

Minutes of Selectmen's Meeting of 4/12/04

**Selectmen Present: Michael Genest, Michael Oldershaw, Ben Pratt
Others in attendance: B. Prokop, B. Hennessey, M. Beauchamp, P. Lovering, C. Baker-Salmon, L. Henderson, M. Morrow, R. Haggett, J. Parsons, W. Witherall, J. Cummings, D. Boule, E. Tenney, P. Vasques, S. Blood.**

The first order of business was the approval of the minutes of the meeting held on 4/5/04.

Next the selectmen addressed the issues raised by the ambulance squad. The following are the opening comments make by Chairman Genest.

The basis of this meeting was Captain Chris Baker-Salmon letter to us of last week. In that he made claims and statements that we strongly object to.

We think the problem areas can be summarized as follows:

1. The officers of the ambulance squad and the Fire Chief, feel that the selectmen are not supportive of them and want to take over the ambulance.
2. That Ass't Deputy Chief Lovering has developed her own billing system and that she is in negotiations with several companies to provide this service and we (the selectmen) have no right to go behind her back to one of those companies without her permission.
3. It is your feelings that all monies collected from billing will go to the ambulance fund and not to the Town General Fund.
4. Accidents, minor or major should not be a concern of the selectmen.
5. This select board is the worst that you ever had to work with and you just do not trust us.

I think that pretty well summarizes what we feel was told to us last week.

To us this was very disappointing, and a total surprise. We all strongly feel that our ambulance service is a very good asset to the Town and we very much appreciate all the efforts of its members. It is too bad that all the press coverage that our ambulance service gets, is Not the great service they provide, but rather how “They are fighting with Selectmen over Billing to Bennington, or Capital Reserves, or now Billing. We have done our best to work with each department head and to attempt to develop good two way communications. The Fire & Rescue Department seems to be the only department we are having this problem with hopefully this meeting will help.

Our goal tonight is to improve communications and to clearly establish the responsibilities that we have to each other and to the Town.

Chairman Genest asked if anyone had anything to add to this summary before we move on? C. Baker-Salmon stated that he did not raise the “billing issue” in his letter, and that he never said that there was more than one billing company.

Chairman Genest than asked the officers present to explain how they have come to feel that we are not supportive and that we want to take over the ambulance? And, over the last three (3) years what was it that you wanted and did not get? I would like to know from Chief Beauchamp, why he told us in this meeting on the 29th of March, that everything was fine and that there were no other problems and we are told a week later that “Chief Beauchamp feels the same way”. I ask you to please give us specifics and not generalities or assumptions!

Chief Beauchamp took issue with this statement. He mentioned that when he said everything was fine, he was referring to the fire department and that he felt that the selectmen were hot on this billing issue and wanted to get this money for the Town as fast as they could and that this was the real problem. The issue of the selectmen’s concern about the accidents was raised and after some discussion it was agreed that the concerns were not only the accidents that the ambulance has had recently, but also the total accidents that have happened in the Town over the last 12 months.

The discussion then moved on to the confusion over the billing questions and what was meant by the fact that Ass't Deputy Chief Lovering had developed her own Billing system and is negotiations with several companies to provide service and the selectmen should not go behind her back? Chairman Genest stated we were under the impression that we had agreed to form a committee right after Town meeting to study how it would be best to do a PR program to the Town to accept billing, if that was the decision that we made? We were not aware that anyone was in negotiations with anyone. P.Lovering gave us some literature to look at late last year from Comstar and that is when we agreed to form a committee. In September of last year we had done a quick survey of Towns that do billing and asked what service they used. Most of them used Comstar and were very happy with their service. In the meantime, we have talked with Peterborough, Hillsboro, Henniker, and I believe Bristol to get an understanding how "Billing" has affected them. On March 4th, Bill Prokop sent P.Lovering an e-mail, telling her that he and one of the selectmen planned on going to Mass. and would stop and visit with Rick Martin, President of Comstar, to get a better understanding how their system works. she e-mailed back a draft of a brochure and asked to be kept informed of any discussion with Comstar. Bill then sent her another e-mail asking her what day and time would be best for her if he could arrange a meeting with Rick Martin to come to Antrim to meet with our committee. It was the opinion of the ambulance squad that the Town Administrator and the selectman should not have gone to Comstar without them being there. This issue was discussed at length, and it was agreed that a committee consisting of ambulance squad personnel and the Town Administrator and Selectman Oldershaw would meet as a group, in Antrim with Mr. Rick Martin of Comstar. P. Lovering will arrange the meeting.

Chairman Genest asked B. Prokop to explain the background of billing and how payments need to be recorded for the Town. B. Prokop provided the following information:

1. The Antrim Ambulance Squad came under the control of the Fire Chief and Board of Selectmen, per warrant article 15, of the 2000 Town Meeting. This was voted and approved by the majority at the meeting. As of that point in time, the ambulance was and is governed by "Municipal Budget Laws" and is under the control of the Fire Chief and the Board of Selectmen, who he reports to. All monies a Town receives Must go into the General Fund unless the selectmen wish to establish a "Special Fund" under RSA 31:95-c.

They can say clearly what that fund is for. An example is Henniker—they state that up to \$35,000 will go into a “Special Fund” for the purchase of an ambulance. And, every year any expenditures from this fund must be approved by Town meeting. This is not an Antrim regulation, this is New Hampshire Law. Next, if we go to billing the key is Medicare Billing and the Town will be issued a provider number, not the ambulance association. This has nothing to do with your private association –Antrim Ambulance Association a 501c –non-profit corporation. If you still get donations and/or having fund raising events or functions that is your business, the Town has and wants No involvement. However, we have to make it very clear who we are when we bill. We can’t one day be The Antrim Ambulance Squad, then Antrim Ambulance Association, then Antrim Volunteer Ambulance Service, or Antrim Fire & Rescue. When we go to billing we are under Medicare –The Town of Antrim –ambulance squad. We can show the monies as “Income from ambulance” or we could develop a “Special Fund” and allocate X amount of money to the Fire & Rescue and then it is up to the Chief and the Selectmen to decide how to use the funds within the Fire and Rescue department. Those are the facts and that is the law and I am sure the Rick Martin will tell you the same thing. I want to make it very clear, that the selectmen nor myself, have any interest whatsoever, in the activities of the Antrim Ambulance Assn. That is a private non-profit, it has nothing to do with the Town. However, if a check comes in to the Town of Antrim Ambulance, or Antrim Fire & Rescue those are considered Town funds. It is No different than the Rec. Department getting checks, or even the Fire Department, if a check comes in to the Antrim Fire Department that has to be recorded as Town money. There was some discussion and P. Lovering stated that she understood that the Antrim Ambulance Assn. could bill under their tax ID number, but it would have more restrictions on it, imposed by Medicare and they would also have the cost of insurance, get the Town to vote to give them back the equipment. The selectmen feel that it makes more since, to handle this through the Town.

The discussion ended on a very positive note with everyone agreeing to move forward with the view of providing excellent

ambulance service at a lower cost to the Town and its residents. P. Lovering will set up a firm meeting date with Comstar.

The next item discussed was the putting up of our American Flags on Thursday the 15th, as a welcome home to Eric Hutchinson who has been serving a year in Iraq. The selectmen agreed to do this.

B. Prokop then advised the selectmen that due to the extra efforts of our Highway Department and in particular our Road Agent, Bob Varnum the Town had received a check from F.E.M.A., to cover the cost of the December snow emergency, in the amount of \$10,082.00. This money has now been credited to our account.

The selectmen were asked to contact the school board representatives, invite them to a meeting to further investigate allegation # 12 against David Dodge at his recent hearing. The selectmen felt that this issue is not a selectmen's issue, but should be left with the school board and will ask B. Prokop to convey the residents concerns to our school board representatives.

The selectmen then reviewed various correspondence and signed payroll and the accounts payable for the week.

It was noted that the selectmen will be attending a regional selectmen's meeting in Harrisville on Saturday, April 17th, at 9:00 A.M.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 P.M.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M&S', located at the bottom right of the page.