

Richland County Joint Ambulance Committee

July 27, 2022

Minutes

Present: Brian McGraw, Kerry Severson, Mary Rognholt, James Lingel, Verlin Coy, Gordon Palmer, Doug Duhr, Terrance Jindrick, Jean Nicks, Darin Gudgeon.

Not Present: Julie Fleming, Sharon Schmitz, Todd Coppernoll, Jerome Durst, Glen Niemeyer, Tim Willis.

1. Meeting was called to order at 19:19.
2. Notification of the meeting had been made, and the agenda was posted.
3. Committee attendance was as noted above, with 9 members present.
4. For election of Committee Chair, Severson nominated McGraw, seconded by Nicks. A motion was made by Severson to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for McGraw, seconded by Nicks. Motion carried. McGraw is elected Committee Chair.
5. For election of Committee Vice-Chair, Nicks nominated Severson, seconded by Palmer. A motion was made by Nicks to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Severson, seconded by Palmer. Motion carried. Severson is elected Committee Vice-Chair.
6. For appointment of Secretary, a non-voting member, Severson nominated Burch, seconded by Nicks. A motion was made by Nicks to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Burch, seconded by Severson. Motion carried. Burch is appointed Committee Secretary.
7. A motion was made by Severson to approve the agenda as posted. Nicks seconded it. Motion Carried; the agenda was approved.
8. A motion was made by Jindrick and seconded by Palmer to approve the minutes of the previous meeting as presented. Motion carried; the minutes were approved.
9. There were no comments from the public.
10. Judy Shireman stated there are rumors in the community and within the Service that a district is going to be formed and all staff let go. She urged the Committee to consider the need for ambulance coverage and the time given by volunteers raising money for equipment that would be given away. McGraw informed Shireman it was only a rumor and expressed frustration at those disseminating rumors which are causing undue concern. This item is related to discussion in item 14.
11. Gudgeon reviewed financial reports from February through June. It was noted that the funds in the ambulance account are rolled over to the next year, unlike other County departments. February started with a balance of \$244,627.02. Included in the revenue of \$59,050.95 for the month is \$10,000 from REC for the roof. While this is located within the operating budget, it is earmarked to be used for the roof repairs. There were \$41,128.41 in expenditures, leaving an end balance of \$262,550.47. March had \$101,416.28 in revenue. It was noted there was miscellaneous revenue received from the State for reimbursement for COVID-19 testing. The funds received in March included all of 2021. There were \$47,893.47 in expenditures, leaving a balance of \$316,073.28. April had \$40,619.60 in revenue with \$41,571.16 in expenditures, leaving an end balance of \$315,121.72. May has \$46,497.77 in revenue and \$44,540.70 in expenditures, leaving a balance of \$317,078.79. For June there was \$35,793.85 in revenue and \$47,188.38 in expenditures. These expenditures included items for the new building paid for by credit card, such as the phones, stove, and tables. Gudgeon also informed the Committee that utilities have been switched into the Service's name,

however LaValle Telephone has two cooling units and the phone system still running in the building while they wait to receive backordered items to complete their move. Reimbursement for the cost associated with this has been worked out and is pending. Finally, Gudgeon informed the Committee that Cvikota had experienced staffing changes and their main coder faced some health issues, so billing fell behind, however it appears they are caught up now. It is expected there will be a spike in revenue in future months as claims are paid. Call volume has been comparable to 2021 with 576 calls between January 1 and June 30. Only 4% were transported emergent to the hospital.

12. Gudgeon reminded the Committee that the Pine Valley Repeaters amateur radio club would be moving to the new facility, as they provide support during emergencies. In order for communication equipment to best function, they are proposing erecting a radio tower in the southwest corner of the property. Ralph Hendrickson, Club Treasurer, was in attendance and spoke regarding the proposed project. The Club would cover the purchase of equipment, installation, and maintenance. The proposed tower is less than ¼ the cost of a new shorter tower. The FCC states that the City cannot deny installation of an amateur radio tower, however there may be height and property line restrictions. Hendrickson was unsure if the neighbors have been contacted. There is no audible noise or exposure risk from radio waves or microwaves. If interference issues arise such as with phones or radios, the Club is committed to solve the problem so as to have no impact. There is currently a tower owned by the Club installed on the Courthouse through a MOU. The intent is to simply update this MOU, with the Club providing insurance and maintenance for the life of the tower. It would also allow County antennas and equipment to be placed at no charge. Gudgeon stated the previous tower MOU was simply approved by the Emergency Management Committee but he would check with the County Administrator regarding the approval process. Severson made a motion to approve the proposed tower contingent upon County Board approval if required, City approval if required, and that the MOU be modified to reflect the change of location, allow installation of county equipment and antennas on the tower at no charge, and require the County be named on the Club's liability insurance policy as an insured. Motion seconded by Nicks. Motion carried.
13. Darin explained the Service was eligible for funds through the EMS FLEX Grant, which had funds available for several categories. An application was submitted for \$50,000 to be put toward staff retention and recruitment. The funds, if received, would be used to achieve two goals: take full-time/part-time staff to the final step in the 2018 wage study and establish a flat rate for primary and backup wages for paid-on-call staff, and to cover salary for two additional part-time positions. Funds must be spent within 12 months of receipt. Gudgeon stated these funds will allow for more consistent staffing of the second truck, which would allow for better call coverage and more availability for transfers. It is expected these changes will have a positive impact on overtime and will generate enough revenue to pay for themselves. Nicks made a motion to direct Gudgeon to draft a resolution for the County Board to accept the funds, if awarded. Motion seconded by Palmer. Motion carried.
14. A series of resolutions had been proposed at a Finance and Personnel meeting in June regarding the future of non-mandated services, of which the Ambulance Service is one. This proposed resolution stated the Service would need to establish a plan to no longer require tax levy dollars for operation and establish a business plan. If the Service could not show autonomous operation, the Service would be dissolved and assets liquidated. The resolution had been tabled. McGraw noted the

Service has not been funded by the tax levy since at least 2004, though likely much longer. There is documentation to show this. It was also noted that any funds remaining in the budget at the end of the calendar year had previously gone into the general fund until 2015 when the segregated fund was established. Gudgeon stated if the County retains ownership of the Service, it may be eligible to increase the tax levy to pay for a portion of the cost of the 911 system, without penalty. It was noted that the Committee already is doing or intends to do the work listed in the proposed resolution, however the language regarding the potential dissolution of the Service creates recruitment and retention problems. An amendment has been written and proposed to the Finance and Personnel Committee for consideration which calls for an orderly transition to alternate management. At this time, regardless of resolution adoption, Gudgeon stated he is working as though the resolution has been adopted and is beginning the process of establishing a business plan with assistance through the State. The State has recently hired someone to work on stabilizing rural EMS; the Committee will not have to pay for services rendered. Severson stated there may be been action taken on the proposed resolution in a Finance and Personnel Committee meeting earlier that day but would need to be adopted by the County Board to go into effect. Severson also stated the earlier meeting had included a rejection of the two- step wage increase. Joint Ambulance Committee members rejected this, recognizing a need for the wage increase for recruitment and retention.

15. The proposed 2023 budget was presented on the screen. Gudgeon stated the County Administrator has recommended a two-step increase from the 2018 wage study plus 5% for inflation for full-time/part-time staff. This would increase starting wage to \$14.97 plus 5% for inflation, with current staff with less than two years employment receiving \$15.63 and those with more than two years would receive \$15.97. Gudgeon informed the Committee of neighboring services hiring with \$16 to \$19 starting, based on experience. At least two staff members have been approached by a service in the area trying to recruit them. The proposed wage increase shown in the budget is necessary for retaining current staff. The Temp-Casual line has an increase to reflect the two part-time positions to be funded by the FLEX Grant if funds are awarded. The Crew Pay line covers payroll for the paid-on-call staff and has trended down over the last several years. Taking the proposed changes from the FLEX Grant into consideration, the budget has been adjusted accordingly to the trend as well as the raise. The budget for lights has been set with help from REC. The overall expenditure budget is \$706,732.85. This includes setting aside \$20,000 for capital expenditures. Discussion regarding the wage increase showed the general consensus to support the increase. It was recognized that the County may not support raises, however wages are already behind neighboring departments. Wages must increase if the Service is to retain staff. For revenue, the current MOU ends with 2022 so 2023 will begin a new cycle. MOUs will be presented at the August meeting once the language has been approved by Corp Counsel, however at this time, it has been recognized that the four-year average of calls has increased so there is no need to increase the per call cost. The proposed 2023-2025 MOU is expected to have an average per call cost of \$170 with the revenue from MOUs increasing from roughly \$126,000 to \$150,000. The Committee supported the budget as presented with no changes made. Gudgeon thanked the Committee for their guidance, recognizing that with municipal funds, the municipalities should have the opportunity to weigh in.
16. Severson made a motion to adjourn the meeting; motion seconded by Nicks. The motion carried; the meeting was adjourned at 21:53.