

**HORICON TOWN BOARD
JOINT MEETING WITH TOWN OF CHESTER TOWN BOARD**

**November 4, 2021
7:00 PM**

Horicon Town Board:

Present at meeting:	Sylvia Smith	Supervisor
	Michael Geraci	Councilperson
	Frank Hill	Councilperson
	Peter Palmer	Councilperson
	Robert Olson	Councilperson
	Krista Wood	Town Clerk
Absent:	Frank Hill	Councilperson

Chestertown Town Board:

Present at meeting:	Craig Leggett	Supervisor
	Karen Durose	Councilperson
	Larry Turcotte	Councilperson
	Chris Aiken	Councilperson
	Mike Packer	Councilperson
	Mindy Conway	Town Clerk

Also: Diane Smith, Cash Jones, Bob Smith, Jack and Pam Crossman, Christine Hayes, Ralph Bartlett, Jodi Bartlett, Travis Howe, Izzy Modert, Kathleen Modert, Josh Wells, Adam Kinsey, Thomas Galley, Sarah Dinnick, Connor Marz, Corey Ouellette, Colin and Stacy Brayton, Amy Culver, Joc Connelly, Jim and Sarah Hayes, Kevin Feldt, Ed and Doris Gargan, Kevin Healy, Debra Eves, Chris Kostyun, and others.

Supervisor Smith, Town of Horicon, opened the meeting at 7:00pm. Supervisor Smith along with Supervisor Leggett welcomed guests.

-NWEMS Chairperson Diane Smith explained that the cost of everything is going up and, as such, the squad costs are increasing exponentially. She said the squad would like to be able to offer competitive wages and benefits to staff. However, she noted it is difficult to do with the current funding they have. She said the increase they were given by the Horicon Town Board for 2022 is generous. She said the squad will have to find other ways to find funding.

-NWEMS Treasurer Cash Jones provided the Board members with the squad's financial report and reviewed the report in detail. He noted the largest source of funding for the squad comes from the towns. One issue they face is the fluctuating income with an increase in the summer months and a decrease in the winter months. He said in the leaner months the squad will fund operations by draining down the bank accounts. He further added that the squad finances are sound with revenue exceeding expenditures at this time, however, this is largely due to the fact that they received stimulus money through the Payroll Protection Act. If the squad had not received that money they would have had to drain down the bank accounts to fund operations. The Board members had several questions which Mr. Jones answered.

-Chris Kostyun, Emergency Management Resources LLC, explained that his company does the billing for the NWEMS. He explained in detail how the billing and reimbursement process works. He noted the reimbursement received is far less than what is billed. Mr. Kostyun explained the various payment sources, how they work, and how much each source pays. He explained that in a normal year they bill out approximately \$300,000 but only see a recovery of about \$15,000. He said the only way to increase revenue is to increase the fees charged. There were many questions which resulted in lengthy discussion regarding billing and payments.

-There was lengthy discussion regarding the increasing challenges of funding operations and recruiting staff. Key points of discussion: 1) difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff based on the inability to offer competitive

wages and benefits, and 2) difficulty in maintaining a sound and stable financial position due to seasonal fluctuations in income and low financial recovery on billed services.

-In an effort to address the challenges facing the squad there was discussion regarding the best way to move forward to ensure the sustainability of the squad. Four suggestions were made: 1) things can continue the way they are, 2) there can be further discussion on the possibility of a County-wide EMS, 3) the option of switching to a private EMS can be researched, or 4) research can be done on the possibility of creating an EMS taxing district.

-Several members of squads from surrounding areas spoke about the success they have had since their towns created a special EMS taxing district. It was noted that funding has become much less of an issue, cash flow is much more stable, they are now able to be more competitive in their recruitment efforts, and their retention rates have increased.

Privilege of the Floor:

-Kevin Feldt asked several questions about the taxing district. He said he is against the County-wide and private EMS. He said with a local EMS you know you have an ambulance when you need it. He is in favor of the taxing district.

-Chris Kostyun noted that if there is a possibility of going over the 2% tax cap in the Town's budgets with the taxing district the Town can clearly explain why and no one is likely going to say no.

-Christine Hayes said if there is a tax district and the squad sets their budget then the Town cannot dictate how they spend their money. Johnsbury EMS rep, Joe Connelly, said his squad negotiates with the Town and if they do not agree either party can cancel at any time.

-Supervisor Leggett said Lake George is looking at a tax district and he feels there would be good cooperation to create a new system, noting the main thing is that the calls are going to be answered.

-Stacy Brayton explained that something needs to be done because there is already a bidding war for staff.

-Matt McKenzie asked if the current issue with recruiting and retention is the inability to offer competitive wages and benefits. NWEMS member Izzy Modert said this is the case, in addition to the fact that people get burned out.

-Diane Smith thanked the public in attendance, the first responders that came from surrounding areas, and the Town Boards. She said she expects this will continue to be a positive on-going effort.

There being no further comment from the floor, Supervisor Smith said they will continue with further discussions on how best to move forward.

Adjourn:

There being no further business to attend to the meeting was adjourned at 8:50 PM by MOTION of Councilperson Olson and Councilperson Durose, all in favor.

Respectfully Submitted:

Town Clerk