# Your Fire Department

We are proud to announce that we have four new Paramedics as members of the Fire Department. Lt. Adam Varner, Alex Reed, Collin Peterson, and P.J. Graley have successfully completed their Paramedic training.

Becoming a Paramedic requires tremendous commitment. The process includes extensive classroom instruction, countless hours of studying, clinical rotations in the emergency room and other areas of the hospital, ride-along time with other fire departments, skills testing, numerous written exams, and a final examination. These dedicated members have spent nearly an entire year completing their training.

Thank you to everyone who attended our Memorial Day Parade and Pancake Breakfast. Please mark your calendars for our annual Steak and Clam Bakes on Sept. 19 and Oct. 17.

We are also very excited about the continued construction of our new fire station on Old State Road, just north of GAR Highway. Construction is underway, and we currently anticipate the station being completed by June 2027.

A live camera has been installed at the construction site so the community can follow our progress. The link to our YouTube channel and construction camera will be available on our website, HambdenFire.org.

# From the Zoning Office

In the coming weeks the zoning office will begin issuing violation notices for junk vehicles. To be considered "junk", a vehicle must be: three years old or older, apparently inoperable, and damaged in some way. Such vehicles will either need to be moved to a completely enclosed building or removed from the property entirely. This applies to any and all vehicles regardless of registration status. Anyone found to be in violation will have 30 days to handle the matter. Please feel free to contact the zoning office with any questions.

*- Richard Acquaviva,*
*Hambden Township Zoning Inspector*

## *Fiscal Officer*

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regular audits, generally at least once every two fiscal years. These audits provide an independent review of financial records, reports, internal controls, and compliance with applicable laws and regulations. The purpose is to help ensure that taxpayer money is properly accounted for and that public officials are following established financial procedures. Hambden Township was last audited in 2025. It was a clean audit with no findings.

Together, the Ohio Checkbook and regular audits provide important safeguards for taxpayers. By making financial information available online and subjecting Township finances to independent review, these measures promote transparency, accountability, and peace of mind that public funds are being carefully overseen.

*-Mike Romans, Fiscal Officer*

## *Fire Chief*

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Richard Vandevander has since been arraigned in Geauga County Common Pleas Court following an indictment charging him with aggravated theft, telecommunications fraud, money laundering, falsification, and forgery. The charges allege that more than $1.5 million was stolen over approximately three years. Approximately $800,000 of the remaining funds were associated with the State of Ohio grant for the construction of the new fire station.

How could this happen? This is a question I have asked myself many times, and I know many members of our community are asking the same thing. We believed safeguards were in place. Checks required two signatures, financial statements were presented to the Fire Department Trustees each month, and an accounting firm reviewed our finances annually and prepared our tax filings. In hindsight, those safeguards were not enough. Quite simply, we placed too much trust in one individual. Based on what has been uncovered during the investigation, financial records, signatures, and other documentation appear to have been falsified or forged.

**What Are We Doing to Prevent This from Happening Again?**

We have already made significant changes to the way the Department's finances are managed. We now have both a Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer, and multi-authorized members have access to monitor our bank accounts. Alerts have been established on the accounts, all checks continue to require two authorized signatures, and transfers between accounts require approval from two authorized individuals.

We are also in the process of hiring a recommended accounting firm that will provide stronger financial oversight, including annual audits and accurate tax preparation. We are evaluating the use of an outside payroll company. Bills must be reviewed and approved by two authorized members, and monthly bank statements will be independently reviewed and signed by at least two authorized individuals. We will continue evaluating additional safeguards and implementing stronger checks and balances wherever necessary.

The Department maintains insurance coverage for dishonest employee conduct, and we are pursuing every available avenue to recover funds. Most importantly, construction of the new fire station will not be affected and is continuing schedule. Unfortunately, the loss of operating funds has required us to make temporary changes. We have reduced daily staffing from three to two firefighters for a period of time. The Chief and Department Officers have also voluntarily suspended their monthly stipends for the foreseeable future. All our members are committed to providing the best possible service even if it means working for free. All our neighboring Fire Departments know our situation and have offered to assist whenever needed.

In closing, I sincerely apologize for the actions of this criminal and for not discovering it sooner.

*-Scott A Hildenbrand*