

## MINUTES

**AMBULANCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING  
MONDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2022  
WILLIAM L. PULLEN MUNICIPAL BUILDING MEETING ROOM  
ONLINE NON-INTERACTIVE ON TOWN HALL STREAMS  
6:30 p.m.**

**Committee members present:** Heather Jackson, Jesse Casas, Tracy Weed, Patrick Costigan, and Ken Keiran

**Others present:** Jesse Thompson (EMS Chief), and Kevin Curry

- 1. Call Meeting to Order:** at 6:35 p.m. by Tracey Weed.
- 2. Approve minutes from September 19, 2022:** Tabled.
- 3. Updates on ICSD:**

Jesse said Kevin McGinnis gave him a phone call. Jesse had given everything he'd asked for: cost data reporting, did not get all the numbers as for some he's relied on dispatch. Our dispatch for the county is at emergency staffing levels, and the communications director is sitting behind a console most of the day now. Lincoln and Waldo counties are also at that level; they just can't get people. That was part of his conversation with Kevin, who wants a snapshot of it.

Jesse is also doing cost data reporting for Medicare. There are things not included in his budget such as town manager (human resources), town treasurer (accounting), electricity and heat for the bay floor that the ambulance sits on which is not in there as the Town of Union pays for it. In answer to Patrick, Jesse said the phone line is the only part of his budget that ties to the building. Medicare wants to know the true cost of running an ambulance service, because if you have an ambulance service coming to this town to cover the three towns, what is going to be the cost for them to do that. Obviously, the ambulance doesn't have to pay the whole cost of it; he did the best he could figuring out – if 50% is emergency side, 50% is town office, then take the 50% of what he's got divided by seven because there are seven apparatus sitting up there, and the fire department pays six sevenths of the cost.

Kevin is making the calls to start setting up interviews with people around the towns, ER, dispatch, law enforcement, etc. Mike Senecal of NorthStar will be doing the state inspection of the service: training records, truck inspection, interviewing crews, etc.

Patrick asked about a survey. Jesse said they will take care of the surveying of the people. They will expand further.

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Patrick asked if it would be a transparent process. Jesse said he has no idea what type of questions they're asking. Tracy said it's probably part of being that independent, third party, unbiased. Patrick said we could just know what the questions are before. Ken said that might have an implication of bias. Jesse Casas said it might potentially be coaching people about it; transparency will be at the end. Patrick said the town managers, select boards, all the major players are on the list which Jesse confirmed. Patrick suggested as much openness as possible.

Jesse will give Tracy Kevin's email. She can reach out to him. He does not want it construed that he's trying to influence. She will also ask about the PowerPoint.

Patrick was not there for Kevin's presentation. Heather suggested he watch Town Hall Streams.

Jesse Casas clarified his quote "it's almost like a hidden cost to the Town of Union" – the percentage of the actual building, payroll, etc. When Washington pays its share, or Appleton, actually the costs for the building aren't in there. All these costs that Jesse is having to provide to Medicare are actually not factored into what our assessment is. It was eye opening to him, that Union is shouldering the whole of that; our towns are getting billed for everything else but not that.

Tracy asked if there's any way to know what those ballpark dollar amounts equal out to.

There was further discussion on how Jesse breaks down the budget.

In answer to Patrick, Jesse said they've been saying for years Medicare doesn't pay their fair share. Now they want proof: show us everything you spend money on, how much does it actually cost to run a service. This is nationwide. If we don't do it, we take a 10% hit on our reimbursement. Smaller than us services will just take the 10% hit, then you've got bigger services reporting, and you've got a skew in results. That's why it's important and he's staying on top of it. They don't have to start collecting data until 2023. Tracy said Kevin McGinnis has incorporated that data collection into his assessment which is why Jesse's going through that now.

Jesse said Kevin is doing his piece as well. In answer to Tracy, Jesse said completion date looks like end of October. Heather suggested Tracy get in touch with him re: a public forum or mailings as we're on kind of a time crunch. Patrick concurred that the people need to be given a voice.

Heather wants to get on Union's select board agenda and feels the Appleton and Washington boards have been discussing it more than Union's.

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Jesse said the third meeting of the Blue Ribbon Commission will be October 6. They've concluded they've regionalized the schools, it was a disaster, and that's what they need to do for EMS. Regionalization will probably be forced on us at the county level. This county wants no part of it. The state figures to bring all the ambulance services from the red to the black will be \$65 million (rough estimate) just to get them caught up. Their concern is services won't use it to pay people, increase their payments, or staffing levels but just give rate reductions to keep towns. They are trying to figure out how towns don't take the money and do that.

In answer to Ken, Jesse estimated 280 services in the state, a little less than that now.

In answer to Patrick, Jesse said the Blue Ribbon Commission is made up of EMS professionals and legislators. You can watch it via zoom live on October 6.

Also in answer to Patrick, Jesse said 911 is county based, and you get assessed for that at the county level – the communications center and the sheriff's office. Tracy said EMS receives the benefit from dispatch, but Union doesn't pay a portion to Knox County Communications Center; that's covered under the individual county taxes, so they're getting the money from property taxes. Jesse said they break it down into how many police, fire, and EMS calls are in each town, it's put into a formula, and that's how the towns come up with their assessment for the communications center.

Also in answer to Patrick, Jesse and Tracy said the county head people are mandated to make sure there are EMS services in every town. Jesse said all towns in Knox County have EMS coverage.

Patrick mentioned representatives who are now knocking on his door. One said there's a feeling in the legislature about funding some of this. Jesse said that's what the Blue Ribbon Commission is talking about.

Kevin Curry talked about regionalization. He said in Knox County, in all your services, the overhead expense of running the operation is an extremely lean percentage of the operation. He discussed how our county commissioners did nothing for EMS. His compliments to Jesse and Tracy for trying to get a second truck. Allocation of resources was discussed.

Jesse talked about QA (quality assurance). Every week Kevin is identifying the previous week. Jesse has been MacGyvering. University of Maine has been looking into the reasons for short staffing; it was supposed to be done a year ago. Instead of that they are getting pushed to do leave behind naloxone, now going to be pushed to do suboxone. Those two hot button topics are pushing providers away. They have to follow what Maine EMS says. Tracy said the board is appointed by the governor. Jesse said they are thinking about redoing all of that as well.

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Kevin Curry brought up homeless encampments which we don't have in Knox County.

Jesse said they are making policies broad spectrum for the big cities. We might deal with one or two drug overdoses per year, usually transient population. Our communities are mostly older people with mobility, cardiac, or respiratory problems. We have to keep up with the training requirements. It's not getting any easier. There are people getting tired of it because things are changing so fast.

Ken summarized: pressure from the state on these band aids plus, for this committee, the problem of the towns questioning the value of the service.

Jesse said he also has to enforce all his members are covid vaccinated. They now have to be flu vaccinated. He asked how the state will enforce that: they said they will send out a survey. In answer to Ken, Jesse said he only lost one person out of 20 due to the vaccination requirements, but it was a hit, a person doing 24 hours a week. Jesse clarified he is not averse to the vaccination. This year they have done 523 calls so far; last year at this same point they did 436. Jesse noted there is a higher population and more mutual aid. Kevin Curry mentioned compassion fatigue. Tracy mentioned covid and people not putting loved ones in care facilities. Tracy brought up no-transport calls, 29 for 2022 and 13 for 2021. Jesse said there are too many options for the providers to choose from, difficult and time-consuming for his staff. He sits on the data committee for the state and tries to make them understand.

In answer to Patrick, Jesse said he's been holding off until we get done with what Kevin McGinnis has to do, or as Tracy put it his recommendations and outcomes from his assessment and suggestions. Patrick said this seems like a condensed timeline. Ken said didn't he say by Thanksgiving he was hoping to have some real data to us? Patrick's sensitivity is asking the people what they want, as they're going to have to pay for it. Ken said generally the towns want more service so assumes that's the gist of this: we don't want to lose that resource, we want to have something there, and if we buy into it that's what we're being asked to advocate. Tracy said the towns can accept it or go to an alternate path; they might enter a six-month agreement.

Jesse said if towns pull out, Union does not have to cover whereas fire does. Who's going to be covering? Other towns would have to jack up their rates more. It's fair that Washington and Appleton keep Union informed of their plans. He got blindsided by Washington having a conversation with Liberty.

Jesse Casas said he is on the budget committee, and he's here to find out what's going on. Their town meeting is at a different time. They had not anticipated that much of an increase. Getting some real numbers ASAP gives them time as a budget committee to understand and work together. They talked to Liberty because beholden to the taxpayers. Neither Washington nor Appleton has a big commercial tax base.

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Jesse wants to see what comes back from Kevin, see what the towns want, can we do it in stages. If things go awry he would almost keep his budget flatlined. The fuel line item definitely has to go up and is out of his control.

In answer to Patrick, Jesse said his budget deadline is end of December usually before Christmas break.

Jesse Casas asked for an approximate idea of how much it's going to increase. Jesse said he'll see that number. Jesse Casas feels a lot better about this than he did back in January. Speaking on his behalf he thinks Union ambulance is great; but at the same time, it's all about money, retirees on fixed income, etc.

Jesse hates it being about money because he got into this to help people. He has to do the dollars and cents. He also doesn't want his tax bill to go up.

Heather asked about paying for regionalization. Jesse said it falls under what the county is willing to do. They could look at all the data and decide where to put an ambulance, like South Hope instead of Union. Who knows? Union is the closest thing to a regional service in this county. Jesse said fire departments are already talking about some form of regionalization. Jesse noted if someone calls 911, he's going.

Mutual aid was further discussed. Kevin Curry said it could be a scary situation, with potential major holes when a mutual aid call comes in for example from Camden, or a second call; minutes do count.

In answer to Patrick, Jesse said we are mutual with Northeast.

Ken said he was impressed with the average time of our ambulance getting on scene.

Patrick would like to see per town time to get on scene. Jesse thought he did a breakdown.

Tracy reiterated she will contact Kevin McGinnis and ask for the PowerPoint.

Patrick liked a flat budget going forward. Jesse will have to account for Maine EMS. The Blue Ribbon Committee could change everything.

Jesse suggested the committee watch the Blue Ribbon Committee's upcoming meeting. Wednesday he will be in Bangor with Kevin McGinnis talking to MMA about ICSD.

Heather mentioned an update for the select board. Tracy will email tonight.

Patrick noted email communications have been great.

#### **4. Set next meeting date:** October 24.

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**5. Adjourn:**

Motion by: Jesse Casas  
2<sup>nd</sup> by: Patrick Costigan  
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Meeting adjourned at 8:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sherry Abaldo  
Secretary