

June 16, 2011

Good evening members of the OVAC Oversight committee and my fellow community members.

Many of you know me at this point but for the record my name is John Flynn. I live with my family in the town of Ossining where I have been a resident for 15 years. I am a 23 year veteran of the Yonkers Fire Department, where I currently serve as one of three Deputy Chiefs who are responsible for and oversee the operations of our 455 member department with an approximately 53 Million dollar budget. I have been an EMT for over twenty years and I have personally responded to thousands of emergency medical incidents, from the routine to the very complex. The Yonkers Fire Department also oversees the operations of the City of Yonkers commercial ambulance service. I have a degree in Fire Protection Technology and I am nearing completion of a second degree in Emergency Management. I have served as an adjunct instructor at the New York State Fire Academy. I have planned, participated in, and evaluated large scale exercises with Fire, Police, EMS agencies, as well as Federal Government agencies throughout the tri-state region. I am also a published author in International Fire Service periodicals. I have extensive training and real world experience in leadership, budgeting, contracts, and personnel matters.

I would like first to express my gratitude to the many dedicated members of OVAC, both career and volunteer, who provide this valuable, lifesaving service to our community. I would also like to thank the volunteer members of the oversight committee for their time and efforts.

I have been interested in and concerned about the provision of Emergency Services in our community since I originally settled in the town of Ossining approximately 15 years ago. In August 2008 a public meeting was held during which time the concept of an ambulance taxing district was proposed and discussed. I attended this meeting and publicly expressed support for the concept of creating an ambulance taxing district. However, at that time I also made known several concerns which I held about the finances and operations of OVAC and of the proposed finances and operations of the ambulance taxing district. I offered my services as a member of the OVAC oversight committee at that time, however I was not selected. Many of my concerns went unheeded and my recommendations were not acted upon. The failure to act on any of these recommendations has resulted in serious operational issues at OVAC which have resulted in a diminished level of service to members of the community as well as unnecessary expense.

Three months ago, at the March 17, 2011 oversight committee meeting, I again raised many issues regarding operations and financing at OVAC and with the ambulance taxing district. Since that meeting, I have spoken to several members of OVAC, both career and volunteer, about these matters. I have had discussions with several members of the oversight committee individually, as well as elected leaders of the town and village, and many residents of our

community. I have done quite a bit of research to verify and corroborate information which has been related to me, and I have reached out to independent and objective leaders of Emergency Medical Services in this region for both factual information as well as their individual subjective opinions regarding the situation vis-a-vis Emergency Medical Service in Ossining and the surrounding region.

My concerns can be broken down into three main categories as follows:

1. *Approved budget for the ambulance taxing district in its initial year (2009) was \$425,000. Two years later (2011) the budget has been set at \$ 562,927, a 32% increase.*
2. *A complete lack of transparency regarding OVAC finances.*

For example, by New York State law, OVAC, as a 501© (3) organization, must provide information about its programs and finances within 15 days upon request. Despite my repeated requests, OVAC has not done so.

Further, their website continues to state that they do not receive any governmental support.

Also, required IRS form 990 detailing finances is due 4 ½ months after the end of the fiscal year. Currently, OVAC is many years behind in filing this form. On previous years form 990's, OVAC lists many expenses in the thousands of dollars each for such line items vaguely titled as "meetings"; "entertainment"; "fundraising expenses"; "good and welfare"; "membership committee"; "miscellaneous"; "communication", etc. While many of these expenses may be legitimate, I fear that many are not and that taxpayer as well as donor monies are being misspent.

In 2008, the very year that OVAC was pleading with the community to support the concept of an ambulance taxing district, claiming their finances were unsustainable otherwise, as well as the year that the economy was beginning to implode, causing severe economic hardship for many in our community, it has been reported that OVAC threw a \$40,000 party (paid for completely out of OVAC funds) for its members and guests. I am further advised that parties and unnecessary expenditures continue to this very date.

Recently, an embarrassed member of OVAC let me know that a professional cleaning service is under contract to clean the OVAC station, at a cost of almost \$1,000 per month. Now, in my opinion, many traditions in emergency services have been or should be discarded. However, the notion of Firefighters and EMS providers taking pride in keeping their own quarters clean during the hours they are within the station awaiting an alarm, and providing a substantial

savings to the taxpayers in the process, is not a tradition which should be discarded by the career or volunteer members of OVAC and the ambulance taxing district.

- 3. Most importantly I have grave concern about the ability of OVAC to provide effective Emergency Medical Service due to the existence of serious internal problems with authority and accountability.*

The chain of command is not clear which is reportedly causing operational failures and poor morale. Recently, all OVAC ambulances were out of service for a period exceeding 24 hours. These ambulances were placed out of service by the New York State Department of Health for inoperable air conditioning. The OVAC Chief does not have authority to make decisions regarding ambulance or fly-car maintenance and in fact, information regarding status of vehicles, repair expense, where and when ambulances are taken for service, etc. is withheld from him. Apparently this authority has been placed with volunteer members of OVAC who are not able to be held accountable for their actions or inactions. In any quasi-military emergency services organization, every member must of necessity be clear on his or her place in the organization. Each member must know to whom he or she is accountable and for whom he or she is responsible to supervise and hold accountable. There is no room for two separate chains of command, one being the career side and one being the volunteer side. Hopefully the reasons for this are obvious to you all. I urge the members of the oversight committee, in particular Supervisor Borgia and Mayor Hanauer, to address the issue of chain of command immediately. The issues surrounding ambulance maintenance as it relates to chain of command and authority and accountability are but one symptom of a larger problem. I implore you to clearly and firmly designate appropriate leadership and chain of command, and then as quickly as possible work to put in place clear, written by-laws, rules and regulations, and policies and procedures. Required NIMS (National Incident Management System) training must be completed by all members, both career and volunteer. Further steps must also be taken to ensure that all members of OVAC are trained and held accountable to these policies.

During the March 17 meeting, and immediately afterward, I was assured by members of this committee, as well as the volunteer leadership of OVAC, that any legitimate questions or concerns which I might have would be answered by the appropriate parties, and that no one had anything to hide.

Since the March 17 meeting, I have had quite a few conversations, both in person and by phone, with many of the stakeholders in this room, in regard to our shared concerns. I have also exchanged emails with many of you who are in various positions of authority, further detailing my concerns, and requesting specific information.

I would like to thank both Supervisor Borgia and Chief Sam Lubin for the time they have taken to hear my serious concerns and to provide me with some of the information which I have requested.

Unfortunately, I have had an extremely disappointing experience in my attempts to elicit information from any member of the leadership of the Ossining Volunteer Ambulance Corps, despite their face to face assurances to me immediately subsequent to the March 17 meeting that they would be happy to provide me with answers to any specific questions which I might have.

I have requested in writing the following information from the OVAC volunteer leadership as well as the OVAC board of directors. Much of this information is required by law to be made available upon request. None of it has yet been provided. I am requesting the assistance of the oversight committee in obtaining these documents:

- Copies of OVAC IRS Annual Return (form 990) for years 2008, 2009, 2010.
- OVAC By-laws
- OVAC Rules and Regulations
- OVAC Standard Operating Guidelines and / or Policies and Procedures
- Flowchart or other documents detailing OVAC Chain of Command
- Contract with OVAC Chief
- Job Description of OVAC Chief
- Ratio of shifts which are filled by paid personnel vs. volunteer personnel
- Total number of active volunteers with a breakdown of the number of volunteers who are Paramedic, EMT, or “other”.
- Inventory of equipment, drugs, or other items which have donated by Phelps or any other hospital
- Criteria by which volunteer Officers are selected

I appreciate in advance any assistance which you may provide in obtaining this information. It is my fervent hope that all of the stakeholders will continue the discussion regarding the delivery of Emergency Medical Services in the Ossining area in an open, frank, and respectful manner, and that our dialogue will be data driven and based on fact rather than anecdote.

It is my opinion that there are very many hard working and caring individuals serving currently in OVAC, both career and volunteer. The members of this committee, it is also my belief, have the best interest of the community at heart. Unfortunately, often times ego, pride and insecurity can obscure the real issues and get in the way of what we are all trying to accomplish, which is to protect the members of our community, and in particular our most vulnerable -the old, the young, and the infirm. In protecting our community, in this case from medical emergencies, we must strive to do so at the lowest possible cost without unreasonable loss to efficiency and effectiveness. I urge the board members, and in particular the chief elected officials of both the town and village, to show leadership on this issue, and to ruffle some feathers if necessary. I predict that if true leadership is shown by this committee, others will fall in line, work together for the common good, and do so with a bounce in their step and a smile on their faces.

People want to be led! Those in emergency services in particular desire strong leadership. The effectiveness of the organization depends on it. Please do so.

In closing I again offer my services as a member of this committee going forward. I believe that, in addition to my qualifications previously stated I would bring objectivity as well as provide representation from the town outside, which currently does not have a representative serving on the board.

Thank you.

John Flynn