

**BREWSTER-SOUTHEAST JOINT FIRE DISTRICT
BUDGET HEARING October 15, 2024**

ATTENDANCE:

Commissioner John Klosowski
Commissioner Martin Miller
Commissioner George Durmer
District Treasurer Donald Goodwin
District Secretary Maurice DeSantis
Department Treasurer James Delawder

Public Attendees:

Jim Gaynor
Bruce Colombraro
Keith Rusinko

CALL TO ORDER:

Meeting called to order at 19:00hrs by Commissioner Klosowski

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. James Gaynor queried the Board regarding the establishment of a District sanctioned paid EMS system.

Commissioner Miller explained the reasons the District opted to implement a paid EMS responder program. Highlights are listed below;

- Volunteer demographics have changed over the past 10 years. We have predominantly two main age groups for volunteers. Ages 18-24 and 50 – 70. We have lost the majority of people willing to volunteer their time from the middle group due to the changing economic situation. People in the 25 – 49 age group are actively raising families and or working more than one job so that their free time is greatly diminished.
- Our older group of volunteers, especially those that rode our ambulance was adversely affected by the COVID emergency.

Older members are more vulnerable to disease exposure. They felt that the risk of volunteering with its potential exposure to a contagious disease to be too great.

- Because of this, the District was forced to “contract” out to commercial providers to continue to meet its mission.
- At first, the District contracted with “EMSTAR”, then “EMPRESS” and finally, “AMBULANZ”. While this was a short term solution, working with a third party proved unreliable.
- In addition to the potential lack of service, the District also lost control over the quality and competency of the providers acting on behalf of the Fire District.
- Commercial providers, because they are profit motivated, tend to pay / invest in their employees as little as possible. This has the undesired effect of putting people with very little or no experience at all in position to provide care and increases the potential risk / liability to the Fire district.
- In November of 2023, the District received an email notice on a Friday afternoon that our current commercial provider was terminating their relationship with the District at the end of the month. Facing the possibility of having no coverage, the District accelerated a plan that we had been working on and through some hard work and late nights, was able to advertise, interview and hire enough EMT’s to place an ambulance in service by the end of that month.
- While this was an outstanding success, due to the call volume being received (in excess of 6 requests per day) and the number of simultaneous / second requests, it was felt that we needed to staff a second ambulance during the busier times of the day.
 - In June, we began operating a second staffed ambulance from 0800-2200 each day.
 - We are now covering 96% of all requests for emergency ambulances. Our only mutual aid requests result from third simultaneous calls or a second request during the midnight hours when our ambulance is on an active assignment.

Mr. Gaynor then inquired about the revenue generated through billing and whether that is enough to offset the cost to the budget.

- Commissioner Miller explained that Brewster EMS is participating in Governor Hochul’s “EMS Cost Recovery Act” however the income generated is not enough to cover all operating expenses. While we do receive mostly adequate reimbursement from insurance companies, approximately 40% of our patients that transported are covered by Medicare or Medicaid. These governmental entities do not cover the cost of EMS provision. In addition, approximately 20% of patients transported have no insurance at all.
 - While we hope to be a “break-even point” sometime in the future, we have not reached that point.
 - It is our hope that through the use of the “EMS Cost Recovery Act’, we may be able to reduce the operational costs to the District in the future.

Mr. Gaynor then asked whether the amount budgeted for EMS provision was sufficient.

- Commissioner Miller stated that currently, we are receiving enough revenue to almost off set the cost of our EMT salaries, the amount allocated for EMS provision is in actuality less than what we would be obligated to pay commercial providers.
 - In 2022, we received bids from Ambulanz, Empress, Westchester EMS and Carmel VAS, for coverage. Yearly cost ran from a low of \$450,000 (for 1 EMT and a non certified driver) to \$640,000 for two EMT’s for one ambulance.
 - We are also obligated to compensate Empress Ambulance for paramedic “intercept” services. This costs the District approximately \$20,000 per month (\$240,000 per year).
 - If you were to add the cost of commercial ambulance provision to the cost of paramedic intercept service, we are already exceeding the amount budgeted for 2025’s EMS provision.(If you take the \$640,000 from 2022 and adjust for inflation, that’s \$689,000 today. Add to that the \$240,00 for paramedic intercept service and we are at \$929,000.
- We are currently providing Two fully staffed ambulances as well as a First Responder vehicle and hopefully soon a paramedic for \$900,000 per year.

- In addition, as the provider, the District has complete control over the quality, training and operational performance of the individuals representing the District.

Mr. Jim Delawder inquired as to which line item in the budget would be used to pay for the new tanker that was ordered.

- Commissioner Klosowski informed Mr. Delawder that the monies for the tanker were to come from a Bond that the District was approved for.

Mr. Bruce Colombraro asked where income from billing for EMS transports goes.

- Commissioner Miller explained that all monies received from billing are used to offset the operations of EMS provision.

Mr. Jim Gaynor then asked whether the Fire District has needs that are not in the budget.

- Commissioner Klosowski answered. The Fire District takes a very proactive approach toward planning for future needs. We take into account the future changes and plan accordingly.
- Commissioner Miller further explained that;
 - we do not have fire hydrants in all of the district, therefore we have different apparatus to handle the various emergencies we may face.
 - We have tankers to compensate for the lack of hydrants,
 - we have engines to supply the water,
 - then we have trucks with ladders for search and rescue,
 - and then a rescue truck for MVA's.
 - We are always looking ahead at the changes in the Town of Southeast and the Village of Brewster.
 - Notable projects underway are;
 - The Envision Brewster project, a complete rebuild of a section of Main st in the Village that will add several commercial occupancies as well as more than 150 apartments.
 - Barrett Hill development, a 150 unit apartment on Mt.Ebo Road.

- A senior housing development will be going in opposite the Acme shopping center on NYS Route 22.
- Some of the farms off Drewville Road are being subdivided for housing.
- Pugsley Road now has 2 “last mile” warehouses, one almost 1/2 mile long and the other 1/4 mile long. We could use a tower ladder for those types of situations.
- We are proactive and provide our members with the latest gear to help protect them on assignments. *We are the only volunteer fire department in the US to use electronic accountability system. It helps command track firefighters in the case of a lost member in a structure.* It is helpful in illegally subdivided structures, where there is a high potential to get lost in these structures.
- Our recently upgraded portable radio / communication system functions as a part of this accountability system. When a member turns on their portable radio, their presence is automatically logged into the accountability system.

Mr. Gaynor inquired as to whether the State or Federal Government helps with the cost of these items / programs.

- Commissioner Miller stated that we are an active participant in the Grant Process. We have applied to the American Fire Grant (AFG) program, the New York State Firefighter Assistance Program (VSAFE) as well as the Dennis Leary Foundation. However we had no luck this year, but we will reapply next year.
 - Commissioner Klosowski stated we got a grant from NYS Dormitory Program which was used to purchase a UTV Utility 11-8-1.
 - Commissioner Miller added that is something we had to forecast due to bike trail and fire needs. The UTV was used 2 weeks ago to get a person out of the bike trail in minutes versus over 15-20 minutes without.

Mr. Delawder asked whether residents taxes will be going up next year.

- Commissioner Miller responded no; we reduced the budget so there will be a decrease in taxes.

Mr. Delawder then asked whether there is sufficient funding for building repairs.

- Commissioner Miller responded, yes, we had the apparatus floor repaired at headquarters this past year which wasn't planned.
 - We do have a capital reserve for emergencies. The floor repair alone was \$100,000. Fortunately, we had budgeted sufficient funds for such an emergency.
 - Commissioner Miller stated the current building has parts that are almost 100 years old.
 - Even though there were renovations done over the years, they were not built to code. There are floors on different levels and ADA compliance issues, which is why we are looking to replace.
 - We investigated costs to repair this building, and it was over \$15 million to repair and bring to the current needed standards.

Mr. Keith Rusinko inquired about GYM reimbursement fees.

- Commissioner Klosowski responded that the reimbursement for gym membership is at \$40 per month. Billable 2 times a year.

There being no further questions on the adopted budget for 2025, Commissioner Klosowski thanked everyone for coming and advised them that district meetings are 2nd Wednesday of the month and open to the public.

NEW BUSINESS:

A Motion to appoint Bruce Colombraro as the election chairman for the 2024 fire district elections was made by Commissioner Klosowski – Seconded by Commissioner Miller

Motion Passed 3-0

A Motion to approve and pay the bills was made by Commissioner Miller – Seconded by Commissioner Klosowski

Motion Passed 3-0

A Motion for adjournment was made by Commissioner Miller xx– Seconded by Commissioner Klosowski

Motion Passed 3-0

Meeting adjourned at 20:16hrs.

Next meeting: 10/16 with KG&D

Respectfully submitted by:
District Secretary DeSantis