

March 16, 2026

**Ohio Township and Town of Chandler
Public Meeting – Fire Territory Adoption**

A joint public meeting of Ohio Township and the Town of Chandler regarding the proposed South Warrick Township Fire Protection Territory was held on Monday, March 16, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. at the Chandler Town Hall, 401 E. Lincoln Ave., Chandler, IN 47610.

Roll call was taken for both bodies.

Town of Chandler: Cheryl Amos – present; Tom Burnett – present; Sarah Eller – present; Tonya Wester – present; Ron Whitledge – present.

Ohio Township: Ed Anderson, Board Member – present; Tom Fite, Board Member – present; Deborah Reid, Board Member – present; Chad Bennett, Trustee – present. All members present.

Pledge of Allegiance

Opening Remarks

Attorney Jeff Bellamy stated that this was the final public meeting, the fourth event in the fire territory process following three public hearings at which the fire department personnel report and fiscal and tax impact forecast were presented. He stated that the presentations would not be repeated and that this meeting was the opportunity for the two bodies to ask questions of counsel, Chief Foreman, the Baker Tilly CPAs Susan Cowen and Scott Finley (participating remotely), or the Trustee, and to make statements before considering motions. Mr. Bellamy explained that both bodies would need to approve the territory by a majority vote to proceed. If both bodies approve, the meeting would move to consideration of the equipment replacement fund. If one or both bodies do not approve, the process would conclude for the year.

Discussion

Councilmember Tom Burnett stated he reviewed all correspondence received and calculated the tax impact on his own property. He reported his property taxes would increase approximately \$181 per year, or \$15.10 per month. He stated he contacted his insurance company and was told that homeowners in areas served by a paid fire department may receive a 5% to 15% decrease in homeowners insurance premiums. He estimated that at the minimum 5% discount, his net cost would be approximately \$103.70 per year (\$8.65 per month), and that at a 15% discount, he would come out approximately \$50.90 ahead. He expressed support for the territory, stating that \$15.10 per month is a small price for improved emergency response.

Councilmember Sarah Eller stated she read all correspondence received, noting over 50 communications representing 35 individuals, with not a single one in favor of the territory. She stated that many residents felt the process was rushed, with a large volume of information presented in a short period. She suggested that the bodies consider proceeding more slowly and explore alternatives before committing to a budget of \$10 million to \$18 million. She suggested looking at whether economic development funds currently allocated to parks could be redirected to public safety after the elimination

of the 9th police officer position previously funded from public safety, whether EMS investment could address call volume more cost-effectively, and whether incentive-based compensation for volunteers on a per-run or tiered basis might help with retention. She referenced the riverboat fund balance and annual revenue as a potential funding source. She stated she was not opposed to providing resources but did not believe the territory was the only option available.

Ed Anderson, Ohio Township Board Member, stated that the territory proposal is not about eliminating volunteers but about supplementing them with career firefighters who can respond more quickly. He referenced the staffing ratio data presented at the public hearings, noting that Ohio Township's ratio of 0.13 career firefighters per 1,000 residents was significantly lower than comparable communities, and that even Boonville's fire territory, with 13,000 residents, has a ratio of 0.42. He stated that Ohio Township is one of the fastest-growing townships in Indiana, with a new three-story assisted living center planned on Warrick Trail, and that the community has a significant public safety issue that needs to be addressed.

Councilmember Eller responded that the staffing ratio comparison is based on career firefighters only and may be misleading, noting that Chandler has operated with an all-volunteer department for over 70 years.

Council President Tonya Wester made a statement regarding her personal experiences and observations. She described a 1999 incident in which her son had a seizure, stopped breathing, and no one responded to her 911 call. She referenced the seven missed emergency calls in the Town of Chandler, including one at the elementary school. She described the history of the department's resource limitations, including expired airbags from 1988 that were not replaced until one failed in 2016, a \$52,000 annual budget, lack of a gear washer, lack of shower facilities, lack of workers' compensation coverage for volunteers, and shared SCBA masks. She described monitoring the "I Am Responding" app and frequently seeing few or no volunteers responding to calls. She noted that a volunteer firefighter recently told her he now checks the address and call type before deciding whether to respond, which she attributed to burnout from growing demand with the same or fewer volunteers. She stated that the average cost of the territory is approximately 35 cents per day for citizens and expressed support for the territory.

Some members of the audience objected to the fire territory during this time, but the clerk was unable to get their names for the record as this meeting was not intended for public comment as the previous hearings were.

Councilmember Cheryl Amos stated she has served on the council longer than any current member and that fire territory discussions date back to her first full year on the council. She described a recent incident in which a medical emergency call was answered by a single firefighter and the individual did not survive. She also referenced a recent structure fire near Rolling Hills in which the Libbert Road station arrived first, one person was pulled from the building, and another jumped from a window. She stated she has been in Chandler for 63 years supported the Chandler Volunteer Fire Department. She expressed support for the territory.

Council President Wester noted that police department funds referenced by Councilmember Eller were not freed up but rather moved to part-time positions during the budget process. She also reported that she checked her own homeowners insurance (State Farm) and was told that while they do not use ISO ratings directly, premium reductions could be discussed, and that she found significantly cheaper insurance in Boonville, which has a fire territory. She stated that many properties she reviewed would see an increase of approximately \$30 per year at the top rate, with the highest she found being approximately \$300.

Councilmember Eller reiterated that she is not opposed to providing resources for the fire department, but stated she believes the bodies should explore all alternatives before proceeding and expressed a preference for taking more time.

Chief Scott Foreman made a statement asking both bodies to consider what the decision means for the people of the community. He referenced the recent structure fire on Shamrock Drive, in which firefighters entered a burning building under dangerous conditions and pulled a victim out. He stated that public safety cannot be measured purely in dollars and asked for support in the formation of the territory.

Trustee Chad Bennett made a statement regarding the history of fire funding discussions, noting that five members of the Warrick County Council told him the only option for addressing fire department funding was to create a fire territory or district. He stated that the LIT study committee sought 15% funding for fire departments but the county council chose 10% for two years, then reduced it to 5% before raising it to 6%, which he described as nowhere near the amount needed. He referenced Senate Bill One as further limiting local government funding tools, leaving fire territories or districts as the remaining option. He asked what the acceptable level of risk is and who will be held accountable when that risk is surpassed.

Tom Fitch
Ed Anderson described a recent ride-along Saturday at the Ohio Township Libbert Road station during which the county experienced nine brush fires and numerous accident and medical runs. He described a brush fire that threatened a home, two propane tanks, and eight hay bales, requiring more than 12 personnel and 10 pieces of apparatus over several hours to extinguish. He stated that Chief Foreman came in on his day off to retrieve the brush truck from the Paradise station, and that without his presence the fire could not have been combated. Mr. Anderson referenced the recent Shamrock Drive house fire, stating that the Libbert Road station responded in nearly six minutes, but that if the Paradise station had been staffed, a firefighter estimated they could have been on scene in 45 seconds at 25 miles per hour. He stated the resident pulled from the home is now deceased. He described the current model as unsustainable and stated that the fundamental issue is reliability of critical services. He expressed support for the territory.

Votes

Ohio Township – Fire Protection Territory

A motion was made to approve the South Warrick Township Fire Protection Territory agreement. Motion passed unanimously, 3–0.

Town of Chandler – Motion to Table

Councilmember Eller made a motion to table the decision until further notice to allow time to explore alternatives. The motion received no second.

Town of Chandler – Ordinance 2026-04 (Establishment of Territory)

A motion was made by Cheryl Amos and seconded by Tom Burnett to adopt Town of Chandler Ordinance 2026-04, an ordinance to establish the South Warrick Township Fire Protection Territory. Roll call vote: Cheryl Amos – yes; Tom Burnett – yes; Sarah Eller – no; Tonya Wester – yes; Ron Whitledge – yes. Motion passed, 4–1.

Equipment Replacement Fund

Attorney Bellamy stated that with both bodies having approved the territory, the meeting would proceed to consideration of the equipment replacement fund at a fixed maximum rate of \$0.0333. He

noted that the fund was presented at all three public hearings and that public comment was limited to the equipment replacement fund only. No public comment was offered.

Town of Chandler – Ordinance 2026-05 (Equipment Replacement Fund)

A motion was made by Cheryl Amos and seconded by Ron Whitledge to adopt Town of Chandler Ordinance 2026-05, an ordinance establishing the South Warrick Township Fire Protection Territory equipment replacement fund. Roll call vote: Cheryl Amos – yes; Tom Burnett – yes; Sarah Eller – abstain; Tonya Wester – yes; Ron Whitledge – yes. Motion passed, 4–0 with one abstention.

Ohio Township – Equipment Replacement Fund

A motion was made to approve the equipment replacement fund. Motion passed unanimously, 3–0.

Interlocal Agreement

Attorney Joshua Claybourn presented the South Warrick Fire Protection Territory interlocal agreement for approval. He noted that discussion and feedback had been incorporated into the current draft. He identified one outstanding issue: the fire territory advisory board membership had been expanded from three to five members. Under the proposed structure, one seat would be held by the Ohio Township Trustee, one by a member of the Ohio Township Board selected from their body, two by members selected by the Chandler Town Council, and one by a member effectively selected by the board, with disagreements referred to the county commissioners. Mr. Claybourn noted a Scrivener’s error in the draft where one reference still stated three board members instead of five and recommended that the motion direct the territory attorney to correct that error.

Town of Chandler – Interlocal Agreement

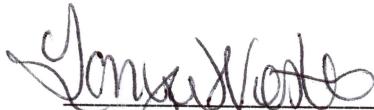
A motion was made by Cheryl Amos and seconded by Tom Burnett to accept the South Warrick Fire Protection Territory interlocal agreement, with the understanding that references to three board members would be corrected to five by the territory attorney. Roll call vote: Cheryl Amos – yes; Tom Burnett – yes; Sarah Eller – no; Tonya Wester – yes; Ron Whitledge – yes. Motion passed, 4–1.

Ohio Township – Interlocal Agreement

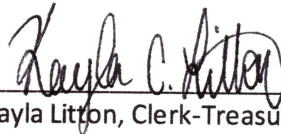
A motion was made to accept the interlocal agreement with the same Scrivener’s correction regarding board membership. Motion passed unanimously, 3–0.

Closing

Attorney Bellamy stated there was no further public business and that the signed ordinances and resolutions would be collected for submission to the Department of Local Government Finance. Both bodies adjourned.



Tonya Wester, Council President



Kayla Litter, Clerk-Treasurer