

**TOWNSHIP OF NORTH HUNTINGDON, BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION MEETING, THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2026, 7:00 P.M.
11279 Center Highway, North Huntingdon, PA 15642
Presiding Officer – Zachary Haigis, President, Board of Commissioners**

CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Haigis called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.

ROLL CALL

Commissioner Hempel - Present
Commissioner Atwood – Present
Commissioner Gray - Present
Commissioner Zona - Present
Commissioner McGhee - Present
Commissioner McHugh - Present
Commissioner Haigis - Present

Also Present:
Manager Harry Faulk
Assistant Manager Ryan Fonzi
Solicitor Chelsea Dice
Director John Hochlinski

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF EXECUTIVE SESSION

CITIZENS INPUT

Bill Sombo – 13380 St. Clair Drive – states he is currently a member and Assistant Chief of the Hartford Heights VFD, a lifetime member of Circleville VFD and former Assistant Chief of twenty-two years. He has served North Huntingdon Township for over fifty-two years between police, fire and EMS. He states he noticed some false information written into the agenda for tonight's meeting as Township Manager Harry Faulk has informed the Board of Commissioners of false information. Mr. Faulk put into writing “in October 2025, Larimer VFD and Hartford Heights VFD merged and requested the tax revenue for both stations continue for ten years, however the current ordinance requires the tax funds be distributed equally among all departments”. He states this information is not true and the departments have not merged, in fact, a letter was composed at the direction of their attorney that if Hartford Heights and Larimer VFD's do merge, then the fire tax dividends need to be clarified with the Township. This letter presented to the Board asking if the dividends received by each company could continue to be received by each for a period of ten years was simply a request. Mr. Sombo states the letter was signed by both Presidents and Fire Chiefs and this letter did not have any notification to these two fire departments being merged. If there would be a merger, a few things would have to happen: each department would have to have the members vote with a majority to merge. This has never happened, in fact, in November 2025, Chief Sean Oskin asked all members attending who wanted to merge and the response was no merge. Secondly, the Board of Commissioners who charter each fire department would need to vote to approve the merger and as far as he knows, there has never been an abolishment of the charter of Hartford Heights or Larimer and /or the Board's

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approval of a new fire department being formed. Additionally, the situation with Strawpump VFD referencing their ISO rating has nothing to do with the mergers or dividends of the fire tax. The Boards move to hold fifty percent of Strawpump's fire tax until they raise their ISO rating is a separate issue. He states Manager Faulk states these changes underscore the need for a comprehensive review of the fire service delivery, resource allocation and long-term sustainability a feasibility study will access current coverage, response times and service gaps. Evaluate financial impacts, funding models, recommend strategies for improving ISO ratings and reducing insurance costs and finally provide guidance on the merger, consolidations and/or equitable tax distributions. A few years ago, a similar study was performed and yielded nothing and was a waste of time and money. He feels there is no need for this effort or the cost to the tax payers. Mr. Sombo questions Manager Harry Faulk's underlying motives to mislead the Board with false information and states there is rumor that Manager Faulk's aspiration is being the Township Public Safety Director, in charge of the police, fire and EMS. He further adds his opinion as well as information he has been told as he was police chief of Elizabeth Borough for several years and has several contacts in that area which leads him to addressing this issue. There have been several incidents in the Township where Mr. Faulk has shown up on fire scenes wearing a fire helmet and who is a member of Blaine Hill Fire Department in Elizabeth and not a member of any fire service in the Township. He also states there is information that Mr. Faulk has an 800-megahertz radio with Township police, fire and EMS frequencies. If in fact this is true, he is not authorized nor has an identifier through Westmoreland County 911 to use such radio. Mr. Sombo states Mr. Faulk needs to stay in his lane, know what his position is and what hat he needs to wear.

William Hardy – 11771 Crockett Street – clarifies that there is no active merger between Hartford Heights and Larimer and was only meant to be of what is being looked at. They are still two different VFD's. He states the intent of the letter was to notify that is potentially looking to do and look for the continuation of the money.

David Henderson – 9856 Polk Street – states the reason he is here is because of a situation dealing with a resident with a piece of road in front of his house that is considered a paper road that the Township no longer maintains and falls on the residents. Recently there was a water main break and main lines can be run through personal property and right of way.

Nick Carrozza – NHT resident – states today marks a new year and for some a newly sworn oath to uphold the United States Constitution. He needs to correct the record regarding comments made by Mr. Gray at the prior meeting. Mr. Gray characterizes the assistance offered to him as meaningful help. While it is true that a conversation occurred, the only advice provided was to seek legal counsel. He states his position remains that there must exist a lawful and reasonable path for resolving Constitutional grievances between a citizen and their local government before forcing into federal litigation. He also rejects the assertion that his claims are unfounded or baseless based on the idea that attorneys would otherwise be lining up and that assertion misunderstands the realities of the modern judicial system. He addresses the recently installed buzzer system and the changes in the access protocol at the police department. There was signage placed on the exterior door of the building stating No Audio or Video Recording past this point. However, that signage did not revoke the implied license granted to the public upon entry. The public lobby contained informational pamphlets, a drug take-back box and a public service window. A second interior door, marked with identical signage, secured by keypad clearly

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separated the public lobby from the operational side of the police department. He states what occurred instead was the deliberate creation of a buffer space. At the time of his arrest, on July 27th and at the time of the unlawful seizure of Mr. Jackson through a demand for identification, the lobby was operating as a public space. Any attempt to retroactively redefine the public space to justify prior enforcement actions raises serious First and Fourth Amendment concerns and demanding identification from an individual lawfully present in a public space violates established Fourth Amendment standards. What is most concerning, is the decision to alter public access through the installation of a buzzer and locking mechanism, does not appear to have been presented to this Board, discussed publicly or adopted through any transparent process. If the police department believed the change in access was necessary, the request should have come before the Board and the public.

RESPONSE TO CITIZENS INPUT

Merger of Larimer & Hartford Heights VFDs - Commissioner Atwood states on the received letter references the first sentence states that Larimer VFD and Hartford Heights VFD are moving forward on merging into one and that was the language presented to the Board. Manager Faulk clarifies some accusations and states he does not belong to Blaine Hill VFD and was a member in the past but has not been for five to eight years. The last time he responded to a fire call was probably Spring 2025 for a working structure fire and while he was there the pump operator for Circleville VFD was manning the lines, trying to pump the pump to get water to the fire engine. Mr. Faulk asked him if he needed some help hitting the hydrant so he hit the hydrant to supply water to the engine. Mr. Faulk states he has no aspirations of becoming a Public Safety Director and would have done so ten years before getting into this line of work. He states he is not a fire chaser, but does have a responsibility to have a pulse of things going on in the Township, so whenever there is a working structure fire, if available, he may go or not. He adds that he does not have a radio, a portable radio or a scanner.

David Henderson / Polk Street paper alley – Assistant Manager Fonzi needs clarification on the location. Mr. Henderson states it was called Shafton Avenue many years ago and now considered part of Polk Street Extension.

Nick Carrozza / Buzzer System – there were no Board comments.

Work Sessions Discussion Topics

- 1) Larimer VFD and Hartford Heights VFD Merger Notice*

Manager Faulk states he has a letter dated from October 30th from Chief Hardy talking about the merger moving forward and their request for both stations to receive the allotment for ten years. Looking at the ordinance, states the revenues available for specific purposes of maintaining the fire protection district, so if there are any changes of how the funds are distributed, the ordinance would have to be amended. Commissioner Zona feels this is a moot point and nothing needs addressed tonight because the merger is still in discussions.

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2) Fire Department Feasibility Study*

Manager Faulk states with the talk of the merger between Hartford Heights and Larimer VFDs and the current situation with the ISO rating at Strawpump, we are a stakeholder to the fire departments because we provide tax money for them. He states there is a free service through the governor's office for a feasibility study and his recommendation is to look for the free service to come in and do a feasibility study to give a recommendation for the fire departments and Board for when they are making these types of changes based on data from a third party. Commissioner Atwood clarifies it is a free service. Yes. Manager Faulk states it is a service through the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and would have to submit an application and create a steering committee. Commissioner Haigis states he was the one who asked Manager Faulk to put this on the agenda and envisioned it differently. He wanted the stakeholders to be the volunteer firefighters, Township staff and Board to give the Board recommendations working together. He states he is not against having someone come from the outside and years ago there was a study, but he feels the Township residents and volunteers know the Township best. Commissioner Zona agrees and the volunteers should be the stakeholders and to put a committee together to prioritize the needs of the departments. He feels there are some important issues that need to be addressed right away. Commissioner Hempel states he too agrees and knows a lot the volunteer firefighters who are the stakeholders and should represent the committee. Commissioner McGhee asks if this is something that will help keep a better pulse on ISO ratings. Commissioner Haigis feels with this committee will set a standard that each fire department has to meet every year and if they don't will be repercussions. He states looking at some of the bigger items and if departments want to merge, would have to look at the fire district as a whole and how it is drawn. Commissioner Zona states the fire districts have not been changed in thirty years or longer especially with all the new housing plans and should be one of the priorities. Commissioner Atwood asks if there is already a meeting with the chiefs on a regular basis. Commissioner Gray states he has always been of the opinion that any change needs to come from the firemen themselves and knows they meet once a month. He always felt any impetuous to make any change if fire service should come from them and is opposed to appointing a committee at this point unless they come to us to look into it. Bill Hinish, President of Circleville VFD, speaks on behalf of himself and his fire department. He states things change over the years, he has been involved since 1982, and from his standpoint would highly recommend putting a committee together with three Commissioners, Manager Faulk or Ryan Fonzi, etc. to get a full picture and scope. He also recommends that each department have two members on the committee. He states it has been over thirty years since a redistricting has been done within the fire service and the community has grown and changed with a very large bedroom community. He recommends to move forward with the committee with two representatives from each fire department and that way if there are any disagreements would be a majority vote across the board. Commissioner Haigis asks the other departments present if they are ok with moving forward with the committee. Manager Faulk states he will work on drafting an agreement. Commissioner McGhee states we would want to have a majority vote from the fire departments to move forward. Bill Hinish states there is only one department who is not present, so the majority vote is sitting right here. Commissioner Zona states this is not being approved tonight, just coming up with a draft for discussion, and agrees with Commissioner Gray that the firemen should be making this decision, not someone from outside.

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3) Norwin Chamber of Commerce Membership*

Manager Faulk states the Township used to belong to the Norwin Chamber up until COVID and the fee to join is \$690.00 annually. He asks if the Board is interested in joining the Norwin Chamber. Commissioner Gray and Hempel state they are interested in joining. Commissioner Gray feels it was a mistake when they got out and was not on the Board at that time. Manager Faulk states they will rejoin. Commissioner Hempel states he would like to see they have a voice in the Norwin Chamber to have the Community Picnic held at the Public Works Facility every other year.

4) RFP for Auditing Services*

Manager Faulk states the Township currently engages Turnley Robinson Associates for the annual audit. The Municipal Annual Audit and Financial Report is due to the DCED by April 1st following the fiscal year end. He states North Huntingdon Township has missed that deadline for the past three years and the prior year audit has been generally presented to management in the last quarter of the year, so due to repeated missed deadlines and possible grant funding being at risk, is asking for the Board to put out an RFP for auditing services. He states there will be an action item for advertisement next week. Commissioner McGhee asks if there is enough time to have somebody for the 2025 audit. Manager Faulk states typically these should be done in the Fall of the previous year and luckily have not had any penalties or fines. Commissioner McGhee asks should there be anything in here for penalties for missing the deadline.

5) RFP for Professional Legal Services*

Manager Faulk states the Township currently engages with Bruce Dice & Associates who is appointed by the Board of Commissioners. We currently pay a retainer of \$6250.00 per month plus any supplemental fees and if the Board is interested in putting an RFP out for legal services, will be on the agenda for next week. Commissioner Atwood states he does not have any complaints about Bruce Dice & Associates, but feels this is a prudent move to have these RFPs making sure we have the best interest of the Township.

6) Solar Ordinances Draft*

Assistant Manager Fonzi states the last time we spoke, Commissioner McHugh had some items he wanted entered into the draft, so the changes are all in yellow and he did his best to make sure it didn't conflict with what we already had. He states he did not want to put hard numbers in the draft, just the flexibility that could be adjusted over time with inflation or market changes. He also did research on the rapid disconnect and is also put in the draft. Commissioner Gray asks if we want to include something in the utility scale to include regulations on the best systems and battery energy systems. Mr. Fonzi states that would make more sense to include rather than the wind energy. Commissioner Gray states he would be in favor of that. Commissioner Haigis suggests adding the battery backup to the solar ordinance.

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7) Tax Office Lease*

Manager Faulk states a copy of the draft office lease agreement is provided to occupy space in the Townhouse at \$3.65 per square foot, with 276 square feet in the new office for an annual revenue of \$1,007.40.

8) Purchase of a Backhoe for Public Works*

Director Hochlinski states he explored numerous avenues for replacing the 2011 John Deere backhoe which had seven thousand hours which is an extreme amount of hours. He states they did some demos with different companies, Caterpillar and different John Deere machines and after several months, arrived that this is the best option. It will be a brand new 2026 John Deere 410 which is a bigger machine than we have now, capable of doing more things, lifting heavier things with a longer reach. He states we got a very fair price from CoStars with the trade in. Both operators dealt with their sales people and our mechanics and did a lot of homework to ensure this is the right machine for us. Commissioner Gray asks if we looked at other manufacturers. Director Hochlinski states they used the Caterpillar backhoe on Pine Hollow Road on the big project and was just ok. He states Caterpillars are far more expensive and complex to run.

PLANNING / ENGINEERING TOPICS:

There were no items for discussion

OLD BUSINESS

FURTHER BOARD COMMENTS

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: Commissioner Atwood

Motion to adjourn.

Second: Commissioner Zona

Motion carried 7 – 0 – 0 (7:43PM)

Executive Session to follow to talk about legal matters.

- Special Meeting minutes of January 15, 2026, were approved by the Board of Commissioners on February 18, 2026.

Zachary Haigis, President

Harry R. Faulk, Township Secretary
jjh/hf

