

## BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING

Tuesday March 15, 2022 – 10:00 AM via Zoom

**PRESENT:** Neal Pilson, Chair; Al Hanson, Selectman; Roger Manzolini, Selectman; Danielle Fillio, Richmond Town Administrator; Roger Kavanagh, West Stockbridge Selectman; Eric Shimelonis, West Stockbridge; Cathleen Keresy, West Stockbridge; Marie Ryan, W. S. Town Administrator; Austen White, Richmond Fire Dept.; Steve Traver, Richmond/W.S. Fire Chief

The meeting was opened at 10:00 AM and turned over to Danielle to introduce Steve Traver, the Fire Chief for Richmond and West Stockbridge, who is extremely knowledgeable. He has a long history of EMT service.

Austin White, a member of the Richmond Fire Dept., was asked to report on the work he has been doing in connection with developing staffing for the ambulance service. Austin noted that the biggest problem in obtaining staffing is that most of the members of the department are volunteers who work regular jobs Monday through Friday. That often means that, in order to answer a call, he must bring in other services from surrounding towns. The National Fire Protection Association suggests an 8-minute response for ambulances. Richmond's response time is between 20 to 30 minutes to arrive on scene.

He has been working on a proposal for a shared ambulance service between Richmond and West Stockbridge that will hire two new firefighter EMT's or two EMTs who could get their firefighters certification, which the towns would pay for. That would allow the towns to cross-staff ambulance and fire, with the primary goal of staffing the ambulance. Currently, both towns are often dependent on mutual aid, especially for an ambulance call as there is only one ambulance. If a fire call comes in there are volunteers who might be able to supplement, depending on mutual aid. There have been times when volunteers have been asked to come in from their regular job to fill in, but that is not sustainable.

The price for salaries and benefits for two additional people will be \$132,000 per year. Richmond has applied for a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Assn. to cover the cost of a fulltime staff for three years. The Town would then agree to continue to fund those positions for an additional three years after the end of the grant. That means that for six years there would be guaranteed staffing. Those grant-funded employees would have to be sent to the Mass. Firefighting Academy at no cost to the town. In response to a question as to the availability of such staff, Austin said that there are two EMT students who will have completed their firefighting education in early April. This new staff would be overseen by him and by Steve Traver.

The day-to-day operations are run by the Fire Chief and Austin who are responsible for maintenance of the firetruck, fire stations, etc. in both Richmond and West Stockbridge. Currently, volunteers live mostly in Pittsfield or Lee and this creates inevitable delays in

responding to a call. From 4:00 PM to 8:00 AM, the staff consists of normal full-time volunteers who can respond off-duty with the stipulation that they will receive a stipend. Overtime costs are not great, even when a call comes in at the last minute of a shift.

Roger asked whether, under this mutual agreement, the two new employees would be housed in the Richmond Fire Department. Eric Shimelonis responded that Roger was correct in that assumption and that this agreement will be the starting point for a future where both towns could have ambulances and staff housed there. In summer, if the call volume increases in West Stockbridge, the ambulance could be moved temporarily to West Stockbridge. The agreement was seen as flexible in that regard.

Ambulance receipts in Richmond last summer was \$26,000 billed. Prior to the loss of staff, billing was closer to \$50,000 to \$60,000. Richmond's application to the SAFER Grant has made it to the third round, which is excellent news. In fact, Richmond is apparently the "poster child" in the State for regionalization and districting, which is very helpful in obtaining the grant.

A discussion of several details ensued including how the cost of salaries and benefits for two additional staff could be covered if Richmond does not win the grant. Austin noted that the ambulance is self-funding and an annual operating budget of \$50,000 could maintain the service. The decision on the grant will be available to Richmond by the end of May, with funds being forwarded by September.

Austin noted that 8 EMT certified volunteers are currently in the department. Because of a waiver available due to the COVID pandemic, an ambulance would be allowed to go on a call with one EMT and a firefighter first responder. Without the waiver, two EMT's are required. A full-time staff needs two EMT's on the off-hours or one EMT and a first responder under an emergency waiver. Currently, there is one certified EMT on staff and two in class.

Austin explained that a call with a need for a higher acuity of care requires the presence of a higher-level paramedic from another agency who will join the ambulance on route. This service is billed to the town (intercept fees).

Neal asked Danielle and Marie if they were comfortable with the increase that will be required in the budget. Danielle said Richmond is fine where we are, and the agreement will make it possible to use more of the ambulance receipts to get a \$45,000 differential instead of \$60,000 for each town. Danielle explained that, as in all other mutual agreements with West Stockbridge, Richmond would retain the lead and take the initial responsibility for expenses, with West Stockbridge paying Richmond to split the cost. Essentially, this agreement does not represent a huge budgetary impact on the towns.

Eric Shimelonis said that this type of arrangement is precisely what was recommended to West Stockbridge by a professional consultant. He felt it makes sense and will financially impact West Stockbridge, even if the grant does not come through. Cathleen Keresy agreed.

A discussion of how the costs would be split between the two towns resulted in a consensus that the split would be 50-50 and that the agreement will be a benefit to both towns and to Berkshire County as it provides an opportunity to do mutual aid and obtain fees from those calls. Neal mentioned talk he has heard about the possibility of a county-wide ambulance service in the near future. If that happens within the term of the agreement are the towns locked into their original agreement? Austin advised that the grant funds could be applied to such a county-wide project, but he seriously doubts that any such thing will happen within the next ten years.

Neal then asked what are the next steps? He suggested that the two Boards meet separately to discuss going forward and then ask their Town Counsel to draft a six-year agreement. Eric agreed that this item will be on the next agenda of the West Stockbridge BOS meeting. The Board will then approach their Finance Committee to advise of the new budgeting needs and, having reached consensus, will be ready to make a motion for the Town Meeting. Neal said Richmond will follow the same process.

Both boards thanked Austin for his expertise and hard work on putting together this proposal, which he presented with excellent clarity.

There being no further business, Neal moved that the meeting of the Richmond Board of Selectmen be adjourned. He was seconded by Roger and the motion was adopted by unanimous roll-call vote: Pilson , aye; Manzolini, aye; Hanson, aye.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 AM.

Signed:

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Neal Pilson, Chair