Ayes: 12. Nays - John Korth and Robert O'Connor. Nays: 2. Absent — Lucas Bourquin, Staci Duerr, and Andrew Townsend. Absent: 3.

**AGENDA ITEM VII - CITIZENS' COMMENTS**

Robert Hutchinson, Hanover read a portion of his statement that he inadvertently left out during the Public Hearing: *The first leg of the SSA #7 proposal—consolidation—sets on a permanent footing the provisional measures adopted by the County Board in coordination with Elizabeth Ambulance to bridge the public safety deficits in SSA #5 that were exposed as Hanover Ambulance struggled to hide its operational collapse and stonewall the administrative investigation that resulted in the revocation of its license.*

*The second leg of the proposal—tax-rate increase—is a reasonable, proportionate, and necessary solution to the chronic structural shortfalls in rural EMS staffing, recruitment, and training that threaten every ambulance company in our county with Hanover Ambulance's fate.*

*I also take this occasion to reiterate our thanks to Elizabeth Ambulance for providing seamless EMS coverage to the population of SSA #5 ever since Hanover Ambulance's EMS operations were officially terminated on May 18, 2018, as well as for the assistance that the officers of Elizabeth Ambulance extended to the Hanover Ambulance board in the spirit of respectful cooperation during the latter's mounting difficulties in the preceding year.*

**ADJOURNMENT**

The motion to adjourn was made by John Korth and seconded by Robert Heuerman.

The motion carried by roll call vote. Ayes - Steve Allendorf, William Bingham, Diane Gallagher, Robert Heuerman, Don Hill, John Korth, John Lang, Robert O'Connor, Hendrica Regez, John Schultz, Ron Smith, Scott Toot, LaDon Trost, and Don Zillig. Ayes: 14. Nays: 0. Absent — Lucas Bourquin, Staci Duerr, and Andrew Townsend. Absent: 3.

Chairperson Toot adjourned the meeting at 7:25 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. Tuesday, September 8, 2020 at the Jo Daviess County Board Room, Jo Daviess County Courthouse, Galena, Illinois