

Ambulance District Oversight Committee

Minutes 10/18/2011 Meeting

Board Members Present: Chief Sam Lubin, Board Chair Dr. Bob Seebacher, Board Vice Chair Richard Wishnie, Ossining Mayor Bill Hanauer, Ossining Town Supervisor Catherine Borgia, Ron Dornau

Also Present: OVAC Captain Lorene Mettler, OVAC Treasurer/ Acting Chairman Alex Beck, Ossining Village Manager Richard Leins, New Castle Village Manager Penny Pitowski, Ossining Village Trustee Sue Donnelly, Ossining Town Councilman Peter Tripodi, members of OVAC, members of the public.

Dr. Seebacher called the meeting to order at 7:10PM.

The Board began by looking at the submitted 2012 budget. Supervisor Borgia spoke about the implications of the 2% tax cap, and how in other kinds of districts, expenses can be offset by increasing elsewhere, but that is not possible in the Ambulance District.

Alex Beck responded that they had met with an accountant that week to get better and more finalized figures. By going over the payroll, they realize they had understated taxes on what was received (updated copies to come from Chief Lubin). What is represented in the presented budget does not include a salary increase, but just added payroll taxes, Social Security, and Medicare.

Chief Lubin mentioned that they were expecting a 5% increase in healthcare costs, and that he was investigating asking employees to make a contribution to their healthcare costs to offset this increase, so the presented figures could go down accordingly. However, he maintains that we will not know until 45 days out what the real numbers look like.

Dr. Seebacher mentioned that he would very much like to have had last year's figures to compare to these. He is concerned that, in light of the tax cap, anything over a 2% increase will not sit well.

Alex Beck said that the budget was proposed without prior numbers, and that \$625k represents a much larger increase than 2%.

Catherine Borgia confirmed that Special Districts are definitely subject to the 2% cap.

Dr. Seebacher explained to the Board that one advantage he sees is that the chairman of the OVAC board was in attendance to discuss this (Alex Beck). OVAC has a much larger budget than is being subsidized by this district, and that new things may be going on between Phelps and OVAC that may lead to them helping in different ways. Dr. Seebacher is not happy to see increases, Richard Wishnie advises that the Board will work with OVAC only up to the 2% increase allowable.

Dr. Seebacher asks if Mr. Beck is intending to remain in his new post, and Mr. Beck says that he is for now. He and Sue Donnelly agree that there could be other opportunities to go to a bigger health plan and find other efficiencies.

In response to Supervisor Borgia's question as to whether Personnel numbers provided include coverage of Croton, Chief Lubin stated that the numbers cover one person in Croton until additional per diems are hired.

Dr. Seebacher brings up the benefits of economies of scale, and says we need to get better right now with what we have and make sure current taxpayers are not paying for newcomers to the District (Croton).

Alex Beck mentions that OVAC has still not been paid yet by Croton, and Supervisor Borgia reports that the invoice was sent to them by the Town of Ossining over a month ago.

There is also discussion about the transfer of the title of Chief's car from the Town of Ossining to the Ambulance District. Supervisor Borgia states that this was discussed at the June meeting, that the Ambulance District would pick up the final lease payments and take the car off of the Town's hands, which is a win-win situation, as it satisfied OVAC's request for a car for the Chief, prevents the Town from having to go to auction, and creates a tangible asset for the Ambulance District. The Town has made the 2011 payment, and the Ambulance District needs to reimburse the Town for the pro-rated amount (about \$14,000).

Richard Wishnie calls for a Formal Motion for the Ambulance District to assume lease payments for one car loaned to the District, and make the Town whole for the leased car cost. Supervisor Borgia mentions that the title must also be transferred to the Ambulance District, as the Town currently insures the vehicle, and advises that this cost must be part of the district's budget as well.

Motion- No Discussion, 2nd. All in Favor

Chief Lubin mentions the Croton Request for Proposal (RFP)- the lawyers need to look at it. He proposes \$16.92/hour (no increase). Supervisor Borgia suggests that for this meeting, the Board not speak in specifics but rather just about the process. Dr. Seebacher mentions that the charges should defray some costs this year.

The Board begins to discuss the Performance Statistics. Chief Lubin reports that we still don't have the 3rd quarter, and it should be emailed within the next three weeks. TOS had 109 calls, VOS had 433, New Castle had 15. He goes on to explain the outliers that cannot be married up under a definitive column. Response time is under 9 minutes 90% of the time. The outliers here may be when a 2nd call comes when an ambulance is already on the way, etc. Dr. Seebacher wants to see further focus on the 7 to 9 minute category, even though the current times are exemplary. Chief Lubin reports that he can work on a more detailed report for the 7 to 9 minute category. There is discussion of a rig at Phelps that can move in both directions which will help smooth these numbers.

The Board moves on to the Year to Date financial letter. In response to questions about whether the Ambulance District or any additions to fall under the 2% tax cap, Supervisor Borgia insists that there is a very clear formula about what is exempted.

Town Councilman Tripodi mentions that he is unhappy that this meeting was not posted to any website, that the meeting was not being filmed, and that to his understanding, the budget was due in September. Dr. Seebacher responds that everyone is struggling to get their budgets in order, and that everyone is doing their best. Councilman Tripodi continues to mention the OVAC vehicle and the Town being compensated, and insists that a Board member resign to let a Town Outside resident be appointed to the Board. He goes on to mention that he is waiting on several information requests from OVAC.

The Board invites Chief Flinn to speak about his concerns. (Attach Chief Flinn letter?) He has concerns about documents he has asked for from the Board, some internal issues at OVAC. Dr. Seebacher responds by saying he understands these concerns, and is confident that the new administrator at Phelps will take a firmer hand and that the new leadership will see that these issues be rectified.

Adjourned into Executive Session at 8:10 PM

October 16, 2011

Good evening members of the Ossining Ambulance Oversight Committee and my fellow community members.

First, I would like to again express my gratitude to the 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 hope you have all had a chance to review the statement which I had written for this committee and which I read at the June 16, 2011 meeting. I had asked that my statement be posted along with the minutes of the last meeting on the Ossining town and village websites but this has not been done.

In my statement I had expressed many serious concerns. Virtually none of my concerns have been addressed to date. At the October 16 meeting, subsequent to the reading of my statement, Mr. Richard Wishnie, the Vice Chair of this committee, strongly urged that the leadership of OVAC should respond to each of the, admittedly, criticisms, I had made at that time. I look forward to this response and I hope that it will be forthcoming this evening.

On page four of my statement I requested the release of eleven items for my review. Virtually all of these items are public documents required by law to be provided upon request in a reasonable time frame. The only documentation which has been provided to me are the OVAC by laws and copies of the OVAC IRS Annual returns for two of the three years requested. No explanation has been given as to why none of the other requested documents have been provided to me.

During the last several years, since I have become vocal in regard to serious issues with OVAC and the ambulance taxing district, I have been approached by several current and former members of OVAC, both career as well as volunteer. These individuals have described to me an agency in turmoil and in dire need of strong leadership from this board and from our elected officials, which has not been forthcoming. Just this past weekend I was contacted by a career medic for OVAC who wishes to remain anonymous. This is an individual who I had not previously spoken to and it is not Sam Lubin. I find this person to be very credible. This OVAC employee has informed me that recently five career members of OVAC had written and delivered letters to this committee detailing serious concerns with the volunteer leadership of OVAC. One Volunteer OVAC Officer's name continues to arise as a very poor leader with particularly bad people skills. The issues which have been described to me by several sources I will not elaborate on at this time unless requested by the committee to do so, but they are serious and they must be addressed by this committee.

OVAC is an agency in turmoil. The very serious problems at OVAC have put the lives and well being of our community at risk. These issues have also wasted taxpayer as well as donor monies. This is a situation which is crying out for strong, principled leadership. I urge the members of this Committee, and in particular its chairman as well as the members of the committee who serve as chief elected officials of both the town and village, to get off the fence and lead! It is perhaps understandable that up until this point many of the allegations that I and others have made, and questions we had raised, were

unsubstantiated and thus the cause for the inaction of this committee and our elected leaders. At this point, however, it should be patently obvious that clear, concrete steps must be taken to resolve the issues which I and others have previously documented.

It should also be obvious at this point that Emergency Medical Service in the ambulance taxing district is now overwhelmingly provided by career personnel. By most estimates, there are no more than 8-10 active volunteers. Approximately 90% of shifts are being covered by paid staff. This once proud and capable, 100% volunteer organization is no more. Ironically, the current structure of the organization, in my opinion, has much to do with the fact that it has fallen so far, so fast in recent years. The individuals with the education, the credentials, the experience...the individuals who do the bulk of the work and are accountable for their actions or inactions, are under the thumb of individuals with far inferior levels of training and experience. Perhaps even more problematic, those with the authority have no accountability for their actions. I would hope that it is obvious to you all that with authority must come accountability.

Most great charitable organizations which have a healthy corps of volunteers such as the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Unicef, Ronald McDonald House (a wonderful organization by the way where I proudly have done some volunteer work), etc., are led by qualified, full time career personnel who are accountable for their actions or inactions. Finances are transparent in these great organizations as well. Legitimate questions and concerns from the public are answered promptly and with no resentment. There is no discernible sense of entitlement amongst the career or volunteer members of these organizations. They are united by a common goal. The volunteer personnel in these organizations gladly follow the lead of the full time, career people who were hired for their expertise and leadership ability. The career leaders of these organizations embrace the volunteers, treat them fairly, and respect their opinions. Why can it not be this way with OVAC?

So, what must be done to fix this mess?

First, the OVAC Board of Directors must be urged, in writing, by this committee, to release all information which is requested by the public in regard to their finances and any other matters which are not confidential personnel issues.

Next, clear lines of authority must be drawn. The career Chief must have ultimate authority and accountability. In the absence of the career Chief, the senior career medic on each shift must be designated the Shift Commander, who will have authority over, and be responsible for, each member on that shift whether career or volunteer. If the OVAC Board of Directors does not immediately agree to institute such a policy without delay, steps must be taken to prepare an RFP (Request for Proposals) from outside vendors for ambulance service.

I believe strongly that these steps will promptly solve many of the serious problems currently plaguing EMS services in the Ambulance Taxing District. I am also of the opinion that enacting such policies will breathe new life into the Volunteer membership. Many inactive members will likely become more active, and new volunteer members will likely come on board. Good people want to be involved in organizations which have clear direction and competent leadership, and transparency in finances.

However, should the OVAC Board of Directors not follow the direction of this oversight committee in these matters, you should not hesitate to make a contractual arrangement with another vendor. In fact, as part of that contract I have no doubt that most, if not all of the current OVAC career EMT's and Paramedics would be able to gain employment with the new vendor and continue serving our community, should they choose to do so, and if this committee were to make such a recommendation to the new vendor.

I urge my good hearted neighbors and fellow members of emergency service who comprise the volunteer membership of OVAC, both those few volunteers who remain active, and the many who are still associated with OVAC albeit with a much less active role these days, to not be threatened by the ideas for positive change I have expressed here. Please see it as the chance it is to salvage your once vibrant organization. Don't let fear of change, false pride, or loyalty to a failed leader get in the way of progress for the good of our community. Out of crisis can come opportunity if you play your cards right. With proper leaders in place who have appropriate authority and accountability, along with the recent developments in regard to Croton ambulance, I foresee an organization which will provide much in the way of challenge, camaraderie, and personal satisfaction for its members. This combination career / volunteer agency can be a role model for other agencies in our area in providing efficient, cost – effective, life saving service to those who we have a moral obligation to protect. Please examine the facts and your conscience in deciding whether or not to support progress or stand in its way.

Upon conclusion of my statement I respectfully request that the Chairman allow and encourage each member of this committee to speak now on the record in regard their thoughts and opinions in relation to my statement.

At this time I will conclude my statement. I respectfully request that it be read into the record and posted on the town and village websites, along with my written statement which was given previously on June 16, 2011.

Thank you.

John Flynn
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Ossining, NY