

Selectboard Special Joint Meeting with East Montpelier Minutes

Thursday, December 5, 2019 at 7pm at the East Montpelier/Calais Fire Station

Present: Denise Wheeler (Chair), Clif Emmons (Member), Katie Lane-Karnas (Recording Secretary), Toby Talbot, Seth Gardner, Bruce Johnson, Gene Troia, Carl Etnier, Casey Northrup, Judy Woodbeck, Ty Rolland, Allen Petrilla

Absent: John Brabant (Vice Chair), Rose Pelchuck (Member), Sharon Winn Fannon (Member)

1. Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the meeting to order at 7:08 pm.
2. Public Comment: None.
3. Review, Additions/Changes to Agenda: None.
4. Presentation of Proposed FY21 Ambulance & Emergency Services Budget by the East Montpelier/Calais Fire Department (EMFD): The group reviewed the profit and loss budget versus actual for fire as of October 31. Fire expenses are at 32.8%, on track for the first third of the fiscal year. The group inquired about line item details including maintenance costs and the timing of yearly expenditures such as pellets.

An “Ambulance profit and loss budget versus actual” document was reviewed; expenses are at 42.0%, a bit higher than expected largely due to repairs on the Rescue 3 vehicle. The group acknowledged the unpredictable nature of timing of insurance payments coming in on the revenue side.

In reviewing the FY20 and FY21 fire budgets, increases discussed included: dispatch is estimated to increase 4-5%; insurance will increase; an additional \$3400 for required hose testing (this item is included every other year). In reviewing the FY20 and FY21 ambulance budgets, increases discussed were: the Ambulance Tax (3.3% of revenue which is invoiced by the State annually) which had not previously been included in budget planning, but rather taken off the top of ambulance revenue; salary; and insurance related to workers comp. Bruce Johnson requested the Department remove the Ambulance Tax from the budget, and instead take it right off the top of revenue, since it is only a guess and based on a moving number.

5. Medicare Data Collection: Ty Rolland noted that the Department was randomly selected to participate in the federal Central Medicare System’s program of data collection. The CMS randomly selects districts to collect a significant amount of staff and volunteer data, for every call the Department receives; unfortunately, this is a considerable amount of staff effort and time without reimbursement. The Department considered it likely that the ultimate end goal of

the mandatory data collection may be to inform Medicare's payout formulas (Medicaid uses Medicare's research data for informing that system's payments).

6. Funding Staff Salary: Toby Talbot walked the group through a bar graph illustrating paid and volunteer shifts at the Department and explained a lot of volunteer coverage (approximately 22%) is mostly covered by 3-4 people. The Ambulance Salary line item as of October 31 is at \$90,571.50, higher than the budget can sustain for the remainder of the fiscal year (at this rate, it would be \$20-30,000 above budget at minimum). The options are to increase the volunteer level to lower the salary costs, or to increase the budget line item for salary.

The group clarified details about staffing and compensation. Twenty-three percent of the time a person with paramedic certification is covering staffing, and several times having that paramedic on staff has made the difference for life saving (as opposed to having to call out for a paramedic to intercept). The paramedic on board does not bill extra if they are not needed to perform a paramedic intervention; going out without a paramedic and calling for one to intercept incurs a \$200 charge. Paramedic are paid \$2 an hour more, but also drive up revenue. The value to the community is high in having a paramedic-level responder available. Toby Talbot clarified that six paramedics want to work here; and their work at the Department depends on their availability and the needs of each shift.

Toby Talbot pointed out that all line items are pretty much level funded, except for staff. The group asked what the cost would be to get the budget to a fully funded Ambulance staff (two shifts) including all attendant costs. Full time employees would cost significantly more than per diems. The groups recalled that last fiscal year's planning estimated the real cost at \$500,000. The goal would be to be able to hire per diems, 24/7; where staff have full time jobs outside of the Department; this was estimated closer to \$350,000-450,000. Finding full time staff would be more challenging than finding per diems. Increasingly, employers have tightened up allowances for employees to leave for emergency services work, and that impacts the Department's ability to hire staff. Some volunteers are certified firefighters as well, which permits getting an engine out faster, all of which ultimately provides better community medical care.

The Boards asked what the expense would be for two 24/7 year-round per diem staff. \$409,968 was calculated for this level of service, not including paramedic level of staffing. By comparison, the current budgeted amount for salary is \$242,000. The Boards stated that they will need to discuss planning for a target number, and their preference to stop having the same discussion every year and instead plan to move toward such a target.

7. Bank Fraud Incident: EMFD notified the boards that in the purchase of Rescue 3, \$109,000, was stolen. An email from the ambulance vendor was hacked and in the money wiring process, the funds were transported to a bank in Michigan; the actions taken by the EMFD were timely and the banks put a hold on the money in the Michigan account. Approx. \$10,000 was stolen and the vendor is taking responsibility for the stolen amount.
8. Power Cots: The group discussed purchase of two used power cots for both ambulances at \$20,000 in the capital plan for FY20 (the Department clarified that this is different than a more

expensive \$60,000 power system that eliminates even more lifting and potential back injury for staff).

9. Calls and Responses Increase in 2019: The group reviewed a calendar year comparison of 2019 and 2018 calls; there were a grand total of 673 calls in 2018, and already 686 calls in 2019 so far. The comparison chart for ambulance transports is also higher for this year, with 2018 transport grand total at 497, versus 534 already for 2019.

10. Donations: Ty Rolland reported that the Department donated a defibrillator to the Twin Valley Senior Center, and several of their staff and members became certified in CPR.

Judy Woodbeck reported that the total donations for holiday gift boxes is around \$3300. There was enough to cover Thanksgiving; last year, the Thanksgiving and Christmas donation cost was approximately \$10,000. School food contributions are brought to the Department; the school nurses gather names of families who need donations. The Department noted their commitment to making sure this holiday donation happens, including shopping, sorting, wrapping, and delivering to families in need.

11. Consideration of Staff Bonuses: This item was tabled until a subsequent meeting because there was not a quorum of the Board.

12. Other Business/Old Business/New Business: None.

13. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm.

Date: 12/7/2019 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas, Recording Secretary
Approved by the Selectboard at the _____ meeting

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