

SELECTMEN'S WORKSHOP
Minutes of 11-02-09
4:15 p.m.

Selectmen:

(Absent with Notice)

Peter F. Brothers, Chairman
Miller C. Lovett, Vice Chairman
Robert C. Flanders
Charles G. Palm
Colette Worsman

Town Manager:

Phillip L. Warren

Recording Clerk:

Karin Landry

Call to Order: Chairman Peter Brothers called the meeting to order at 4:15 p.m. He introduced the Board, Town Manager, and the Recording Clerk.

W09-48 Stewart's Ambulance Agreement Review

In an effort to address an increased number of questions from residents, selectmen and the media, Stewart's Ambulance Chairman Justin Van Etten came before the Board to provide an overview of the company's operation to the towns contracting their services. His presentation included:

- The difference between a paramedic and an EMT
- The Stewart's contract
- How they charge
- The cost of services to the company
- What is done when people can't or won't pay
- Other topics

Although other companies have claimed that they can provide the service for less, Stewart's provides more paramedics and ambulances, the ambulances being the best equipped in the state. Patients are not charged unless they are transported. Stewart's is typically paid less for a 911 transport call than they charge, but their well equipped ambulances allow them to transport patients from hospital to hospital. Stewart's can also transport cardiac patients directly to hospitals equipped to handle their crises, both of which are profitable and subsidize the 911 service. Stewart's has one of the most generous hardship write-off programs in the state, and does not turn an account over to collections when an individual is making a good faith effort to work with the company. The company sues or turns the matter over to the Insurance Commission when an individual has been paid for their services by an insurance company and does not pay the Company. The number of people who can pay, but do not pay, has risen considerably. It does not appear that there has been an increase in calls as a result of the economy, but it does appear that people are waiting longer before deciding to call 911. There has been a significant increase in delinquent bills and hardship write-off requests. LRGH recently stopped exchanging medical supplies on all 911 calls, which will impact Stewart's less than \$20,000 annually.

Selectman Flanders pointed out that Stewart's can provide a higher level of service at a substantially better price than communities providing their own ambulance service because many of their employees are paramedics for local communities that work on a per diem basis for Stewarts. This allows them to avoid the additional costs of health insurance and other overhead associated with full time employees. If the Town can provide service equal to or better than what individual communities can provide through their fire department for a lower cost, it is a benefit for the taxpayers. He supports the use of highly trained personnel whenever possible to provide 911 services to the community, and pointed out an example of the expertise exhibited by Stewart's at a local accident scene.

Selectman Worsman is pleased that the company is willing to work with the Town in view of the current market conditions by dropping their total contract price. She inquired how an emergency is handled when a Meredith firefighter is first on the scene. Mr. Van Etten explained that in that circumstance, the EMT can start performing the services they are trained to provide given the constraints of the supplies available to them. If a Meredith firefighter is taken with Stewart's to transport a patient, they are covered under Stewart's insurance roster.

Selectman Palm is very satisfied with the level of response he received from the company regarding a matter of an outstanding charge for a 911 transport. He inquired about the pros and cons of obtaining a non-transport license. Mr. Van Etten explained that the license allows the fire department to be the first responders. If they arrive at the scene of an accident before Stewart's, they can begin administering first aid. The Towns serviced by Stewart's, with the exception of Meredith, hold a license. Because Stewart's is located in Meredith, they can respond quicker to many calls than the fire department, so the Town must consider the costs of obtaining the license, insuring those acting as first responders, and providing for their continuing education. Meredith fire department volunteers are insured under Stewart's policy when responding to 911 calls. In addition, it is more beneficial to have a first responder that is dispatched to calls on a regular basis.

Town Manager Philip Warren pointed out that the Town does not have the financial means to provide 911 service at this time, and is in favor of continuing to retain Stewart's to provide the service. The contract price for 2010 is \$540,879, down from \$547,448 in 2009. The call volume for the fiscal year October 1, 2008 to September 30, 2009 was 926, a decrease from 1,015 in the previous fiscal year. Stewart's has been unsuccessful in collecting \$58,088.14 for transports originating from the Town of Meredith in the aforementioned fiscal year, which represents an increase of 870% over the previous year.

The closing date for the contract for the ensuing fiscal year is October 31, 2009. The company is working with the fire chiefs of the towns it services to address a provision in the contract that provides for a surcharge in the contract price if the call volume increases by 10%, which can easily be realized in the event of better weather during the summer months.

There was a general consensus among the Board that they will enter into the contract with Stewart's Ambulance to provide 911 service for the ensuing year. The Chair thanked Mr. Van Etten for his presentation.

W09-49 Town Hall Annex Repairs – Bid Results

The Town Manager highlighted the first bid process for the repairs at the Town Hall Annex, which did not result in the awarding of a contract. The project was put out to bid a second time with the three options that were discussed at length by the Board. Two firms bid on options A and B, and four firms bid on Option C. The preferred Option C came in with a high bid of \$88,500 (2,500 performance bond cost) and a low bid of \$36,455 (526 performance bond cost). He recommends that the Town award the contract to the low bidder, Ambrose Brothers, Inc., in the amount of \$36,455. Option C includes removing the garage, supporting the building with a sonic tube cantilever system, leaving the back of the building in tact, and adding drainage. The Town should begin the process of obtaining drainage easements from abutting landowners immediately. There is no indication that the abutting landowners do not support the project. Ambrose Brothers is confident that they can perform the project by the completion date, December 20, 2009. The Town Manager feels that including a performance bond is a small price to pay for piece of mind on a project, and will recommend including a bond on any project over \$25,000 under the Administrative Regulations.

Selectman Flanders pointed out that Ambrose Brothers is located in the Town of Meredith and has completed several projects for the Town that have come out well, finishing on time and on budget.

The Board agreed that being patient and rebidding the project resulted in the best quality option under the constraints of the budget, a reasonably good value, and the added protection of a performance bond. There was a consensus among the Board to award the project to Ambrose Brothers, and to proceed with working on the easements necessary for drainage immediately.

Dialogue ensued regarding the disruptions to the building and parking area during the project, which will be minor and temporary. The Town Manager notified the Congregational Church of the impacts the construction process will have on the parking area they share with the Town. He told the Board that in reviewing the regulations, documents, and contracts necessary to provide himself with the historical knowledge needed to do his job effectively and efficiently, he did not find formal agreements for parking arrangements with the Congregational and Calvary Community Church, or the library, and asked for the Board's guidance on addressing the matter. The Board agreed that formalizing the agreements should not interfere with the budget process, but there is no harm in spending time on the matter if it does not create an undue hardship for Mr. Warren. The Chair would like to spend a reasonable amount of time on the matter, with a well thought out process and open dialogue. Selectman Palm is a resource for information regarding the informal agreement with the churches because he gathered facts when the snow plowing arrangement was being addressed. Selectman Flanders commented on the exceptional level of professionalism exhibited by the Town Manager in addressing items that are not of immediate urgency.

Selectman Palm motioned to adjourn the meeting at 5:20 p.m. Seconded by Selectman Flanders. 4-0. All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Phillip L. Warren, Town Manager

Peter F. Brothers, Chairman

Karin Landry, Recording Clerk

Robert C. Flanders

Charles G. Palm

Colette Worsman