

FOUR TOWNS MEETING  
A Joint Meeting of the Town Boards of the  
Towns of Cable, Drummond, Grand View, Namakagon  
Wednesday, October 30, 2019 – 6:00 P.M.  
Cable Community Centre

MINUTES

**Call to Order**

Cable Town Board Chairman Brett Rondeau called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**Approval of Minutes - October 30, 2018**

MOTION by Chris Elkins, seconded by Jack Radecki to approve the October 30, 2018 4-Towns meeting minutes as presented. MOTION carried.

**Chequamegon Bay Housing Group**

**Presentation by Sheldon Johnson, Northwest Regional Planning**

The Chequamegon Bay Housing Group has been discussing housing needs in the region of Ashland and Bayfield Counties for approximately 8 months. The group has reached consensus to conduct a Regional Housing Study to identify what is happening with housing at the local level. Housing needs stem from businesses trying to attract employees to the area. Often it is difficult for people moving to the region to find housing.

The Housing Study will include a specific housing analysis for any community that participates in the cost of the study. The Housing Group has applied for and anticipates receiving a grant for \$50,000 for the overall study. In order to receive the grant, a 25% fund match is required. Mr. Johnson referred board members to a list of proportioned costs for each participating community. Information from the study will address how local communities can use WHEDA tax credits as incentives to attract developers. Participation in the study does not automatically mean a housing development for that community.

David Popelka noted that the median income in Bayfield County for a family of 3 is \$40,000. Any resulting development from the study would not be for Section 8 housing or the lowest level of income. Potential development would focus on affordable housing for work force people with controlled rents. Close to half the population in Cable would qualify. The intent is not to build a large complex in any one town but to find a developer that would combine small developments across the county into one project to make it feasible to apply for available assistance that would help the whole county. All units would have the same amenities without regard to income. It is hard for businesses to find qualified workers when they cannot find places for them to live near their work. Many who live in this area drive 30 to 40 miles to work. Mr. Johnson added that many jobs do not pay a living wage, and both members of a household have to work. These families cannot pay market rate rent. Work force housing takes the low-income stigma out of housing units for work force families and seniors.

Mr. Johnson explained that the City of Bayfield will be the lead city and judiciary for the grant. Municipalities will have to decide by December 18, 2019 whether to participate. A letter must be submitted to the City of Bayfield to be included in the application that will be submitted to the State of Wisconsin.

Sara Balbin asked the reason for not using local contractors. Mr. Johnson explained that the tax credit incentive program has many requirements that local contractors cannot meet or do not want to take the time to fulfill. Attorneys and consultants are needed to complete the paperwork just to submit applications to the state and federal government for tax credits. That does not mean local contractors cannot apply, but it is a complex system that is very competitive, and there are local contractors who do not want to be involved in the paperwork.

Mr. Johnson offered to come to a Board meeting of any of the four towns to present further information.

### **Cable Union Airport Presentation**

Airport Commissioner Dick Fredericks referred those attending to the airport narrative in the meeting packet. The Airport Commission consists of 6 commissioners—two from each of the towns of Cable, Drummond and Namakagon.

There have been improvements in the last few years with four new beautiful hangars and another that will be built in the spring. The airport now has 10 based planes, which makes it eligible for FAA funding. Over the last couple of years Cable Union Airport has joined other airports in hosting Tuesday Burger Nights for pilots who fly in. This has been very successful. As part of Fall Fest, the airport offered a pancake breakfast fly-in with 29 planes coming in. The Young Eagles is a national program. Representatives have been at the Cable Union Airport this year to offer free rides to children.

Recently, a petition for grant money for improvements was sent to the BOA which will be sent to the FAA. It is a slow process to receive the federal dollars available. Equipment needed includes snowplowing and lawn mowing. Airport Manager Mike Nichols will do the work to save on labor costs.

Last summer commissioners met with representatives from the National Park Service (NPS), BOA and FAA. The runway has been shortened due to the obstructions of trees that need to be trimmed.

In the last year the airport was able to sell a parcel of land to the Cable Rod and Gun Club. Karl Kastrosky stated that the airport narrative and an overlay map for the airport will be included in the Comp Plan.

## Great Divide Update

Rob Puls, ALS Coordinator, stated that Great Divide was the first ambulance service in the state to have a paramedical license. Yet 7 ambulances have been purchased at \$150,000 each. These ambulances carry ventilators, IVs, cardiac monitors, a pharmacy of medications—all has been provided without a budget increase. Equipment and services have been provided at no budget increase request to the four towns.

Great Divide has now outgrown its facility in Cable. There are not enough sleeping quarters with only 3 bedrooms and one recliner for 4 on duty. The Runamuk building is for sale. Great Divide hired an architect firm from Ashland to do a feasibility study of the building and costs to see if the building would meet Great Divide requirements. If this building does not work out, there are plans to build elsewhere or renovate the current building.

Great Divide did not want to make an offer on the building without the backing of the four towns. The cost of the building would be extra to the towns, perhaps \$90,000 to \$100,000. The asking price is \$369,000. Renovations costs would be financed by the ambulance service. The four towns own the current house which is marketable real estate. Great Divide is currently paying Cable \$3,000 for the use of two garage spaces. The building would hold five ambulances, and the lot is blacktopped. The property is zoned commercial. The price is not out of line.

Laura Bjork stated that the new location in the middle of town would be a huge benefit to Great Divide. In order to build, there would have to be investment in the property and sewer systems as well as a new building. Great Divide provides a high level of care in this small community which is rare, and needs keep growing. A \$400,000 mortgage over 30 years would cost the towns approximately \$5,000 per year.

Rob Puls stated that Great Divide has been singled out by St. Mary's Essentia to receive an award for the highest number of positive cardiac outcomes than any other group of paramedics in the region. With area growth, Great Divide is having a big issue finding workers and trying to remain competitive. Health insurance is available for employees working 1200 hours a year. Employees are also approved by the state pension board for retirement benefits.

Robert Rasmussen asked how many communities are being served by Great Divide. Mr. Puls answered that they have added contracts for six communities in Ashland County.

Dick Fredericks commended Rob Puls for the fantastic job he is doing with Great Divide Ambulance. The community is lucky to have him. He personally testified that his own life has been saved many times.

## **Cable Area Chamber of Commerce Update**

Chad Young, Cable Area Chamber of Commerce Board President, was present to update the group. Staff turnover and juggling payment of bills have created a huge issue. The Board of Directors took over finances to pay immediate bills. A reserve is needed for the Chamber to function, and the Board shifted its focus from salaries to greater promotion. Office hours and promotions are being maintained with volunteers. Currently, the Chamber has one employee. The Board is taking on the responsibilities of the Director and paying the bills and managed this last Fall Fest without full-time staff.

The Chamber office is located in Cable. It needs a new roof and deck. The estimated cost for these improvements is \$35,000. It is hoped the work will be done in 2020.

The Chamber sent a notice to towns requesting that room tax be submitted monthly, but this is difficult for towns to do. At this time the Chamber has a positive cash balance and its line of credit is paid. The room tax expected in November for the third quarter will help build reserves. Many businesses are not members, but all benefit from Chamber activities. The Chamber is actively working to recruit new members.

Heather Ludzack has agreed to be interim Director and has been instrumental in putting the Chamber on a solid footing. She will continue until April or May, 2020. The Chamber is highly recognized in the State of Wisconsin. Board members are volunteers and have made a huge effort this year to solve the financial problems. The Annual Meeting is scheduled for December 17, 2019, at Lakewoods.

Bob Rasmussen asked the number of members. Mr. Young answered, 110 in the four towns.

A suggestion was made to look into sharing a Director with Iron River. Mr. Young responded that Iron River has similar financial challenges and a smaller budget. Both Boards are opposed to the idea because neither community wants to be neglected and because of the travel time. The Board has decided to use contract labor for accounting and media services to eliminate those ongoing labor expenses.

## **Short-Term Rentals and Room Tax –**

Karl Kastrosky reported that short-term rental is big business in Bayfield County. Each town has different system. Cable has adopted a process that includes a municipal inspection. When the application reaches the Town Board, it is easy to approve. He suggested using one form for all four towns to make the process easier.

Chairman Rondeau noted that many short-term rentals are coming into compliance with room tax payments. It is the room tax that funds the Chamber. The County does not enforce room tax. It is the responsibility of the towns.

## **Law Enforcement**

The Enforcement Officer serves three of the four towns, but is not law enforcement certified which means he can only enforce municipal ordinances, not criminal ordinances.

Dick Fredericks stated that Drummond has abolished the position of Constable. Drummond uses the Bayfield County Sheriff and has empowered the Town Board Chair to enforce municipal ordinances. He recommended the towns not get involved and look into liability issues. At this time the officer is responding to calls even when his assistance is not specifically requested. The town that pays for this mileage is responsible for the liability. He is also using emergency lights on his vehicle which is also presenting a liability issue. It would be beneficial if he would get EMR training so he could do basic interventions. Then the lights would be legal with a permission letter from the Fire Chief which should always be carried in the glove box. Liability issues for the towns was discussed and the need for the officer to understand the scope of what he is expected to do.

Chairman Rondeau agreed to talk to Bayfield County Sheriff Paul Susienka about this issue.

Sara Balbin asked the length of time it takes to get an EMR license. Jack Radecki responded that it is at least 60 hours of training with 20 hours of continuing education each year.

## **Employee Health Insurance**

It would be a major undertaking to look into a health insurance plan used by all four towns to get better rates. Drummond uses a plan through Health Partners that is no longer available. If they drop out, the plan will no longer be available.

Laura Bjork noted that rather than the employer paying for health insurance, it is cheaper for an individual to go to the government marketplace and choose their preferred insurance. It is cheaper then for the employer to reimburse the employee through an HRA account than to purchase the insurance directly. If the funds in an HRA are not used, those funds stay with the town.

Brett Rondeau stated that health insurance plans are a never-ending battle and eating away everyone's budget. The county is now offering a 90/10 split in cost and is considering 80/20. This year the cost is \$300,000, which is 22% of the County budget.

**Next Meeting:** The next 4-Towns meeting will be in Namakagon in October 2020.

**Adjournment:** Chairman Rondeau declared the meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

**Attending (Sign-in Sheet Attached)**

**Town of Cable**

Dave Gebhard

Karl Kastroski

Suzanne Rooney

Kathleen Zuelsdorff

Deanne Allen

Jack Radecki

Tony Merrill

Brett Rondeau

Chad Young Cable Area Chamber of Commerce

David Popelka Cable Housing Representative

**Town of Drummond**

Chris Elkins

Gary Crandall

Richard Fredericks

Sara Balbin

Royden Bloom

**Town of Grand View**

Jack Iverson

Dane Bonk

Mike Oravis

**Town of Namakagon**

Cookie Skultety

George Roth

Jacki McGregor

Robert Rasmussen

**Guest:** Sheldon Johnson, Regional Planning Commission