

PUBLIC SAFETY

Tuesday, February 18, 2020 – 5:30 p.m.

Police Training Room – Olean Municipal Building

Present: Members: Chairman Witte, Vice Chairman Dougherty, Alderman Panus, Alderman Gonzalez, Alderman Crawford, and Alderman Anastasia . Others: Mayor William Aiello; Nicholas DiCerbo, Jr., City Attorney; Fred Saradin, City Auditor; Tim Richardson, Fire Chief, and Tiffany Taylor, Managerial Confidential Administrative Secretary.

1. Roll Call

Alderman Witte called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and asked that the record show that all committee members were present except Alderman Smith, who was excused.

2. Approval of Minutes of the Previous Committee Meetings (Tuesday, February 4, 2020)

A motion to approve the minutes of the February 4, 2020 meeting was made by Alderman Witte, seconded by Alderman Dougherty. Voice vote, ayes all. Motion carried.

3. Unfinished Business

None

4. New Referrals for Consideration

a. Discussion – Ambulance Billing Rate Change

Chief Richardson presented a spreadsheet detailing the proposed changes to the ambulance billing rates:

<i>Service Level</i>	<i>Current Rate</i>	<i>Suggested Rate</i>
ALS2	1050	1350
ALS1	850	1150
BLS	650	850
PI	N/A	575
MLS	15	25

Chief Richardson explained that the suggested rates are based on 2017 rates of comparable ambulance companies in the area. He explained that they are really not “competitors”, but the City really can’t raise their rates over what the comparable companies charge. He explained

that he would like the department to be reimbursed for the work that they are doing, and right now they are not.

Chief Richardson explained that Medicare and Medicaid will only pay so much, so they will not necessarily pay the rate that is being proposed. He explained that the change impacts auto insurance companies and some private insurance companies, but that all insurance companies pay for things differently. He explained that the estimated yearly increase, in speaking with the ambulance billing company, would be anywhere between \$20,000 and \$30,000.

Chief Richardson explained that the busier that the ambulances are, the more revenue that is generated. He explained that the Fire Department is also sending ambulances outside of the City for more mutual aid, and the mileage rate proposed is a standard mileage rate. He noted that the farthest that the company goes is to the Pennsylvania line on the Barnum Road.

Alderman Witte asked if the Fire Department ever has to meet or intercept with Bradford, and Chief Richardson explained that the only way that Olean meets with Bradford is if Bradford is coming with a two man crew any something happens that the City needs to intercept with them, such as a cardiac arrest. HE explained that five years ago, something like that would happen two or three times a year. Now, it happens 20 to 25 a year. He noted that this will probably continue to increase, but not tremendously.

Alderman Crawford explained that his only concern is if Medicaid and Medicare will not pay the full new suggested rate, that it will create an additional burden to taxpayers. Chief Richardson explained that Medicare and Medicaid have set amounts that they will pay, and anything above that is written off. Alderman Crawford asked if the difference is billed to the individual, and Chief Richardson responded that the ambulance billing company can bill it, the individual can pay whatever they can pay, and the rest is a "charity write off". Alderman Gonzalez asked if it is another medical bill that goes to collections, and Chief Richardson explained that the bills do not go to collections. He explained that there is an attorney in Buffalo that works with individuals regarding their bills, and the ambulance billing company actually sends out information often regarding the charity write offs.

Alderman Witte asked what percentage of people private pay for ambulance services, and Chief Richardson explained that the City of Olean has a very high Medicare and Medicaid rate. Alderman Witte explained that she was curious to see what percentage of people are not insured and just can't pay, and Chief Richardson explained that he could find that information out from the billing company. He explained that the billing company takes care of billing questions rather than having the firefighters have to answer. Chief Richardson explained that the \$20,000 to \$30,000 increase previously quoted takes into consideration that most of the increase will come from motor vehicle accidents and other situations where the City is going to

get the increased rate, and takes into consideration that the City will not see an increase in payments for Medicaid and Medicare calls.

Alderman Crawford asked if you have to meet certain eligibility guidelines to qualify for the charity write off, and Chief Richardson explained that you do not. He explained that the billing company sends a lot of forms out and a lot of people still do not fill them out.

Alderman Gonzalez asked if you can use the ambulance service and not have to pay, and Chief Richardson explained that insurance reimburses up to a certain amount, which can vary based on different companies and plans. Alderman Witte asked if we know how much the billing company lost out on last year because of the charity write offs, and Mr. Saradin explained that his office only recognizes the actual money that comes in for the services. He explained that he does not recognize billing as revenue, but rather revenue when it comes into the office as actual payments.

Alderman Crawford explained that he is aware that Medicare and Medicaid will charge the same amount despite the increase, but he wonders if private insurers will pay more. Chief Richardson explained that the cost of healthcare outpaces what insurance will reimburse, but if a health insurance company will pay more than what we are currently paying, the amount they would submit to the City would increase along with the fee schedule increase. He noted that there is currently not a listed fee for the Paramedic Intercept, and it cannot be charged for unless it is added as it is in the proposed fee schedule.

Alderman Gonzalez asked where the suggested rates came from, and Chief Richardson explained that they are from the ambulance billing company, who has access to comparable companies. He noticed that these proposed rates are from the comparable 2017 rates, as we do not want to outpace the comparable companies. Alderman Dougherty asked how old the current rates are, and Chief Richardson responded that they were adopted in 2014 or 2015.

A PL and Resolution will be on the next regular meeting agenda for formal consideration.

b. Discussion – FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grant for Acquisition of a Brush Fire Truck

Chief Richardson explained that the Assistance to Firefighters Grant has allocated \$350 million across the Country, and he would like the City to apply for funding for a brush truck, which would require only a 5% match from the City. He explained that the brush truck would be able to go on the recreational trail, as well as the levee system behind the City. HE explained that the truck can pump and roll, and that there is a rescue attachment to drive the vehicle on the trail system to a patient.

Chief Richardson explained that he has received three quotes between \$99,000 and \$125,000. He explained that this would make the maximum match \$6,250. He explained that the City would still go to bid if the grant was awarded to us, but he wanted to have an idea of the potential cost prior to application. He explained that it would be an asset to the Fire Department, especially with the increase in grass and brush fires with the revitalization of North Union Street.

Mayor Aiello explained that he feels that it would be a great way to improve the fleet, especially to do so for \$6,000. He explained that there would be a PL and Resolution presented at the next regular meeting to obtain permission to seek the grant funding.

Chief Richardson explained that he is working with Ms. Stephen on the grant application process. He has also obtained information from Mr. Saradin and Mr. Piechota to assist with the process.

c. Discussion – Replacement Plan for Engine 41

Chief Richardson explained that this is something on the horizon that he thought he should bring up to the Council. He explained that Engine 41 is the reserved pumper out of Station 1. He explained that the present frontline vehicles are 12 and 9 years old, and ten years on the frontline with ten years as primary reserve is the suggested life of a vehicle by NFPA standards. He explained that Engine 41 is 23 years old.

Chief Richardson explained that he would like to look into specifications for a new vehicle, and that it would take a year to build the truck once it is ordered. Mayor Aiello explained that this was discussed in Fleet Management last week and that he wanted this to be brought to the Council's attention to begin a future discussion for funding the purchase of a new vehicle.

Alderman Crawford asked if this is not a part of the Fleet funding, and Mayor Aiello responded that this is a \$500,000 to \$600,000 item. Mr. Saradin explained that if the City chooses to finance the purchase, that depending on timing, it would really not affect this or the next budget, but rather three budgets from now. Chief Richardson explained that depending on how long the bid process is, the bids may not be awarded until this November and delivery would not occur until a year from then. Mr. Saradin explained that this would push out the budget impact even further.

Alderman Crawford asked how many engines the Fire Department has, and Chief Richardson explained that there are two plus this reserve. He explained that any time a vehicle goes out for maintenance, this one is used. He explained that when the City takes delivery of the new vehicle, the oldest will become the reserve and the new vehicle would become the frontline vehicle.

Alderman Crawford asked what the trade in value is on Engine 41, and Chief Richardson explained that he will look into the trade in value. He explained that it is up to the Council to determine if they want to trade in the old vehicle or take it to auction.

Alderman Panus asked what the telltale on something like this to alert that something needs to be done. Chief Richardson explained that there is surface rust on the engine, and it is difficult to get the truck into pump gear. He explained that the employees need to get underneath the truck and hit the linkage to get it to work correctly. HE explained that there is a whole folder on what is wrong with the engine, and Mr. Donahue in the City Garage can provide more information.

Alderman Witte noted that the City has mutual aid from surrounding companies in the case of a fire, so there is no need to worry in the meantime.

Alderman Panus asked if there are any potential grant opportunities, and Chief Richardson explained that for the FEMA grant previously discussed, that engines are considered a low priority, while brush trucks are high. That is why he proposes applying for funding for a brush truck. Mayor Aiello added that there is always a possibility, and we are always looking into it.

d. Discussion – Cat Issues

Alderman Witte explained that she has had a few constituents ask questions, and Mayor Aiello explained that he is starting to get calls as well, and that Ms. McElfresh has been taking care of calling the Catnippers and taking care of the billing. He explained that they won't get started until the spring, unless it starts warming up sooner. He explained that there is \$2,000 left in the existing budget and the tentative budget includes another \$5,000 in funding. He explained that he does not have numbers at this time, but that he can provide them next time on what has been done so far. He explained that his office has found that some treatment has been done without the City's authorization, and that the City will not pay for this.

Alderman Witte asked how the City is sure that the Catnippers are doing what they say they are, and Mayor Aiello explained that each cat is given a name, and neighbors will see the cats back with clipped ears. He explained that they provide the City with a service and we trust that they do it, as they are a reputable organization.

Alderman Crawford asked if the invoice the City receives is from the organization that spays and neuters the cats, and Mayor Aiello explained that it is.

Alderman Crawford explained that it is normal during the spring months for activity to start up. He explained that last year he spoke with residents who noticed clipped ears and less activity

amongst the cats in their neighborhoods. He explained that it is a process and a long commitment.

Alderman Panus asked what Catnippers is, and Mayor Aiello explained that it is an organization that comes into the area, traps cats, spays/neuters/vaccinates them, and releases back into the same area with clipped ears. He explained that before moving into an area, they notify residents to basically lock up their cats, and they do check to see if the cat has been previously spayed or neutered. He explained that this process helps reduce the colony.

Alderman Crawford explained that studies have shown that if you trap cats and take them to a shelter, it creates a vacuum effect and more cats come into the area. He explained that it is unsustainable and you cannot win at it. He explained that the TNVR program aids the population in dissipating, and that in three to five years, neighborhoods begin to see major change. Alderman Dougherty noted that he still thinks that something needs to be done about feeding, because he feels that feeding strays is a huge issue.

Mayor Aiello explained that it is best to call his office if constituents have problems, and he will ensure that the issues are relayed to the Catnippers.

5. Approval of Committee Reports

None

6. Executive Session

A motion to enter into executive session to discuss personnel issues and the potential acquisition or sale of real property was made by Alderman Crawford, seconded by Alderman Witte. Voice vote, ayes all. Motion carried. Executive session began at approximately 6:10 p.m.

A motion to adjourn from executive session was made by Alderman Witte, seconded by Alderman Crawford. Voice vote, ayes all. Motion carried. Executive session adjourned at approximately 6:40 p.m.

7. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Alderman Crawford, seconded by Alderman Witte. Voice vote, ayes all. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at approximately 6:45 p.m.