

## Emergency Services Committee Meeting Minutes – June 13, 2017

The second meeting of the Emergency Services Committee investigating alternative ways to offer emergency services in the future was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chairman Craig Gondeck on Tuesday, June 13, 2017 at the Watab Town Hall. Those present were Ed Kacures, Mike Horner (Gold Cross Ambulance), Dick Raveling, Tom Travaglio (Gold Cross Ambulance), Paul McIntyre (God Cross Ambulance), Jason Krueger, Rob Jacobs, Lloyd Erdmann, Craig Gondeck, Todd Waytashek, Pat Spence, Bob Raveling, John Olson, Maureen Graber, Mike Couri, Bob Ruppe, Chris Scheel, and Dale Rogholt. Following the Pledge of Allegiance, the minutes of the May meeting were approved through a motion by Craig Gondeck, second by John Olson, and passed.

Three representatives from Gold Cross Ambulance introduced themselves and described their service to more than a six hundred square mile area ranging from north of Kimball in the south to the edge of Motley in the north and between Foley and Richmond going east to west. They work with more than eighty first responder systems. Computer tracking of their service calls determines where the ambulances are posted, and this is re-evaluated at least three times each year. They explained how this is a successful system for determining where ambulances should be posted, and it is used across the nation. Previously they housed an ambulance at Rice and Royalton, but they moved them to Sauk Rapids. The only site that will always stay consistent as a station is the City of St. Cloud. There are eleven ambulances scheduled during the day for our area. The closest ambulances to Watab are housed at Sauk Rapids and Sartell, but when a dispatch call comes in the closest ambulance at that moment is the one that responds. They add crews as the need demands. Gold Cross Ambulance would enter our location into their system to determine if housing an ambulance at Watab would be a good fit. 7 – 8 crews St. Cloud. The only one that stays consistent is the St. Cloud station. Questions asked were:

- Do you have a sense of the call volume in the township? They will get that information for Watab from their Rochester office including the average response times for each call.
- Is there a mandated response time? Yes, the government mandates response time criteria. Information can be found at the EMSRB website. Minnesota has tighter response time requirements than the national ones. Tom thought they would be most likely to have less than a nine-minute response time from Sauk Rapids to Watab.
- Maureen explained that she got 911 dispatch information from the county dispatcher for four cancelled calls in April.

Date	Time of Call	Location	Rice Dispatched	Rice Cleared	Total Time
4/5/2017	15:38:31	Sucker Creek Rd	15:49:51	15:50:24	33 seconds
	Rice FD		15:50:18	16:05:57	15.05 minutes
4/12/2017	10:41:04	Pines Edge	10:43:52	10:47:54	4.02 minutes
	Rice FD		10:47:04	10:47:11	.07 seconds
4/12/2017	2:08:18	Rockwood	2:12:41	2:28:18	15.37 minutes
4/23/2017	2:12:57	W Lake Rd	2:14:41	2:21:20	6.39 minutes

On the April 5<sup>th</sup> call, Gold Cross transported the patient to the hospital. April 12<sup>th</sup>, Gold Cross cleared the patient without transport; no charge by them to patient. On April 12<sup>th</sup>, the deputy monitored the patient until Gold Cross transported him. On April 23<sup>rd</sup>, the deputy assisted Gold Cross-patient was cleared with no transport; no charge by them to the patient. Maureen explained that the township paid \$1,400 for those cancelled calls to the City of Rice. The township does not bill anyone for a cancelled call.

- If Gold Cross has an ambulance that goes out from Sauk Rapids to Watab, do you pull an ambulance in to Sauk Rapids? Yes, ambulances are shifted; the dispatch center helps regulate the locations. All the rucks are on radar, so the dispatchers know where they are. 911 transfers the call to the ambulance. All the ambulances are dispatched from one place.
- How long have you been with Gold Cross Ambulance? Tom said that he came here when Murphy Ambulance sold out. Gold Cross had thirty-four personnel in 1995 and four ambulances. They now have one hundred-six employees and fourteen ambulances.
- Does Gold Cross pay rent where they are housed? No, the only place they will pay rent is at the new Cop House in St. Cloud. They own a building in Little Falls. Tom explained that most of the time they are invited to house an ambulance in that community.
- How do you charge? If we transport a patient, there is a charge. If we “clear” the patient, there is no charge from Gold Cross.
- Do you respond for a lift assist? No, we usually send a public safety official/law enforcement for that. We will speak up if someone seems vulnerable.
- Do you have an advisory board? Tom said that he goes out to meet with the fire chiefs or anywhere he is asked. He especially likes to get out to the far fringes of the service area to discuss response times. Benton County has quarterly meetings of the public safety officers, there are mutual aid organizations Gold Cross meets, and Stearns County has the organized Fire Chiefs meetings.
- How much training is required now for a First Responder? That is a question for Tate Mills or another fire chief.
- How far does Gold Cross transfer patients? That depends on the level of service needed, which is rated into three tiers. Little Falls St. Gabriel’s Hospital would be a Tier 3, St. Cloud Hospital would be a Tier 2, and Mayo or Hennepin County Medical Center would be a Tier 1. If the patient needs a higher level of treatment at a Tier 1 hospital they would be air lifted by a Gold Cross ambulance helicopter using the closest one. They have one in Alexandria and one in Brainerd.
- If Watab supplied you with a facility here, would you spread your time between the Sauk Rapids and Watab? Gold Cross would put the town hall’s physical address and see how it fits into their plan and then discuss what is best.
- What type of building would Gold Cross need? A garage with a 110 plug in, a small office area with small desk and computer access, and a space for the crews to come inside. No sleeping accommodations are allowed. Tom explained that one of the larger expenses for a first response crew is education. In lieu of paying rent to a community, Gold Cross helps with the training and supplies. They are happy to work with Watab.
- Does the computer tracking system consider traffic on weekends? No, it does not have the capacity to do so; that is where the human element is required. Also, that is needed to discern which ambulance should respond because of the few number of Mississippi River bridges.

- Would you like to be invited to future meetings? Yes.

Mike Couri and Bob Ruppe, Attorneys, gave a presentation titled "Putting Out Your Own Fire: Establishing a Township Fire Department (A case study of the Chain of Lakes Fire & Rescue Department)." Five townships were served in part by the Richmond Fire Department. After the inability to negotiate an affordable contract with the City of Richmond, they formed their own department. Mike asked for clarification of the motion that had been made at the annual meeting regarding emergency services. John Olson, who made the motion, described that it requested the town board form a committee to explore new avenues for emergency services because the situation with Rice has been chronic. There has been a "take it or leave it" attitude. The township has incurred a lot of expense. The committee is to decide whether to establish our own fire department or see what arrangement we can make with Sauk Rapids or partner with other townships. The committee is a research vehicle.

Bob Ruppe is the attorney for the townships that formed the Chain of Lakes Fire Department. They went through a similar process as Watab. Richmond said take it or leave it. Chain of Lakes thought they could do it cheaper. Watab owns the land for a fire hall; Chain of Lakes did not. He recommended the township decide whether it is replacing one or both fire contracts. Bob added that the financial information in the presentation is from 2010-2011, but it would be very accurate. Mike Couri said that fire departments are generally easier to establish than you think, but it requires steady input from the town board and residents to get it up and running.

Bob said that the townships tried to negotiate with Richmond to set up a fire district so no one could be dictated to. They had similar issues that we have with Rice. After many months, the city backed out. They went to mediation. The meeting lasted from 7pm to 2:30am, when the city left without letting the townships or the mediator know, so they voted to start their own department. The five townships in the Chain of Lakes service area is very close to the same population as Watab Township.

In November 2009, Ehlers & Associates prepared a feasibility report for the Chain of Lakes townships. They recommended twenty firefighters, a 6,000-square foot fire hall, and operating and capital budgets. The township officers consulted other departments to verify the accuracy of the numbers. Bob said that this is very important. The estimate personnel costs were \$119,400; capital equipment was estimated at \$287,500, and the facilities and station at \$593,000. The estimated operating budget was \$49,300. Potential revenue sources were state fire aid, township contributions from their levies, donations and grants, and insurance billings. The best financing option was issuing Certificates of Indebtedness. Chain of Lakes borrowed \$790,000. They had to purchase land, put in a well, build a larger building than Watab will need because they put in a large meeting room and upscaled it to serve as a potential town hall. Bob said that Watab won't incur a lot of that debt and should be \$200,000 less than Chain of Lakes Fire Department.

Once you know that you have the funding, it is important to get and keep public support by keeping the residents informed. This provides the base to recruit firefighters and the support for the levy. The Chain of Lakes were told that they were a drain on the city, and that they didn't need the townships. Now, the city is asking to join the Chain of Lakes Department. Bob said that Richmond was vicious in their attacks on the townships through the rumor mill and the newspaper, which was published by a firefighter. Bob suggested newsletters, updates at regular meetings, emails, and everything that Watab can think of to

keep communication good with residents. The City of Richmond fought the townships every step of the way.

The next thing that is important is hiring the Fire Chief. It makes or breaks your success when you are starting something from scratch. Chief is central; the chief needs leadership and firefighting skills, charisma, and the ability to recruit and keep people. A lot of people wanted to become chief. On paper, they looked great, but many had personality defects. Watab needs to find a good natural leader who will be chief for a few years. Chain of Lakes hired someone who was just moving into town, and no one had beefs with him. They hired a part-time administrator to do the paperwork. Hiring the right Fire Chief is critical.

To get equipment, we need to talk to other fire departments to find out what they like and don't like about their facility and their equipment. What would they do the same, and what would they do differently? Take their experiences, measurements, pictures; they don't want us to make the same mistakes. Chain of Lakes got a lot of equipment free. Bob stressed that Watab doesn't need the costly, shiny stuff; get it used from a bigger city. Make sure it's good and durable. Somethings they had to buy new, but most was used or free.

When recruiting firefighters, we need to ask about their availability during the day. What is their location to the department? Will they be available on holidays and deer hunting season? With personnel comes training, legal, and employment issues. We can use the policies that Couri and Ruppe have developed and evaluate it for how it works with our culture. Bob suggested having the town board in charge of the hiring to keep it from becoming a popularity contest.

Another decision will be determining the level of service; have a good discussion about providing medical service and keep an open mind to it. Talk about how generous you are going to be on retirement benefits. Chain of Lakes decided to be more generous than the City of Richmond, but they used similar policies. They also used a signing bonus and a lump-sum bonus each year to retain personnel. Chain of Lakes finds that this works. Getting the insurance for the department is easy through the Minnesota Township Insurance Trust.

Mike talked about finding used equipment through a cooperative group out of Texas or from other fire departments. He said that the Texas site has very inexpensive equipment,

Chain of Lakes has some personnel who are nurses and doctors that go on medical calls. We should go to township employers and talk about need for their cooperation. Will the employer let them go to respond to an emergency? It's hard to say no to something like that. Chain of Lakes has twenty-six personnel plus the fire chief. Mike said, "This is doable. You will have all the talent, and it's not that expensive." He added that it is ideal to set up and shadow another department. St. Augusta was trained by Gold Cross and responded for a time with Rockville.

Mutual aid is created through contracts. A trend is going to county-wide mutual aid agreements. Bob said that he has never seen a neighboring fire department not give mutual aid, even if their city council prohibits it. Benton County has an Operability Agreement.

Bob Ruppe asked Gold Cross representatives what they would be looking for from the township. They responded that they will consider having a Gold Cross ambulance here if that fits the demand. They would help with the education of first responders if they house here. They donated an ambulance to Rice and to the Chain of Lakes. They value having a good relationship with all the First Responder units.

Watab can grow into having medical response if they decide to offer it. Benton County deputies are all First Responders, and they usually are on scene within a few minutes.

Pat asked the group what the next steps should be moving forward. Craig said people are concerned about their insurance costs going up. Bob Ruppe said that there were no major increases in Chain of Lakes, and people's costs for fire protection went down a lot. It took Chain of Lakes slightly more than one year to get their fire department started. Gold Cross Ambulance representatives said that we should have confidence in our committee and community. We might have paramedics that live here and serve in a surrounding community. St. Cloud may also have good information for us.

Next Steps:

1. Does this work financially? Meet with Todd Hagen from Ehlers and Associates to discuss this.
2. Talk to other fire departments about their buildings; visit them. Ask what would they do differently?
3. Move as quickly as possible; don't lose momentum.
4. Inform your residents what you are doing.
5. Talk to Dan Holthaus from Chain of Lakes about their department and how they hired the fire chief.

The next meeting of the committee will be at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, June 27<sup>th</sup>.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Clerk Pat Spence