

Oct. 27, 2021

Special meeting Cape Vincent Town Board and Cape Vincent Ambulance Board

Present: Supervisor Edward Bender, Councilman Aubertine, Councilman Mason, Councilman Wiley, Councilman Wood, Dave McIntyre Ambulance Board President, Jeff Call and approximately 32 visitors.

Supervisor Bender opened the meeting at 7pm with the pledge of allegiance.

Councilman Mason welcomed everyone and said that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the ambulance budget.

Councilman Wood said that the meeting is being held for questions and answers.

Councilman Mason said that the ambulance budget is part of the town's budget but will become its own line and appear so on the tax bill.

Councilman Wiley said that the board heard from a lot of residents who said that the town needs an ambulance.

Councilman Mason also explained that the town budget now includes \$150,000.00 for the ambulance. He said that the town has used monies from the fund balance to help keep the tax rate down.

Dave McIntyre explained that the ambulance pays employees, has volunteer drivers and first responders. He said that they are leasing employees from Guilfoyle and at this time all administration is done voluntarily.

Dave said that for the last 2 years, Multi-Med handles all the billing.

Dave said that the ambulance has a \$460,000.00 operating budget. He said that they do not have any money set aside to replace the current ambulance.

Dave discussed hard billing and explained that it can be hard to recoup those fees. He also reviewed the calls, stating that in 2019 they had 184 calls in which 116 were Medicare billing and 36 were private billing. He also said that they are doing a policy change so that they will be able to send those who don't pay to collections.

Dave said that because of Covid-19 there has been a drop in calls, but they still have to pay the EMTs for their time. They provide 24-hour coverage.

Comments from the floor:

Kathleen Pierce – Kathy said that she had a few comments about the budget. She said that last year the town gave the ambulance \$90,000.00 and this year the ambulance is asking for \$250,000.00 from the town. She asked why there was such an increase. She said that this is a big concern of hers and she is curious as to why the increase. She said that she has reviewed the budget and feels that there are some duplications in it, stating that there is a line for NYS employee taxes. She said that there should not be any taxes paid to the state as the ambulance is a not for profit and is exempt from unemployment.

Kathy also talked about the building, and maintenance figures given. Kathy said that budget should not be submitted until all the figures are accurate. She asked if the ambulance meetings are open to the public. She said that she attended a town board budget work session where it was discussed and decided that the town board would commit to \$150,000.00, with a stipulation that the ambulance can come back and request the remaining \$100,000.00 if they need it. Kathy said that if this happens, the

board should request a report from the ambulance board stating why they are requesting and what the basis of the needs are. She expressed concern that there is an appearance of lack of transparency, which she said makes people wonder if there is misuse or misinformation of tax payer money.

Jeff Call said that they are a not for profit, and they have a few volunteer drivers. He said that in the future they hope to pay the drivers. Jeff said that the ambulance needs its own facility. He said that now they rent a bay at the fire hall. He said that this situation is not a good working environment, and they need their own building.

Jeff talked about the pay scale for a paramedic and the need for competitive wages. He also talked about the town of Lyme and Cape Vincent merging services. He said that both communities will give \$250,000.00.

Jeff said that he has no problem sharing the budget, that they are not hiding anything. He said that one year into this, if they are sitting on 30 to 40 thousand dollars extra, they will not ask for that much more money. He said that they can't do fund raisers because he does not want to pay someone to do this. He said that the payroll is not black and white.

Councilman Wiley said that they came to the town board asking for \$250,000.00, and the board committed to \$150,000.00 to be paid by the taxpayer. He said that if they need the extra \$100,000.00 the town will have to give it. He said that he felt this is the best cost-effective way to contract for service. He said that he understands the people don't want a tax increase, but this is insurance for the unpredictable. He said that he is proud of what they have done over the last couple of years.

Councilman Aubertine asked if the district is created, can they bill other entities such as the prison, school and State Parks for service. Councilman Aubertine said that these entities use the service but don't pay any taxes.

Jeff said that they are State owned operations, and there are laws on what they can pay.

Jarrold Radley – Jarrold said that there were ideas on how to make the budget request lower. He said that there are creative ways to fund raise. He said that it is easy to raise the taxes to pay for this but there are calls going to places where they don't pay taxes, those places won't have their taxes raised. He said that there have to be solutions, so that next year they don't ask for more money. He said that the unknown is scary.

Dave McIntyre said that there are different grants available to help them, but they are specific on what they can be used for.

The board discussed billing and the revenues the ambulance receives from this. They discussed Mutual Aide and what can be collected from this.

Dave McIntyre said that they will be renting Todd Ewing's house next to the fire hall.

Jeff Call said that the new building will have a couple of bays, shower, lockers and a place to sleep. He said that Mike Aubertine will be helping with the preliminary plans.

Liz Brennan – Liz thanked the boards for the presentation and the work they do. She also thanked the Lions Club for the fund raising they did to allow for the purchase of the current ambulance. She asked if the Cape Vincent crew will stay in Cape Vincent, and Dave said yes. She said she was concerned because the Lions Club worked hard to raise the funds for the ambulance for Cape Vincent residents.

Jeff Call said that the town of Lyme is willing to purchase an ambulance for them.

Liz discussed the budget and the fund balance used to give to the ambulance budget. Dave said that the purpose of the ambulance budget is not to rely on the volunteers.

Councilman Wiley said that he agrees with Jarrod that they need to do fund raisers. He said it will take all of us to make the ambulance work.

Jeff Call said that they intend to do this, but the staff is employees, and they have other jobs.

Karen Wiley – Karen said that she has a renewed awareness for the ambulance as she just had to use it. She said that the first responders were very caring and confident. She said that Cape Vincent is a long way from the hospital, and she was very pleased with the care she received from them. She said that she always wants an ambulance in the village and feels that it is very vital to Cape Vincent. Karen said that she too does not want her taxes to go up, and hopes they can find other places for funding and suggested that the planner may be able to help with the grant writing.

Jeff Call thanked the community for attending, he said he appreciates more minds around the table. He said that the budget is proprietary and should not be shared. He said they are not trying to get anything over on the residents.

There being no further comments or questions, Councilman Aubertine made a motion to adjourn at 8:23pm.

Michelle Bouchard, RMC – Town Clerk