

My perspective and approach to management are based on growing up in a small rural community, 28 years in the U.S. Navy (Captain, retired) and significant program management experience in the aerospace industry.

I appreciate everyone's concern over fire and EMS services for Halfmoon Township. The current Board of Supervisors and everyone that I have talked to, myself included, believes that fire and EMS services must be funded. Halfmoon Township has funded and continues to fund these services. Halfmoon Township has also provided additional funding when the Supervisors felt requests were justified and fairly shared.

Much of the current dialogue concerns the Port Matilda Fire and Port Matilda EMS organizations. It is important to recognize that both fire and EMS services for Halfmoon Township are provided, not by just these two organizations but, by multiple organizations that have service areas covering multiple townships. This presents challenges for the organizations and the townships. The good news is that historical data has enabled Halfmoon Township to have adequate tax revenue to meet all requirements. That historical data, combined with coming year's organizational inputs, is what I will use to help inform budget planning decisions.

As an aside, the fire and EMS organizational budgets are needed by the townships but, and I feel more importantly, are critical to the service organizations themselves. A good organizational budget, combined with transparent communication with the townships, will help maintain these critical services. This was graphically displayed last fall when Port Matilda EMS announced they would cease operations. Fortunately, the Halfmoon Township Supervisors led an effort to return Port Matilda EMS to solvency.

As to how to fund these requirements, the township has two basic sources of tax revenue: income and property (mil rate). I am not in favor of a mil rate property tax levied for any variable, annual requirement. My primary reason is that a fixed mil rate fire tax obligates those tax revenues to the fire services budget requirement. For example, there is a proposal circulating, supported by Ms. Hartle and Ms. Perkins, that states a 2 mil fire tax is the "fair" way to fund fire services. I believe that approach is unfair for two reasons. First, if enacted, that 2 mil tax would collect approximately 50% more tax than required to meet the proposed fire services budget. And second, that would place the entire fire services tax burden on property owners. Paying for fire and EMS services budget requirements from the general fund provides the township the flexibility to adapt to individual organizational budgets during the budgeting process without unfairly placing the tax burden on only property owners. It also prevents collecting excessive taxes.

Also of note, the 2 mil fire tax proposal would collect new, additional tax revenue to pay for services that are already funded within the balanced general budget. In short, Ms. Hertle and Ms. Perkins are proposing a 2 mil tax increase that is unnecessary.

Another challenge that must be resolved is that there is currently no agreement among the townships within the fire and EMS service areas to share the budget requirements of the service organizations. It is not fair to the townships to budget without a commitment from all the townships. It is also not fair to subject the service organizations to annual budget uncertainty. There is a proposal, initiated by Halfmoon Township, that defines how the involved townships would share the total fire and EMS budget requirements. That proposed agreement has not been formalized but I will work to formalize this or another agreement so that we can stabilize future funding for essential services.

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