



Town Board

Joint Informational Meeting with the Town of Horicon– Ambulance District July 6, 2022

The Town Board of the Town of Chester along with the Town of Horicon Town Board convened at the Town of Horicon Town Hall, 6604 State Route 8, New York, at 7:00 pm.

Roll Call:

Horicon Town Board: Supervisor Michael Geraci, Peter Palmer, Robert Olson, and Krista Wood, Town Clerk. Frank Hill and Rob Hill were absent.

Chester Town Board: Supervisor Craig Leggett, Karen DuRose, Mike Packer, Chris Aiken, and Larry Turcotte.

Informational Meeting:

Supervisor Geraci, Town of Horicon, **opened** the Special Joint Informational Meeting at 7:00 pm with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Supervisor Geraci thanked everyone on behalf of both Boards for coming, the members who are here, Board Members Rob Smith and Ed Sim, and thanked all the EMS members not present for the services they provide on a daily basis.

Supervisor Geraci reminded everyone that both Towns came together back in the last quarter of 2021 to begin discussions of the future of sustainability of the EMS. At that time they discussed various budgets and financial burdens of both communities and North Warren EMS. Since then extensive research has been conducted on options on how to fund the delivery of emergency medical services and what is best for both communities. Whether it is individualized or similar delivery. It is important to know that if this is formed it will be two (2) individual tax districts; one (1) of Chester and one (1) for Horicon. The reason why we are meeting together as one board is so that we have one unified message and discussions can be heard by all of us. It is important to note that how committed the members are of both Boards that they agreed to meet together to hear the issue simultaneously.

Supervisor Geraci asked Supervisor Leggett if he had any opening remarks.

Supervisor Leggett said he agrees with Supervisor Geraci and that it is great to be at this point in time, here tonight and it can be a simple process.

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

Mr. Hafner explained that these two special districts would help to guarantee emergency medical services. Mr. Hafner said ambulance service has historically been under the general fund and the State has found that towns are facing increasing issues with the growing costs of providing emergency services and that many 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 to the EMS, this allows the taxpayers to see how much cost goes toward the services. A special district first has an area where service is to be provided; for this district it would be the entire

town. The Town must develop a Map, Plan, and Report which lays out an area where service to be provided; for this district it would be the entire town, 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 be filed with the Town Clerk, then 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, then the Town Board will hold a public hearing, perform SEQ, and then consider a Resolution to establish the district. Once a resolution is passed, the Town must give the public thirty days' notice, and if the public wants to have it placed on a referendum they can formally petition the Town Board. Mr. Hafner said typically most Towns look at it as they are already providing emergency services in the general fund, and now they are 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 to each Town Board their timeline if they decide to move forward. Mr. Hafner explained that this will be a Town District, therefore, the Town will have control of the District and how much money will be raised by taxes.

Town Board Member Questions:

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

Mr. Aiken, Chester Councilman, 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 North Warren EMS or whomever they choose to contract with.

Mrs. DuRose, Chester Councilwoman, asked who owns the building. Mr. Hafner said Towns do not own ambulance buildings unless they run their own squad.

Chester 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.

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

Mr. Turcotte, Chester Councilman, 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 and this assures that every dollar raised in taxes goes to EMS. He

said 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 and that they would contract with NWEMS but would also have the option to contract with any ambulance service.

North Warren Emergency Squad Comments:

Ed Sim, Chairman of the Board of the NWEMS 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. 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 and 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.

Mrs. 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 some point the County may come in to provide the personnel and by each Town having their own tax district it provides more options in the future to consolidate districts and expenses.

Mr. Turcotte asked what the contract services amount will be and does the squad have capital expenses in the budget. Mr. Sim replied that they are working to develop a capital plan and the funds to support that plan.

Horicon 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 and 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. 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.

Mr. 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. 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 replied that 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 and a decision will need to be made in the next few weeks.

On a motion by Mr. Olson, seconded by Mr. Palmer, meeting **adjourned** at 8:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Town Clerk