

**Horicon Town Board:**

Present at meeting:	Mike Geraci	Supervisor
	Robert Olson	Councilperson
	Peter Palmer	Councilperson
	Krista Wood	Town Clerk
Absent from meeting:	Frank Hill	Councilperson
	Rob 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 Present:** Town Counsel Bob Hafner, Assessor Christine Hayes, Joe Koch, Rob Smith (Horicon representative to NWEMS, and Ed Sim (Chairman of NWEMS Board of Directors).

**Supervisor Geraci called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.**

**Opening Remarks by Supervisors Geraci and Leggett:**

-Supervisor Geraci explained this is a special meeting to discuss the potential formation of a special EMS Tax District. He said he and Supervisor Leggett have done extensive research on the various options of how to fund the delivery of emergency services and what is the best option for each town. Supervisor Geraci noted that if the special tax district is formed each town would have its own individual tax district not a joint tax district. He said the reason for the joint meeting is to have one unified message that is heard by both Boards even though each Board will make its own decision.

-Supervisor Leggett said he agrees with Supervisor Geraci and noted it is good to be at this point. He said the process can be fairly simple and even though there are details to figure out this is the starting point.

**Overview of Ambulance District Formation Process:**

-Supervisor Geraci asked Bob Hafner, Town Counsel, to review the special tax district and the necessary steps the Towns must take for formation of the district.

-Bob Hafner, Town Counsel, explained that these two special tax districts would help to guarantee emergency medical services. He said what they have found is that Towns are facing increasing issues with the growing costs of providing emergency services. Mr. Hafner said many of the towns are moving toward the special tax district as a way of collecting funds based on property tax to provide emergency services. There would be a specific line in the Budget with the amount to be raised by taxes and all of the money collected would go directly to the EMS. It lets taxpayers know how much it costs to have these services. This is the exact same process as the Town does with the Horicon Fire Department. Mr. Hafner said there are several steps to forming a district and reviewed the steps. First, the Town must develop a Map, Plan and Report which lays out the expected costs for the district, how much will be in the budget, and how much it will cost the taxpayer based on the rate/1000. The Map, Plan and Report must first be filed with the Town Clerk. Second, the Town must prepare and post a Public Hearing Order that includes the cost of the district and how much the district will raise; this must be posted at least ten to twenty days before the public hearing. Third, the Town Board will hold a public hearing, perform SEQOR, and then consider a Resolution to establish the district. Lastly, once the resolution is passed the

Town must give the public thirty days notice, and if they (members of the public) want to have it placed on a referendum they can formally petition the Town Board. If there is no petition filed then the Final Order must be adopted on or before September 20, 2022. Mr. Hafner said typically most Towns look at it as they are already providing emergency services, they are now going to account to the public for those services in a special line item in the budget, and people are going to know that number on their tax bill is to specifically save their lives. He said this is what is driving this proposal, besides the fact that costs have been going up for many of the north country ambulance services. He further explained that, if the Horicon Town Board decides to move forward, the Public Hearing order for Horicon must be set at the July 21 meeting, with a special meeting for the public hearing around August 4, with the Final Order adopted September 15. For the Chestertown Town Board their public Hearing order would be adopted at the July 12 meeting, the public hearing would be August 9, with the Final Order adoption on September 13.

Mr. Hafner explained that this will be a Town District, therefore, the Town will have control of the district and how much will be raised by taxes.

**Questions by Town Board Members:**

-Horicon Councilman Olson asked if this funding will come out of the General Fund and go into the Special Tax District. Mr. Hafner said it would not be in the General Fund, it would be a separate tax and separate line item in the budget just like the Fire Department and Schroon Lake Park District.

-Chestertown Councilman Aiken asked if both Towns raise money through taxes would the money be combined among the new district. Mr. Hafner said each town will have their own district, each town will raise their own money, and each Town will have their own contract with NWEMS or whomever they choose to contract with.

-Chestertown Councilwoman Durose asked who owns the building. Mr. Hafner said towns do not own ambulance buildings unless they run their own squad.

-Supervisor Leggett asked Mr. Hafner to explain what the difference is between this tax district and the one Lake George created. Mr. Hafner said the concern expressed by Lake George was that they would not be able to provide twenty-four hour service to the community. They felt if they created a Town district with town employees then they would be better able to retain members.

-Horicon Councilman Palmer asked if the proposed budget from the EMS is the combined budget for both Towns. Supervisor Geraci said this is strictly a proposed budget, not a final budget, and Mr. Sim will explain it further.

-Chestertown Councilman Turcotte asked what the advantage to the Town would be if a district is formed. Mr. Hafner said this is a policy decision for each Town Board, however, he has found that Towns have wanted to have a specific line item in the budget so people can see this money is designated to saving lives. He said this assures that every dollar raised in taxes goes to EMS. He noted this helps people understand the cost. Mr. Hafner reiterated this is a Town Board policy decision not an attorney decision.

-Supervisor Leggett said emergency services has been the biggest increase in the budget and this would allow more transparency. He also noted that they would contract with NWEMS but also have the option to contract with any ambulance service.

**NWEMS Comments – Ed Sim:**

-Ed Sim, Chairman of the Board of the NWEMS reviewed and explained their proposed 2023 budget in detail. He said the squads have found the biggest challenge has been finding and retaining the number of qualified

personnel needed; it has become a bidding war between squads. He said their budget has increased mainly due to the constantly rising costs of operations. He said they had to raise the pay rate for personnel and recently voted to provide benefits as well. Mr. Sim reviewed the revenue the squad receives which includes money from the town, reimbursement from insurance companies for calls for service, and donations. Mr. Sim said they are trying to do the best they can to provide service to both Towns and they want to continue to do so, however, they cannot sustain the way things are right now. So, if it is not a tax district then they will need to sit down and have serious talks with the two towns about how they can sustain a squad.

-Chestertown Councilwoman Durose asked what, besides transparency, is the main advantage of a tax district.

-Supervisor Leggett said the whole employment situation means that at some point it may be too much for the squad to handle. At this point the County may come in to provide the personnel. He said by each Town having their own tax district it provides more options in the future to consolidate districts and expenses.

-Chestertown Councilman Turcotte asked what the contract services amount will be and does the squad have capital expenses in the budget. He asked if there is enough money in the budget to cover expenses Mr. Sim said they are working to develop a capital plan and the funds to support that plan.

-Supervisor Geraci asked if they create individual tax districts would there be an option in the future to consolidate with other districts at different tax levies. He asked if it is even legal to consolidate those districts into a single tax district for those communities that want to be part of it. Mr. Hafner said each town would first need their own tax district in order to consolidate then there would be an agreement between the towns as to how they would deal with that.

-Supervisor Geraci said the Town Boards must decide what is right going forward, but the bottom line is when someone calls 9-1-1 they expect to get a trained professional that is going to respond, but that is not currently happening when you only have two people on an ambulance during the day. The person may get the next closest squad which may be as far away as Glens Falls. He said the question is the cost; what is the right thing for Horicon, what is the right thing for Chestertown. He said these are the deliberations that need to happen relatively soon. The bottom line is something needs to be done because these are real life issues.

**Privilege of the Floor:**

-Assessor Christine Hayes said the way it works right now is that everyone pays the same, whereas with a tax district it is based on the assessed value.

-Chestertown Town Councilman Turcotte asked Supervisor Geraci if he had come up with a contract of services amount yet for the Map, Plan and Report. Supervisor Geraci said he has not he is still working on it. Mr. Turcotte said he asks because in the current NWEMS budget there will be a shortfall in revenue if the towns contribute the same amount. He said he feels the Towns need to increase the amount of funding for the NWEMS. Supervisor Geraci said it is incumbent upon the Boards to look at all options in order to make the best decision.

-Supervisor Leggett said the property tax would be based on the taxpayer's assessment, which, based on the average home value is very low. He said for a very low cost there is guaranteed ambulance service.

-Paul Gregory said, thinking of how the public may look at this, they may ask if the General fund will be reduced if a tax district is created. Supervisor Leggett said the general fund line item would be reduced and the tax district line would be increased. Mr. Gregory asked if the Squad could come back mid-year and ask for more money. Supervisor Leggett said they could not because the money would be set in the contract. Mr. Gregory

asked if there is anything in the proposed budget for new equipment. Mr. Sim said he will produce a capital plan for equipment.

**Closing Remarks:**

-Supervisor Geraci said he hopes everyone understands the commitment in regard to this. He said a decision will need to be made in the next few weeks.

**Adjourn...** There being no further business to attend to the meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM by MOTION of Councilperson Olson and Councilperson Palmer, all in favor.

Respectfully Submitted:

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Town Clerk