

Joint Tri-Town Selectmen Tri-Town Ambulance Committee Meeting
Tuesday, June 14, 2011
7:15 P.M.
Chilmark Town Hall

Present: Tri-Town Ambulance Committee Chair: Chief Randhi Belain, Chief Brian Cioffi, Bruce Haynes, Walter Delaney, Dianne Powers, Jonathan Mayhew, Warren Doty, Frank Fenner, Skipper Manter, Cindy Mitchell, Jim Newman, Beverly Wright, Spencer Booker, Remy Tumin, Adam Wilson, and Tim Carroll.

AGENDA:

Joint Discussion with the Boards of Selectmen from Aquinnah, Chilmark, and West Tisbury regarding Aquinnah's contribution to the FY12 Tri-Town Ambulance Budget

Aquinnah Selectman Spencer Booker: This budget question came up because we felt that the Tri-Town Ambulance budget was escalating too much for us and we thought that with two EMTs on day duty, that TTA could do without a Deputy Chief. The actual number that was taken out of the budget (\$25,000 less) was not really understood by us – it was more a comedy of errors. We discussed what could be saved if you did not have a Deputy Chief.

At no point were we in default. I was a bit surprised when you put on my desk the highlighted portion of the 1972 or 74 agreement that states that in 60 days we would be cut off from the ambulance service. I felt that was not the way to go about discussing an issue. When this is all said and done, we will have a Special Town Meeting and we will put this money back in the budget. As members of the community, we do want to cooperate.

We should revisit the Agreement. If you look at the number of runs and how they have increased....I have the breakdown from 2006 to 2010.

West Tisbury went from 217 to 258

Aquinnah went from 33 to 75

Our former Chairperson made this list and she wanted us to pay by the number of calls. We can not do that; we can not plan a budget based on that forecasting. I'm wondering if there is another way to look at it: population?? But if we have to pay a third, then we will pay a third. I think we need to look at where we can cut costs.

Aquinnah Selectperson Beverly Wright spoke: she is the new kid on the block. She looked at the budget and the calls and determined that if you look at the calls, then Aquinnah could pay less but then when you look at the revenue, then Aquinnah would get quite a bit less and this would cost the town more in the long run. I think we are between a rock and a hard place but we can look for grants? Of where we can cut back.

Dianne Powers: In a perfect world the budget would have grown more slowly and proportionately. But we do not have a perfect world. We needed to be able to set it up so whoever came in as Chief, they would have the tools needed to make the TTA service workable. You would not have seen a 53% increase in a budget in a perfect world. And I can safely say you will not see that kind of an increase again. We envision a part paid, part volunteer service. We need all shifts covered. I understand what you say about the number of runs – but please remember that the runs from Aquinnah take 3 hours – the longest in the service. Please do factor that into the thinking about the budget.

Bruce Haynes: Confirming the time it takes for various runs. A lot more is factored in to the runs. The Chief, Zeke Wilkins, could not be here due to a personal medical matter with his son. The Chief is the decision maker regarding whether a Deputy Chief will be hired or not. Even if a Deputy Chief is not hired, then other Paramedics will be used to cover the time/shifts that the DP would have covered.

Skipper Manter: Removing the DP would not reduce the budget because that slot will be filled by other Medics.

Dianne: Removing the DP, we would have less benefit line item. Maybe this year we could reduce the budget and split that savings by the three towns.

Brian Cioffi: The important thing that was said: we hired a Chief and these are decisions to be made by the Chief. He can decide how he wants to run his operation. He can bring that forward to us. The Aquinnah Selectmen asked if we need a Deputy Chief, that is a question to be posed to the Chief – not for us to discuss. Let him address it.

Cindy Mitchell: Perhaps we can agree to modify the budget later. He does need to factor in the “extra” money that may need to be in there to pay Dr. Zack’s medical help which may be \$30,000???

Randhi Belain: We do not know the amount. Dr. Zack claimed he would have a proposal to us in a week. The money is for QA/QI.

Cindy Mitchell: Aquinnah now is short \$25,300. The vote was not related to the unfairness of the agreement. It can be discussed (not necessarily tonight) – what I am wondering, starting July 1, would we deduct the \$25,300 from each town so each town is paying the same amount in the beginning. TTA does not need the whole budget at the beginning of the fiscal year. On July 1 each town puts in their equal 1/3 deducting the DP salary. Maybe we will agree to a reapportionment. All of that can happen over a period of time and we can start the year in unison. Maybe you won’t need to have a Special Town meeting.

Question: When I was an EMT in NJ, the Paramedics operated out of the hospital and they served the whole county. Has that ever been considered? That way the ER Chief of service, supervise all the paramedics.

Randhi: I do not think that it has been brought up formally again since when it was part of an earlier option before the Agreement.

Beverly: Does the Chief have the authority to hire an assistant? A Deputy Chief?

Dianne: Yes, that position was created and budgeted. It is up to the Chief to determine if/when he wants to hire that person. He then presents that to the Committee and the Committee can approve the hire.

Beverly: What does Dr. Zack mean about Zeke needing training?

Dianne: It is not training he needs, but more experience. Dr. Zack wants two years of experience as a Medic. The more runs Zeke is on, the more experience he will accrue. Dr. Zack wants Zeke to have more experience for teaching others.

Randhi: Dr. Zack would like the whole island Paramedics to do a rotating service. TTA medics would ride with OB, Edg would ride with TTA, etc.

Beverly: They think the three down island towns don't get enough training??

Dianne: The down island medics do not get long runs because they are close to the hospital and TTA does not get as many runs – so sharing could provide experience to all.

Bruce: The down island run time could be 15 minutes; TTA run time can be anywhere from 45 minutes to two hours. If the down island Medics worked up here, they would be with a patient much longer and would actually get to use their skills.

_____ : Dr. Zack talks about QA/QI (Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement)

Is he coming up with a plan for TTA? Do we have an idea of what that plan would be?

Randhi: He mentioned that an ER Doctor would be committed just to reviewing TTA and working with TTA only.

Brian Cioffi: Dr. Zack believes that Zeke does not have the experience to handle the QA/QI process and therefore Dr. Zack wants to assign a Doctor to that specific role. But Zeke may decide to get someone else who has the two years of Medic experience to fill that role.

Jonathan Mayhew: Zeke will try to work with Dr. Zack.

Brian: I did have a conversation with Zeke and he does have someone in mind. We want to let him do his job.

Selectman: How much time is a Medic on duty – not necessarily on a run?

Randhi: We have Zeke (as a Medic) on duty for four (4) ten-hour days; we have other medics on duty for three (3) ten-hour days; and we share with Tisbury a Night Medic for 14-hour shifts seven days a week.

Selectmen: How do we pay for that?

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Brian: We pay two-thirds of that bill and Tisbury pays one third. And the thing with the Deputy Chief position – that you can think that you do not need that position – you still need a Medic on duty for that three-day period when Zeke is not on duty. We created that position to cover that need for a Medic and to fulfill the Training aspect needed for the Squad – that is a State requirement.

Selectman: Does Zeke have the option to work extra shifts?

Brian / Dianne: Zeke is a salaried employee. He is only supposed to work 40 hours a week.

Selectman: What about the EMTs?

Randhi: During the season there is an EMT in each barn being paid hourly. During the off season, there are two EMTs on duty and they are paid for a shift – come July 1 the pay will go from \$75 a shift to \$100 a shift.

Selectman: So when a call comes in, and EMTs go who are not on the schedule, do they get paid?

Randhi: No they are volunteers who are merely responding to a call. They do not get paid.

Selectman: What about when two paramedics come to a call.

Randhi / Brian: One medic may have called for additional support. One medic may arrive simply because they heard the call and were close by – they are not getting paid unless they are on the schedule.

Selectman: When we do QA/QI do we consider time of response? How long does it take a paramedic to get to a call? Do we list if it was a high priority?

Randhi: Yes, we record all stats and TTA is above average on time of call; and part of our response time has improved because we have paid staff.

Bruce: It is a good system in place where we have one medic and two EMTs on at night and you know when you are on night duty and hear a call that the two other staffers will respond to that call also. If you need more people, you can always call for more back-up and it will come.

Selectman: What is the actual response time to get to the call for each person on duty?

Bruce: If the call is in Aquinnah, the time it will take me to leave my house, get the Ambulance and get to the call might be 20 minutes. A Medic might need 30 minutes to get to Aquinnah and that is just the nature of what we have here.

Brian: In a perfect world we would have each TT Ambulance staffed with two people waiting to go off on a call. We do not have a perfect world; we can guarantee that one ambulance will roll seven days a week with two people on it. To make that happen, we budgeted for the staff – a Chief, a Deputy Chief, two EMTs to be on duty.

Jonathan Mayhew: Back when I was active maybe 1985, things worked with volunteers and people came with their pagers. But now it is a different world.

Dianne: Back in the dark ages, when we had one ambulance for Tri-Town, Chilmark police used to bring the ambulance to wherever it was needed.

Brian: And that is why Chilmark has a night shift – to bring the ambulance to call.

Selectman: How are we doing with inspections now?

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Randhi: Great. We just had an inspection and we had one little bump but the inspection went well. It had nothing to do with medications. The ambulance went off to be fixed and will return on Tuesday. And since we are on Seasonal Shift, the ambulance can come up from Chilmark. Oddly enough, since the ambulance has been off island, we have not had a call.

Brian: We looked at the budget this year and looked back at other years to see where we could cut back. Now we have three ambulances, two intercept vehicles, etc. It costs more.

Randhi: One intercept vehicle usually stays with the Paramedic on duty.

Jonathan Mayhew: Would one of the Chiefs like to talk about having Selectmen doing this job again in six months and doing away with the Police Chief involvement.

Dianne: What we talked about was that TTA should be seen as a department and run as a department not run by a committee of seven but run by the Chief of TTA. There is no need for a Committee when TTA is run as a department.

Selectmen: There needs to be open communication.

Brian: We have heard this before – that there is not enough communication. But there is a representative for each Town's Selectmen and they need to report back to their people. And the Selectmen need to ask more questions. The perception out there is that the Police Chiefs have nothing to do with the Ambulance. It is unfair. I do say I'm a Police Officer not a Paramedic. I can not tell you what to do on an ambulance. It is about ownership and about pride. Give somebody the job and let them do it. Give them the pride, and you will see a great service. They do not need to report to seven people. Absolve the Committee. The Chief can report to the Selectmen and keep communication channels open.

Dianne: We had decided to make the move when the Chief was in place and that really happens in six months when the probationary period has ended.

Aquinnah Selectman: Budget time. . .did you bring your budget to each Town for approval?

Brian: No, we were asked to go before the WT FinCom but Aq did not ask for a presentation. But really you knew about the budget and then a few people manipulated the budget and the budget that we came up with was not even the budget that was being looked at by the WT FinCom.

Dianne: If the question is how soon will the Committee change? -- then I think the answer is up to the Selectmen. And maybe you ought to think about a Squad Rep.

Brian: I think not.

Walter: With the Chief that we have now, the morale now is improved over 100%. I hope we are reorganized by the next fiscal year. All the slots are filled for the summer, right?

Randhi: Yes, with a few opens but we will always have that.

Dianne: We want to see the Chief in place before we make this shift away from a Committee. We currently have a probationary Chief in place. And assuming that at the end of six month we have that Chief in place, then what?

Cindy Mitchell: Playing devil's advocate, if at the end of the six month probationary period, you do not have a Chief in place, what do you do?

Dianne: If for some reason this Chief does not continue on, then we would have to seriously look at the job description to find out why we are not attracting the right person.

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Beverly: who would make the decision that at the end of the six-month probationary period, this Chief is not right for the job??

Dianne: The Committee would make that decision.

Cindy: So no later than January 1, 2012, this Committee will determine if the current Chief (whose probationary period would have ended on December 7) is to continue in that position.

Dianne: When you see the TT as a department, then the Committee can be more hands off.

Brian: There were some emails from Jack Collins about whether per diems are real employees, what benefits do they get, etc. The Committee should be dealing with these types of issues.

Jonathan: Then the issue of the money needs to be resolved. There might be some savings in the end if we do without a Deputy Chief.

Dianne: What needs to happen is the Committee needs to step away from the day to day running of the service. If it were not for Chief Belain, the TTA would have folded over the past years. He has done a lot of the management when we lacked a person at the helm. Future, I envision that the Chief will put together his budget and put it forward. The model is the police chief. Instead of the TTA Chief answering to nine people, he would answer to three people.

Jonathan: I'm thinking that the three representatives might be a rotating position of Selectmen from the three towns.

Selectman: I think that the Committee that hired Zeke should be the group that evaluates Zeke.

Skipper Manter: I think reporting to three is too small. I think five or present seven is fine.

Dianne: The consensus was not if we would disband but when.

Cindy: We could draft an Agreement that has reporting to three.

Brian: I stand on the issue of ownership and pride. Reporting to a Committee of seven does not instill pride or a sense of ownership. The Chief makes his budget, presents it to the FinCom, reports to the Selectmen, make policy for his Squad, etc.

Cindy: The Agreement was from 1974.

Bruce: I think it would be difficult for a TTA Chief to flourish when there are three Police Chiefs in the room who all have opinions about how things are run. It will be easier for a Chief to be strong when he is reporting to three people / representatives from the towns.

Dianne: The TTA service will be stronger when it is seen as a department and the Chief reports to the Selectmen of the three towns.

Warren Doty: We need to think about how this can work for the TTA since it is not the same as the Police Chief – who knows he reports to the Selectmen. If we decide within the reconfiguration that the TTA Chief reports to the Selectmen – as an oversight (finance) committee. It can be one Selectman from each of the three towns.

Brian: Chief Wilkins needs to be in charge – he needs to have pride in ownership. I think that the new structure should not even have a Squad representative (no offense to you,

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Bruce) on the Committee because it diminishes the Chief's authority. The department will run better.

Speaker: Project to a year from now - - - We have a 3-person committee, Chief Wilkins has been in place for a year, we're going to do a job evaluation to see if he is eligible for a raise, the Chilmark Selectmen appointed the Chief....how does it work for evaluation?

Dianne: The Committee will do the evaluation and submit it to the Chilmark Selectmen for approval.

Cindy: It works the same with seven or with three. It is a form of rubber stamping whatever the representative recommends.

Dianne: It is the charge of the Committee of three to come up with an evaluation to be presented and filed.

Warren Doty: That same Committee would be working along with the Chief on the budget, etc.

Beverly: Do the three towns have the same salary matrix?

All: Chilmark is the fiscal agent and all TTA employees are thus employees of Chilmark.

Agreement:

A. Chief will be looking at the budget

B. Aquinnah will hold a Special Town meeting to find the additional \$25,318.00.

C. Richard Knable has had interest in revising the Agreement, so ask him to do that and bring it back. Cindy will volunteer Richard to do that. Once we have it, we will get back to you to date another meeting.

Brian: If we are going to go to the trouble to rewrite the Agreement, let us pay someone to look at it and advise us. There may be some contention there – asking Richard to do it.

Randhi: It will be a Draft.

Dianne: Richard has offered to put together a Draft – so whether we like what he puts forward, it will be a starting point.

Speaker: A person is too upset to come to a meeting but we might like his Draft? I don't think so.

Speaker: The TTA has been a regional effort.

Brian: The Committee – out of necessity – has had Police Chief involvement. We've hired a person who now has been in charge and has recently passed a State Inspection. We have too many tiers in the chart. We need a Chief who reports to a group of Selectmen, who report back to their full Selectmen body. They govern their towns. This Committee should be pulled out of the mix.

Bruce: What the Agreement lacks is defined rules for the Committee. If you define what the Committee is responsible for – that would be great.

Speaker: When will Aquinnah meet?

Jim Newman: July 7, 2011 is our Special Town Meeting.

Speaker: Do you think that any of the talk heard here tonight would create a more favorable result in Aquinnah regarding the TTA budget and the Deputy Chief money?

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Jim Newman: There had not been a discussion there; Randhi tried to get people to understand what is needed but it fell on deaf ears; it is hard enough to try to get a quorum; we'll probably have to give away a fire truck as a door prize but . . . I am comfortable with Richard Knable writing the Draft of the Agreement – knowing how opposed he is to everything.

Randhi: Chief Wilkins will look at the FY12 Budget and decide what he wants to do with the budget. The administrative work happens when you are not on runs. Zeke will work that out. Thank everyone for coming this evening. A very good discussion was held.

Old Business:

Alpha 90 – the Aquinnah ambulance is going to come back on Thursday afternoon. Simon Bollin and Randhi will go off island in an intercept vehicle to get it and have the intercept vehicle tagged/marked that day.

Once Dr. Zack gets his proposal to us, we will need to plan a meeting.

Motion to Adjourn by Dianne Powers, Seconded by Brian Cioffi.

Unanimously voted. Motion Passed.

Meeting Adjournment: 8:43 PM

Draft Minutes respectfully submitted by Barbara Silk