

TOWNS OF ALLENTOWN AND PEMBROKE
Tri-Town EMS Board of Directors
311 Pembroke Street
Pembroke, New Hampshire 03275
Minutes of Regular Meeting
February 8, 2017

Call to Order

The Tri-Town EMS Board of Directors Meeting for February 8, 2017, was called to order by the Chair at 3:30 p.m.

Roll Call

Present on the Board: Shaun Mulholland, Michael O'Meara, Harold Paulsen, Robert Bourque, Hearshell VanLuven, Dana Pendergast, and David Jodoin

Others Present

Tri-Town Staff: Christopher Gamache, Director; Stephanie Locke, Assistant Director

Approval of minutes of previous meetings

Chair Mulholland stated that there are no minutes to approve because the current records clerk is taking a leave of absence; a new records clerk will be starting soon to work on the backlog. He asked that Board Members state their names when speaking to help the new clerk understand who is talking.

Approval of purchase orders

On motion of Mr. Pendergast, duly seconded by Mr. O'Meara, it was voted to approve the Accounts Payable manifest dated February 2, 2017.

On motion of Mr. Bourque, duly seconded by Mr. Pendergast, it was voted to approve the Accounts Payable manifest dated January 13, 2017.

On motion of Mr. Bourque, duly seconded by Mr. Pendergast, it was voted to approve the Payroll manifest dated February 2, 2017.

On motion of Mr. Bourque, duly seconded by Mr. Pendergast, it was voted to approve the Payroll manifest dated January 19, 2017.

On motion of Mr. Bourque, duly seconded by Mr. Pendergast, it was voted to approve the minutes of the January 11, 2017, non-public session. Mr. VanLuven abstained from the vote.

Mr. Gamache stated that he needed an email address for Mr. VanLuven. Chairman Mulholland said he had sent it and would send it again.

Acceptance of donation from Susanne & Woodrow Whitbeck of Pembroke

On motion of Mr. Bourque, duly seconded by Mr. O'Meara, it was voted to accept a donation in the amount of \$250 from Susanne & Woodrow Whitbeck.

Chair Mulholland expressed thanks for the donation on behalf of the Board.

Discussion of ComStar revenue report

Mr. Gamache referenced the January revenue report which he previously distributed to Board members. He noted that \$69,000 was billed; \$20,000 was collected as revenue; and \$30,000 was written off. The uncollected balance at the end of January was \$428,345.46.

Chair Mulholland stated that he is writing a white paper for the website, explaining the billing and collection process as discussed at the January meeting.

Mr. Pendergast asked Mr. Gamache if he was now getting the report from ComStar as promised at the last meeting.

Mr. Gamache responded that he hadn't seen it on this report but still has a lot of detail to go through in the report. He stated that he and Mr. Pendergast have had email discussions about how to go forward with a modified accrual basis of accounting for Tri-Town. The current reports are on a cash basis, similar to a personal checking account, showing the flow of dollars in and out. The auditors use modified accrual based accounting, but they only do this once each year, four months after the end of the year during the annual audit. He said that with the modified accrual system, whatever month revenue is generated, collections would be applied there, regardless of when they are received.

Mr. Jodoin stated that cash based accounting is easy to understand, as it simply accounts for cash flow in and out. Using the modified accrual system, receivables, payables and write-offs are booked. Hypothetically, if the revenue figure is \$50,000 and write-offs are \$30,000, the revenue is actually \$20,000. The modified accrual method would give a truer picture of where Tri-Town stands. He used the collection of property taxes as an analogy. Payments are matched with their corresponding receivables.

Mr. O'Meara stated that as an accounting practice, the modified accrual system is the way to go because it gives a truer picture of where we stand on a monthly basis. It is not obvious to everybody but we will come to understand it.

Chair Mulholland stated that this is how government accounting is done. Enterprise activities such as the sewer and water departments use modified accrual accounting in order to match collections with receivables. However, they are 100% fee funded, whereas Tri-Town is only about one-third fee funded, with the rest paid by taxpayers. He stated that with property taxes, payments are distributed to the appropriate year regardless of when they are collected.

Mr. Gamache pointed out that there is a lag of at least three or four months with ambulance revenue and an even longer lag with government payments such as Medicare. For example, all but two payments in January were for previous months. Therefore, changing to a modified accrual basis might result in a huge negative balance at the end of the year because about half of the receivables for the year would trickle in over the next year. He asked who would make the adjustments.

Mr. Jodoin said that he would do that. The revenue would be applied and the allowance for uncollectible amounts would be adjusted. Accounts receivable would be debited and revenue would be credited.

Mr. Paulsen asked if this was different from any other year. The auditors would make adjustments to the allowance for uncollectible amounts. It will give a better financial picture. He asked if someone would go back and adjust previous months.

Mr. Jodoin responded that it would be a year-end adjustment.

Mr. Gamache stated that a benefit is we won't have a tendency to overspend, thinking that we have more revenue than we actually have.

Discussion of administrative regulations for EMTs and paramedics

Chair Mulholland stated that they began talking last year about administrative regulations for EMTs and paramedics. They asked the EMS Bureau to consider regulations for background checks and requiring EMT units to report arrests or suspensions of their members. Importantly, individuals fired from one place could not be hired elsewhere, especially critical because these people are so intimately involved with human beings. The EMS Board dropped the idea because the firefighters unit was opposed. He said it would be preferable to let the EMT units make their own rules, rather than creating legislation telling them how to operate. This is the way it is done for law enforcement. The EMS Bureau and the Fire Chiefs are in favor of this. Mr. Mulholland stated that he has been in touch with Chief O'Brien of Goffstown who is a representative on the board. A draft has been prepared and sent to Mr. Pendergast and Mr. Gamache for review. Chief O'Brien will review the draft as well. This will be a long process.

Chief Paulsen stated that there could be a problem in small communities which rely on volunteers and the units might not know about the backgrounds of these volunteers.

Chair Mulholland said that the individuals (volunteers) would be responsible for providing the information.

Director's report

Mr. Gamache stated that January was a busy month, with 101 runs. Significantly, Tri-Town had only one call to assist in January and received assistance ten times. Mutual aid is usually a wash amongst the communities involved. Time out the door was just under one minute; time to get to the scene averaged 4.5 minutes; the average call was just over one hour.

Mr. Gamache stated that the new ambulance will be here next week. Its arrival was delayed by bad weather and other factors. Mr. Gamache will do his inspection next Monday and the State will inspect on Wednesday. Then the ambulance will go to Ossipee Mountain Electronics for installation of the repeater and the mobile radio. The Ferno will stay in number 3 and the Striker, which was just delivered, will stay in number 8. The good news is that there will be a power stretcher in both.

Mr. Gamache reported on his work with the Capital Area Public Health Network, which is focused on the opiate issue and how to better serve people in need of help. He discussed the 211 call line for drug counseling and psychological assistance. The 211 call line can also help with transportation to get needed help, particularly psyche help in non-crisis situations.

Mr. Gamache also discussed his affiliation with a Concord group which looks at substance abuse and merges this with the mental health component. As the only representative from the public safety sector, his input is valuable. This group meets every other month and seeks to help family members and children, not just the patient. The goal is to not just sign off or bring the client to the hospital. Concord Fire is looking at alternative transport destinations. The goal is to get people who can help to the house of the patient.

Mr. Gamache stated that he started a log in January, a spreadsheet to track all EMS incidents – including the no transports, refusals, and cancels. Now he can look at all transports and doesn't have to call ComStar for information. Another full-time staff member is keeping a log on reaction times and who receives surveys and HIPPA notices. They are getting letters out to self-pays offering payment plans. There were five self-pays in January who received letters and one has already called back. This log is also tracking patients on the disposition report, tying in with Mr. Jodoin's concerns about aging and write-offs. ComStar has already worked on these, and so a decision has to be made regarding the next step. Residents of Pembroke and Allenstown are receiving the courtesy of an extra notice before being sent to First Financial for collection. First Financial reported collections of \$750 in January, of which they retain one third. These are accounts which ComStar has already written off. He noted that the collection rate on these over 120 day-accounts is only about five percent.

Mr. Gamache stated that he has talked with Mr. Mulholland and Mr. Jodoin about how Tri-Town's rates compare with others in the state. He will be getting data from ComStar on the rates of other services.

Tri-Town is in the 50th percentile compared with others in the southern tier of New Hampshire. Massachusetts is significantly higher. He plans to look at the top 25% in the area so see what their rates are and what their collection rate is with private companies. He will prepare a graph showing what rate of collection might be expected at various rates. Then decisions can be made about Tri-Town rates.

Mr. Gamache stated that Mutual Aid is an ongoing issue. He has created a form and sent it to Mr. Mulholland and the Medical Director for review. He used the State of New Hampshire's best practice form as a model and has tailored it to be specific to the needs of Tri-Town. It will be emailed to Loudon, Barnstead, Epsom, Bow, Concord, Hooksett, Chichester and Deerfield for review. He expects some pushback from a few communities, and will reach out to them individually.

Mr. Gamache stated that, regarding EMS in the Warm Zone, they are planning an active shooter training exercise in the fall. They have applied for a grant from Homeland Security and Emergency Management for two sets of equipment for EMS providers. There are 50 grants available this year and they will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. Piggybacking off of this, the equipment will be used by our providers in the field. Although the grant program anticipates a large scale shooting, as in a school or a theater, Tri-Town will use it anytime they are being sent to a shooting or where there is possible danger. SOG is to gear up to be as protected as possible.

Mr. Gamache reported on the Vital Life (?) program which has been operating for about six months. He stated that the Board signed off on this for a donation to order stickers. The program allows clients to provide vital information such as name, address, medical history, medications and allergies. The stickers will be available at the two town offices and the two fire stations, as well as any other location that seems appropriate. They can also be stored in the ambulances to be handed out on calls.

Chief Paulsen asked if this involved online storage.

Mr. Gamache responded that it did not. It is in paper form. There are two stickers and a plastic bag, and it works like the Tot Finder program. Clients will print the forms online to fill in and put one on their door, window, cabinet or refrigerator.

Ms. Locke reported that the FTO documents went out yesterday. She highlighted the changes since the first time these were brought to the table several months ago. She said that the big thing that is new is the job description for FTO's. Their role is the same – working with new hires, doing retraining and remediation, and training EMT students and apprentices. The idea is still to use current employees to go through the process of being placed in the FTO role. Candidates will take an exam consisting of multiple choice, true/false and fill-in-the-blank items. Candidates scoring 80% or higher will be interviewed by Ms. Locke and Mr. Gamache; then Mr. Gamache will make recommendations to the Board. Ms. Locke said that one of the documents she sent out is the daily observation report where the FTO will record training which occurs, components of orientation completed during any shift, and other training items completed. Goals will be set for the next shift, and the FTO can make comments re: the strengths and weaknesses of the trainee. These daily reports will be the basis for monthly evaluations. There is also an opportunity for the trainee to evaluate the FTO. Reports will be signed by both.

Chief Paulsen pointed out that question 16 on the FTO exam needs the word “employee” added.

Ms. Locke stated that the compensation component had already been addressed by Mr. Gamache. FTO’s will receive an extra hours’ pay per shift when performing FTO duties.

Mr. Bourque referred to item six on the FTO program sheet and asked what constituted regular hours.

Ms. Locke responded that the requirement is to work 36 hours per month on average over a three-month period.

Mr. Bourque asked if she could put that in the document.

Mr. Gamache responded that this was covered in the policies addressing employee classifications under the section for per diem employees.

Chair Mulholland asked if the FTO’s would be part-time and full-time employees, or did they anticipate having per diem workers.

Mr. Gamache responded that it would be paramedics, of which there are now four working full-time, and of which two are management employees. There are two other paramedics who don’t have much availability. He said they are not looking to have many FTO’s.

Chair Mulholland said he was wondering who would be doing this work.

Mr. Gamache said that it is just Mr. VanLuven and Ms. Locke right now; they are mentoring the two people who are going through the training currently. There could be as many as four FTO’s at some point; there is no big need right now.

Mr. Bourque asked if the FTO would come in on a different shift to work with the person being trained.

Ms. Locke responded that they are matching the new employee to the FTO’s shift, not vice versa.

Mr. O’Meara referred to the use of the word “should” in the document. He suggested that it needs to be stronger, like “shall” or “will”, making the action mandatory.

Chair Mulholland said that “shall” is the legal term in New Hampshire law, but that “will” essentially has the same meaning.

Ms. Locke said that she would change “should” to “will” in all cases.

Chair Mulholland asked if this mirrors the paramedics’ job description. He said that normally this would be an additional duty, not a job description.

Mr. Gamache said that it is “in addition to” and Mr. Locke verified that it is worded as such.

Chair Mulholland asked Mr. VanLuven if he has been involved in this preparation and asked for his impressions.

Mr. VanLuven responded that he had not been involved in the preparation of the documents, but that his impression is that it is working well.

Chair Mulholland asked if the trainees should work with more than one FTO to avoid charges of discrimination or a trainee complaining that his FTO 'just doesn't like me.'

Mr. Gamache responded that they would deal with this on a case-by-case basis. Generally, the new employee would stay with the same FTO throughout the process, but adjustments could be made if there were problems such as personality conflicts.

Chair Mulholland stated that this doesn't require a vote of the Board, but asked if everyone concurred with going forward with this program.

There were no objections.


Chair Mulholland addressed the issue of the resignation of a per diem paramedic, Adam Boise.

Mr. Gamache noted that Mr. Boise lives in Vermont and has accepted a full-time position there. He will continue to do some shifts as a nurse practitioner at Concord Hospital. His letter of resignation was submitted with regret and mentioned the wonderful and professional people he had worked with at Tri-Town.

On motion of Mr. O'Meara, duly seconded by Mr. Bourque, it was voted to accept the resignation of Mr. Boise. Mr. VanLuven abstained.

Mr. Pendergast stated that he had a conversation with Dr. Hirsch about the active shooter program, and Dr. Hirsch spoke highly of Tri-Town's service, calling it one of the best in the Capitol area. He is proud of the program and noted how far it has come in just two years.

On motion of Mr. Bourque, duly seconded by Mr. Pendergast, it was voted to adjourn at 4:21 pm.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shaun Mulholland', is written over a horizontal line.

SHAUN MULHOLLAND, Chairman Tri-Town EMS