

A Special meeting was held Tuesday, April 9, 2019 with the Northampton Ambulance Service in the Municipal town hall Building at 412 S. Main St., Northville, NY. Supervisor Groff opened the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Supervisor James Groff
Councilmen: Art Simmons, Darryl Roosa, William Gritsavage
Absent: Councilman Ivar Anderson

Other department representatives in attendance were:

Ken Cramer-Highway Superintendent

ALSO PRESENT: Mayor John Spaeth, Heidi Darling, Molly Zullo, Jon VanAlstyne, Tom Fifield, Bill Pitcher from WENT Radio Station, Ruth and Jack Farquhar, Janine Jackson, Jerry Wildermuth, Holly Downing, Lori and Terrance Driscoll, Dusten Rader from Fulton Co. Express, Willem Monster, Joy Allen, Steve Collins, Tom Wood and Briana O’Hara Leader from The Leader Herald newspaper.

Res. #2019-04: Resolution Regarding State and Municipal Facilities Program (“SAM”) – Purchase of a Mini Excavator – Project ID: #15741.

Councilman Simmons offered the following resolution and moved its adoption.

Councilman Gritsavage seconded the motion.

4- Ayes: James Groff, Art Simmons, Darryl Roosa and William Gritsavage

0-Nays

Absent: Ivar Anderson

Jon VanAlstyne stated that the Northampton Ambulance Service has a lot of dedicated volunteer members. They put in a lot of time and a lot of effort. As we have seen in the last six years or so since about 2013 our call numbers have steadily increased but our response rate and membership has decreased. It is not just Northampton it’s across the state, across the United States. There are 20 ambulances within the last 16 months that have shut down in NY. In 2013 Northville/Northampton we had 207 calls and response rate of 68%. In 2018 we had 285 calls and a response rate of 52%. We are here to address this issue stated Mr. VanAlstyne. Hoping to come up with a resolution to try and increase our membership; response rates and response time. To discuss this and see what we can do to keep the ambulance up and running for years to come.

Willem Monster asked what he meant by response rate? Does it mean you showed up or you showed up in a timely fashion?

Jon VanAlstyne replied that the ambulance showed up.

Their complaint is about not showing up at all responded the Supervisor.

Steve Collins explained that the response rate is approximately 45% coverage in 2019. It is not just Northampton it's all across the State explained Mr. VanAlstyne. We are trying to address this now before we get to a point where we can't respond to anything with the ambulance.

Suggestions on what to do:

Mr. VanAlstyne suggested possibly hiring part-time per-diem paid ALS (critical care technician/paramedic) providers.

Councilman Gritsavage explained what he understood that there are two types of ambulance corps in NY, one being a totally volunteer service which we do have and we do not bill. You make your money by fund raisers and supported by taxpayers money and everybody is a volunteer. The other type of ambulance corp. is where we bill for the calls, whether it is paid for by the individual, the insurance carrier, Medicare or Medicaid.

In this particular situation because we are a governmental operated Ambulance Service billing is not necessarily required explained Mr. Collins. Theoretically, you could have 24/7 365 days paid staff and not bill.

Councilman Gritsavage-But as a volunteer you can't? Mr. Collins responded that is not true. Volunteers can bill, we don't. There are elected ambulance squads in more populous areas that run combinations of volunteer and paid and they bill. We are seeing the squads that only bill outside of government where there is an additional contribution of money. Squads that are only billing are failing left and right.

Are there professional services that can do the billing for the ambulance service asked Mr. Monster?

The response was "yes".

Why aren't we billing then?

Mr. Collins noted that he contacted a billing company that he was familiar with. He gave them their total call volume and where we are. Medicare and Medicaid rates are different from County to County. Fulton with approximately 300 calls they advised us that the absolute best that we could expect on billing would be approximately \$175,000 a year. That would presume 1. we are covering almost all of the calls. So, if we are only covering 50% of the calls right now you can slash that number in half.

But, if you slash that in half that is still more than what we are getting right now stated

Councilman Gritsavage.

Within billing there are two different approaches explained Mr. Collins. One is to bill Medicaid and Medicare when appropriate. They do not bill the patient that is called "soft billing". You only collect insurance. There are three choices for insurance-Medicaid, Medicare and private. The other way is, the private companies where they are totally dependent on billing by their income, which they bill the patient for whatever the payment is left over and their medication. If your patient is a Medicaid patient only, you can only take what Medicaid pays. You cannot bill the patient and you can't bill anybody else.

You are not billing Medicaid so we are losing everything stated Councilman Gritsavage. Even if it's \$50.00. It's an option, responded Mr. Collins. But if we don't cover enough calls the dollars don't really buy you anything other than a little bit of offset of what you are currently doing because you are not going to get that \$175,000.00. You are going to see less than that.

Councilman Gritsavage: You say you spoke to a billing company, if we have under 300 calls a year approximately 150 calls answered, why can't we hire somebody part-time to come in on a Saturday morning and do the billing to the insurance companies.

Steve Collins: There are insurance complex abilities to billings that you need which is called insurance coding, it is an industry standard in medical billing. You hire a medical billing company because they have the expertise to properly code and bill out to the different insurance companies. My concern from this conversation tonight is that I don't see billing as an upfront discussion. I see call coverage as an upfront discussion. Then depending on what you decide to include the call coverage if that entails additional expenses then billing comes into the conversation. I think that talking about billing upfront will complicate the discussion on the call coverage stated Mr. Collins.

There was discussion on the Town current budget giving \$21,000.00 to the ambulance service. The billing is not going to solve the problem, we are getting off track responded Supervisor Groff. The problem is the response. We need to discuss, how we improve the response or if we are going to try to hire somebody.

Jerry Wildermuth stated that he has been member on the ambulance service for 38 years. The last two ambulance meetings there was discussion on paying medics. We (volunteers) were questioned if we would still respond if medics were being paid. I responded, yes I would and some others I believe stated that they would. But I think it would hurt the overall production from people on the ambulance corps if I'm not being paid and when he is being paid. I don't think that is fair. But over and above that I don't see how we can cover that. We're talking about 8 hours a day, 10 hours a day or 12 hours a day. I cannot commit to that as a driver. Not one day in the week. I cannot be calling around to see who could cover for me. If we can't do that on a daily basis how are we going to do it for paid people? Then we are going have paid people and we don't have people who can respond for them.

Jack Farquhar handed the board members a sheet noting 2018 Northampton Ambulance Service – Member Responses. He noted to look at the amount of time the members have responded and to see who is and who isn't responding to calls. One thing we need to do with the people we have now is we have is to commit some time may it be one hour, five hours, a day whatever it might be or at night. You have to step up and do it and we are having trouble doing that because people work. They have full time jobs. There are very few people that can say they have nothing else to do but put me on the ambulance 24/7.

What can we as a Town Board do about that?

I don't know responded Mr. Farquhar. The only option we have right now is that volunteers help out when we can and go. Right now, we are going to do training and anything we need to do to get the volunteers to come out. If they can't come out, you can't twist their arms. They are volunteers.

What are we doing to recruit people asked Councilman Gritsavage?

Nothing at this point responded Mr. Farquhar. If you are going to recruit I will agree with it. Every volunteer that I have interviewed joined for one reason. They wanted to help their neighbors and help the community.

Councilman Simmons stated that this is his sixth year on the Town Board and on the Ambulance committee. He mentioned that he has attending many of their ambulance meetings. Several years ago I didn't see a problem. I thought that things were going pretty well. Approximately two years ago some questions came up about calls not being answered. Two meetings ago someone mentioned that if we don't do something we are not going to be here in two years, which Councilman Gritsavage and I reported back to the Town Board. Someone did ask at one of those meetings if they had ever done a recruitment drive. There are some signs that are posted around the area. What if you were to go to the NCS Administration and make a presentation or go to ECON, go to some of the businesses, go to the churches and meet with the Pastors asked Councilman Simmons? Has there ever been a real recruitment drive? I realize that if you get five people today and they have no experience, it takes a while to train them.

Molly Zullo stated a few years ago she suggested that they do many recruitments, such as, on Facebook, have an open house, send out a sticker, referring to yellow dot, that you can fill out and have your meds and allergies listed and put it on your refrigerator. There are so many things that we could do to inform the public. We have EMT's and drivers, we need medics. There is a huge cost for paramedic school. To have volunteer medics is going to be very difficult. According to dispatch we have to send an ALS on all calls and that is our largest need is paramedics.

Jon VanAlstyne stated that on every call in Fulton County they send an ALS automatically. So, if we hire a part-time paramedic what are they going to do on the off time inquired Supervisor Groff. There is going to be a lot of time you are not going to have somebody available.

If we start this up now. The off time would be covered by the volunteers stated Jon VanAlstyne. Supervisor Groff stated, that means you are going to have to work your volunteer schedule along with someone that is getting paid that has a different schedule and you are still not going to be able to respond. Jon VanAlstyne responded, correct. I would like improve our response rate. Right now, I would like to see our response rate at 75% of our calls.

I spoke Indian Lake Supervisor and they hired someone 24/7. Our general budget Townwide is \$325,000.00, their budget is \$250,000.00 for those people. That is quite and increase.

They have two ambulances and one is always staffed at all times stated Jon VanAlstyne. I believe their call volume is a little less than ours. The bring in approximately \$110,000.00 with the billing. The town also provides them I believe beyond the payroll.

This is a very expensive cash operation up there explained Mr. Collins.

I'm not opposed to spending the money, it is something we would have to put out for at least a permissive referendum to do that stated Supervisor Groff.

I don't think that it is necessary to pay out \$250,000 a year right not stated Jon VanAlstyne. We have volunteers. Jon asked the volunteers present if they would remain on as a volunteer if there was a paid medic.

Lori Driscoll is not opposed to paying for a medic but statically the volunteers quit.

Someone mentioned that they think it would affect their moral.

If you have a paramedic setting right there and by the time you get to the ambulance building there is no need for us anyway stated Lori Driscoll. They would gradually stop responding because there is not going to be a need for us.

Just as a point of interest, Jack Farquhar mentioned that he spoke with Lee Burns from NYS Health who just retired as Executive Director of EMS. She is willing to discuss the pros and cons on this if the board so wishes. She has seen this throughout NYS and this is an on going problem. She knows this because she has been involved in it until she retired last year. She is very knowledgeable and is willing share her knowledge. The other person you can talk with on this is Doug Wildermuth of E5. They do everything for the agency, supplying the people. I was asked what are you going to use to go with these paramedics, if you can find paramedics? I responded that the volunteers have stated that they would stay. The response to me was “lots of luck” and she could inform us of the volunteers staying.

I think that one of the biggest problems our corps has is we are waiting to see if Jack responds to a call stated Jerry Wildermuth. 70% to 80% could be handled by the ALS. If Jack is not available or he does not respond then by the time we get a crew there we should be responding because we could get on scene and they could meet us on scene. Or if we find out we don't need a medic would could cancel GAVAC and go on with the BLS call. That is a big issue.

Molly Zullo questioned if god forbid something happens to Jack, what is going to happen? The ALS is how much provided by Jack? Thank goodness because we would not be open right now. Supervisor Groff asked if the ALS is being dispatched by the county, why do we have to have a paramedic?

The response was because they are coming from Gloversville.

There is also Basic Life Support to at least get on the scene and try to help whoever is there, explained Supervisor Groff.

Can we do all that, no, I guess that is the difference responded Molly Zullo. There are certain medications.

They are not into the medications but they do know CPR and they can respond in any way such as a driver or whatever else is needed stated the Supervisor. Discussion ensued on possibly having firemen drive the rig if need be. There are firemen that know CPR, yes there are stated Supervisor Groff. The fire department is not equipped to run EMS or into the first aid but they can be a driver or whatever else is needed. So, if you have a paramedic on duty you will still need a driver and they will not be there immediately. When you are waiting it seems like forever.

It is important that you have an idea how many bodies you need a daily to cover in order to have a viable Ambulance Service stated Mr. Monster.

Supervisor Groff responded; you can't pick your days because you never know when anything is going to happen.

I think it is to be important to be self-reliant as possible for our Town responded Mr.

VanAlstyne. Our main goal it to provide emergency care to people in the Town of Northampton, Village of Northville, and to Hope. Right now, we are having a difficult time doing that. It's okay to rely on GAVAC if we need them but it is still 20 minutes out. With summer coming up it is going to get busier and they know it. I don't know how long it is going to take an ambulance to get up here then. I do know when dispatch is called on how long it takes. It is 20 minutes easily up here. Sometimes it's a little more. I think that we are in a position here right now as a Town ambulance to address this. The ambulance like Fulton County, Broadalbin, JAVAC, Mayfield, they are all non-for-profits.

Councilman Gritsavage asked, based on what we are looking at for the summer and what we have for staff right now given the fact that Fulton County went out of business, that we might be in a crisis situation?

The Northampton Ambulance, we certainly are responded Mr. VanAlstyne.

Councilman Gritsavage informed the board of the GAVAC meeting held at the Holiday Inn today in Johnstown saying that it was a public hearing that lasted maybe fifteen minutes. A couple of people made statements and nobody objected to GAVAC moving up. Mr. Farquhar spoke in favor of it. Mr. Farquhar noted that there was no opposition. I spoke and said it was seamless when Fulton County Ambulance shut the door with all the agency's getting together and GAVAC moving into help. It worked out well.

The Town of Northampton and Village of Northville can't afford four positions to obviously to start, asked Tom Wood? Obviously to work with the volunteers, It would be great to move it up from 50% to 75% noted Councilman Gritsavage. That would be \$50,000.00 per person stated Supervisor Groff. If you are looking at one person working full time it would be approximately \$150,000 a year explained Councilman Simmons.

Now we are getting into the second part of the discussion, whether we should be billing maybe stated Councilman Gritsavage. There has been a study on EMS calls stated Mr. Farquhar. 80% statewide were BLS calls. 20% could have been critical calls. BLS comes before ALS. If your BLS crew responds they can call out the other crew and there is another procedure to doing that. They can handle it if it is a BLS and they don't require ALS, there is a way of doing that. The problem is that you are not responding to BLS are you asked Supervisor Groff? They are not responding unless Jack is there or one of the other people are there. You or Jon is a paramedic but you don't have a group that are responding to BLS. They do but everybody has a job responded Mr. Farquhar.

We are an aging community and an aging state explained the Supervisor. You are mostly responding with ALS most of the time. Is there a reason why people are not coming to respond to BLS to help people? Just because they are not available, I guess stated Mr. Farquhar. I don't disagree that something doesn't need to be done stated Lori Driscoll. There are 4 EMT graduating from a EMT class shortly. There was talk about getting our younger people involved and supporting paying them to attend schooling. There was suggestion of possibly paying them per call once they received all their ALS training and then possibly paying them full time, per diem or pay a stipend per call. They cannot volunteer once they are paid. If hire part-time ambulance people they're going to be from another area because none of them are going to be from this area. They are going to have to resign being a volunteer in order to work as ALS for the ambulance and be paid. We are not going to have our local people doing the calls anymore. We are not going to have that community involvement. I think that the biggest problem that nobody notices how bad we need it. If they knew how we need drivers or EMT chances are I believe they would be stepping up. I think that we should be looking at that first. I think that there are other options that support the growth of our community.

Terrance Driscoll stated that they did change the law to be an EMT to 17 years of age. You might be able to groom some young people. Possible scholarships. Unfortunately, instead of hurting people's feelings you have to fix the problem stated Tom Wood. The problem is that nobody is funding it.

It was asked of Mr. VanAlstyne if we are near a crisis right now stated Janine Jackson. We do have GAVAC and they have a limited number of ambulances that they have stretched between two counties. If one of the rigs goes down its going to hit the fan. Gloversville is going to get extremely busy this summer and there may be times they are not going to be able to come up here. We are going to be in a crisis very soon if we are not now. Those are very good ideas but we still have immediate issues that needs to be addressed.

Molly Zullo stated that when Fulton Co was in business. They still had problems responding to our calls. When the tones go out and we respond as EMT's, we are waiting for our drivers our concerns. We don't want to have to wait. That affects our response time as well. I'm not against paying someone or raising taxes but if you have a paramedic sitting in the station are, they going to leave with the ambulance without the driver asked the Supervisor? Yes, was the response. We are doing that now.

You could have a driver at home with a radio coordinate over the radio with the paramedic at the station and tell them you are on your way stated Mr. Collins.

There is a lot of response but we can't get them to coordinate. We had 4 drivers show up the other day but no one that was an EMT.

Jon VanAlstyne mentioned that they keep track of our calls. Most of our calls someone usually goes. We usually have someone show up but not a certified person to go.

It depends on the radio communications stated Mr. Farquhar. That is why we bought radios and everyone has a radio.

Why can't that person go and call a person from the Fire Department asked Supervisor Groff.

Jon VanAlstyne: I believe there will be the more training that will be required for our Fire fighters to get training on our stretchers and stuff like that.

Supervisor Groff mentioned that if we are lucky someone else will show up, or maybe GAVAC will show up.

I think we need more people that are certified and we are a small town and it is a long process (approximately a year) to get certified explained Mr. VanAlstyne.

GAVAC is advertising for paramedics all the time stated Mr. Farquhar.

Molly Zullo asked If we recruit, how do we want too? Mr. Farquhar had mentioned that 80% of calls are BLS. But I can tell you when I've been on calls sometimes the calls are BLS but they are ALS. Yes, we can do training but it is not the same as doing on a real person. We need to have hands on to improve the skills that we have. We need the experience.

Jon VanAlstyne: I have some numbers that are just exploring right now. I think what it would take to cover 75% of our calls we would have to hire between 5 or 6 part-time ALS providers at 24 hours a week. You would have them available 12 hours a day you would pick whatever hours the weekends are busy here, that cost for the providers at \$20 an hour would be \$62,012.00.

We are still not guaranteed a driver. If worse come to worse you hire these people and call on the Fire Department.

Steve Collins: The calls that we do not cover approximately 25% of them nobody shows up. Whether it be a driver, an EMT or a medic. The wait usually for the drivers. If you show up and you don't fill out the sheet then that means no one has responded.

We still need that goal of 75% that we are trying to get to.

I would like to see an ALS support system in what we do suggested Mr. VanAlstyne. We need to recruit EMT and not ALS and BLS anymore.

Councilman Simmons: I think that everyone on the Town Board wants the very best ambulance service we could have for the community. We owe it to our citizens. Closing the doors as far as I'm concerned is not an option. How much does the Village contribute toward the ambulance? That comes out of the Towns budget responded the Supervisor. I am disappointed tonight because this was advertised as a public meeting and only two people who showed up from the whole community.

It should be published in the right way not as a public meeting but as a public safety issue explained Mr. Monster. We are going to do this as a second step. I just thought there would be more people here tonight stated Supervisor Groff.

Holly Downing: There is a lot of public concern. There have been a lot of people who come to me because they know that I work at the Sheriff's office.

Councilman Simmons: there are members here from the media that are here tonight but they just don't come to Northville that often unless somebody calls them. We need to advertise it better.

Other towns have wined and dined people to get them to sign up stated Mr. Farquhar.

You may have to pay people today to work. We need people to say they can help 6 hours a week.

Is it legal to give a small stipend if someone responds to a call asked Councilman Gritsavage? If we recruit do you think we can get paid paramedics? Response, Yes.

Do you as a group want to have another meeting to discuss this further and narrow it down where you could agree on a couple of things, put it on paper and get back to us asked Councilman Simmons?

I want people to understand that in order to do this it is going to cost us money and I want them to understand and be informed of what we are looking at doing stated Supervisor Groff.

Someone mentioned to not do just social media advertisement because they do not do social media.

Mayor Spaeth mentioned putting a notice in with the next scheduled Village water billing.

Mayor Spaeth did mention about the question whether the Village pays for the ambulance and he noted that currently the Village contributes nothing to the ambulance. That comes out of an A and a B Fund from the Town. That doesn't mean that is how it has to stay. If that turns out that way then it could be open for discussion to figure out how to move that back to the A Fund so everybody is paying for the ambulance. Let us not lose site of the \$60,000.00 or the \$175,000.00 whatever it is going to cost us for professionals, it is not all tax dollars. There are other revenue sources. You are talking about raising the taxes \$60,000 you are talking about picking up the

cost of the differences of the cost and whatever you are billing. When you get to nailing down and making a decision you can't not look at the cost and the revenue side of it. Discuss ensued.

The Town Board noted that they will be holding a Public meeting on Tuesday, May 7, 2019 at 7 p.m. with the Northampton Ambulance and the Northampton Town Board at the Town hall, 412 S. Main Street. To discuss multiple solutions to address this matter and to get input. The ambulance will put together a flyer to go out and it will be advertised for the public to come. It was suggested to contact the Town of Hope and Benson and invite them to come to the next meeting.

Councilman Gritsavage motioned to adjourn at 8:55 p.m. and seconded by Councilman Simmons and passed by a vote of
4-Ayes 0-Nays

Respectfully submitted,

Elaine Mihalik, Town Clerk