

**MARION BOARD OF SELECTMEN
WATER/SEWER COMMISSIONERS**

June 24, 2008

Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m. at the Music Hall preceding a public hearing to allow questions and comments on the proposal to commence billing for ambulance services.

Present were Chairman Jonathan F. Henry, Board members Roger F. Blanchette and Stephen M. Cushing, Town Administrator Paul F. Dawson, Helene Craver, secretary, and several bystanders.

The Board signed the weekly warrants.

Mr. Cushing moved the minutes of May 27 and June 10, 2008; the motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

Mr. Blanchette moved the appointment of Diane C. Cook to the Tree Planting Committee; the motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

Mr. Blanchette moved one-day, all-alcohol licenses for Sippican Tennis Club for July 19, August 16 and August 30, 2008; the motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

The appointment of Mr. Henry as the Board's representative to SRPEDD's Joint Transportation Planning Group was signed.

Mr. Dawson explained that, as a requirement from the insurance company, it is necessary for the Board to vote the fireworks display a Town event.

Mr. Blanchette moved the fireworks a Town event; the motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

Mr. Dawson noted that, on February 19, the Board voted to institute third-party ambulance billing; accordingly, he had solicited proposals and received two. Mr. Dawson reported that the proposals had been evaluated first as to content and then as to price; Coastal Medical Billing's proposal was for the lower percentage of the total amount, which he recommended the Board accept. A brief discussion followed regarding whether the Board should vote on the proposal before or after the public hearing. It was agreed that the Board would reconvene after the public hearing to vote.

The Board reviewed a LIP application for Littleneck Village. Mr. Dawson explained that this will allow the Town to find a funding source.

Mr. Blanchette moved to approve the application and forward it to the Department of Housing and Community Development; the motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

At 7:05 p.m., the Board convened the public hearing on ambulance billing.

In addition to the people listed above, present were Lee Craver, Suzanne Byron, Carol Sanz, Thomas Magauran, Julia Deane Crowley, Eunice Manduca, Eric Radin, Helen G. Westergard, Reginald Foster, David K. Pierce, Lucy and Joseph Napoli, Robert I. Wing, David Gulley, Francis Reardon, Christina Hingston, Shirley Johns, Betsy Dunn, Dorothy A. Heath, Fredric Danhauser, Nelson Adams, Kathy Lewis, Margaret and Brian Avila, Nancy and John Mills, Loretta Kemp, Sally Madison, Hank Keene, Carol Brown and Mark Southworth. Also present were Kenneth J. Souza of *The Wanderer*, Donald Cuddy of *The Standard-Times*, Ruth Thompson of *The Sentinel*, Robert Slager of the *Tri-Town Observer*, Emergency Medical Services members Jeffrey Habicht, Joan I. Wing, Everett F. Eaton, W. Dale Jones, Nicole DeBlois, Andrea B. Keene, Charles Brown, Peter Hunsdorfer and Jacqueline Gleiman. Also present were members of the Finance Committee, Richard Kemp, Hamish Gravem and Alan Minard.

Mr. Henry noted that the purpose of the hearing was to discuss the proposed ambulance billing policy which was drafted by Mr. Dawson. Discussions followed regarding details of waivers, income levels, invoicing for service. Mrs. Westergard and Dr. Radin questioned the income guideline levels. Mrs. Crowley suggested a contact person be designated to assist people with the process.

Mrs. Sanz asked why the Town has decided to begin ambulance billing now? Mr. Henry said that we don't know how much revenue will be generated, but the goal is to make the service self sustaining. Mr. Henry explained that it may take as long as a year to determine the revenue and, if there is a shortfall, it will have to be covered by taxation, as it has been all along.

Mr. Henry reported that the Town has received proposals from two companies for the ambulance billing; Mr. Blanchette, Mr. Dawson and Mrs. Mooney had reviewed the proposals and made recommendations to the Board.

Mrs. Sanz asked about the billing process as it relates to waivers. Mr. Henry explained that the Town Administrator would make the final determination as to waivers. Mrs. Sanz objected to having to disclose financial information. Mr. Henry said that the confidentiality standards are very high. Mr. Henry said that, speaking for himself, he wishes to see services be self sufficient, as it helps the taxpayer—less than 1% of the population uses the ambulance service and the other taxpayers are paying for it. Mrs. Sanz pointed out that all taxpayers pay for the schools. Mr. Henry indicated that the ambulance calls are covered by health care benefits. Mr. Henry said that the same people, same system, same ambulance will be in place as long as it can function. Mr. Dawson explained that the demographics are changing; the population is getting older and we have to plan for the future.

Mrs. Dunn objected to the changes and noted that Marion's ambulance service was the last vestige of what we have here. Mrs. Dunn said that we can't equate the ambulance service with moorings in the harbor. Mrs. Heath stated that the service had worked very successfully in the past and the Selectmen are trying to force this issue prematurely. Mr. Henry noted that there were large donations when they were first accepted, but they have diminished to about \$3,000 a year, when the costs are closer to

\$96,000. Dr. Radin said that he had heard at the Annual Town Meeting that people will not be donating for another replacement ambulance and said that a business plan needs to be developed for the ambulance service. Mr. Henry said that they have the costs, but he doesn't have them here right now. Dr. Radin said that the Town is moving too quickly with inadequate data.

Mr. Brown mentioned other services performed by the Town for which people aren't billed (e.g., Fire Department pumping out basements) and said that this is a special Town with special people. Mr. Brown singled out several members of the Emergency Medical Services who had given thirty-plus years in volunteered services "...who had probably been in everyone's home." Mr. Brown said that this plan takes some of the heart out of it and suggested everyone pay \$25.00 per year to fund the ambulance service and prevent the billing. Mr. Brown said that there is hidden poverty in Marion that most people don't see. Mr. Brown indicated that Wareham now has a professional ambulance service which doesn't rely on volunteers, who don't keep up their skills and aren't used anymore. Mr. Brown said that the transfer as a medical necessity worries him the most, as he knows of cases where physically, it wasn't necessary but it was psychologically or emotionally. Mr. Brown said that the service is currently growing with five paramedics—there have never been more, although they could use more help during the day.

Mrs. Manduca noted that the EMS volunteers do the job because they want to do it and they take great price doing it extremely well—has any Selectman gone to an EMS meeting and talked with the members who are doing the job to see how they feel? Mr. Henry said that he didn't see the need, as a member of the Board had communicated with the group.

Mr. Pierce urged the Selectmen to think very carefully about the things which make Marion special and about making changes to a system which is working well and is efficiently run.

Mr. Jones said that he was speaking for himself when he expressed the concern that to institute billing will be detrimental to the service, which will force them to go to full-time people and will ultimately cost the Town in the long run. Mr. Jones said that he knows the service has been accused of giving people "taxi rides" and there have been times when they have taken someone to the hospital at 10:00 p.m. and given them a ride home half an hour later; insurance would not cover this and there are a lot of cases like this. Mr. Jones explained that the service uses donations for support and to buy equipment. Mr. Jones said that the attacks on the members of the service in the *Tri-Town Observer* were "straight-out lies". Mr. Blanchette said that he did not see the need for a full-time service in the foreseeable future—the service is perfect the way it is now. Mr. Cushing agreed that a full-time service was unnecessary and that the Town needs the additional revenue stream. Mr. Henry said that billing is the least painless way of planning is to collect the insurance money due the Town as a foundation. Mr. Henry cited Lakeville and Dartmouth as two towns which use a combination of full-time and volunteer forces. Mr. Henry said that they can't take the chance of calling 911 wondering if anyone is going to come—they have to look ahead. Mr. Blanchette said they must plan on the revenue stream—people are tired and having a hard time paying the bills—if they don't plan ahead, taxes will go up. Mr. Blanchette said that they are

doing what they think is right for the Town. Mr. Magauran said that the Town needs a business plan—what is the cost to the Town if the Board is wrong? Mr. Magauran said that the EMS people think the Board is wrong—a full-time service would cost over \$1 million a year.

Mr. Habicht asked if the Board had considered polling residents on a non-binding ballot question whether they would each be willing to pay \$20.00 per year to fund the ambulance service and prevent insurance billing. Mr. Henry said that he had not considered this and did not see the point of a non-binding referendum. Mr. Habicht noted that the Town depends upon donations to fund the fireworks and he believes people would be willing to fund the service. Mr. Henry said that paying a fee for the ambulance every year could be considered and was not an unreasonable idea. Mr. Napoli recommended putting ambulance billing on the shelf, as the time has not yet come to move forward.

Dr. Kemp summarized discussions and agreements with Emergency Medical Services over the last several years, including the January 2008 meeting when the Town faced an \$800,000-\$1,000,000 deficit. Dr. Kemp explained that the Finance Committee has a business plan projecting over the next five years which forecasts deficits in every year. Dr. Kemp explained that this situation is being duplicated all over the Commonwealth and, at the January meeting, all departments were asked to prepare budgets with a 10% reduction across the board to focus on this serious problem. Dr. Kemp expressed his concern that the present five paramedics are not enough and that staffing is very expensive and ongoing.

More discussion followed, with many of the previous points being raised. Mr. Blanchette said that he sees no reason to change the service in any way beyond billing. Mr. Henry said that he can see a need in the future for a combination of full-time and volunteer personnel. It was stressed by Mr. Henry and Mr. Dawson that the Town has no experience with the projected income and that this will take some. Mr. Dawson also pointed out that it isn't only health insurance companies who pay for ambulance service—automobile insurance and workers' compensation also cover ambulance transfers.

Mr. Jones noted that, although the service cut its budget by the requested 10%, the response time is excellent; they can match anyone in the Commonwealth. Mrs. Sanz noted that the changing demographics target the group least able to pay for the service—they are taking away one of the things that they can count on. Mr. Henry said that they would like to avoid pitting one group against another. Mrs. Sanz said that the seniors are happy to pay the school bills for young couples; in general, it is the seniors who have the lowest income.

Mr. Magauran said that, four years ago, Town Meeting gave the Selectmen the authority to set fees, but he didn't think anyone contemplated putting this system at risk with this action; this should go to Town Meeting. Mr. Henry said that there is no reason not to collect the revenue due the Town.

Mr. Blanchette said that he has seen the billing forms and they have simple check-off statements for someone without insurance or who cannot afford the cost; the

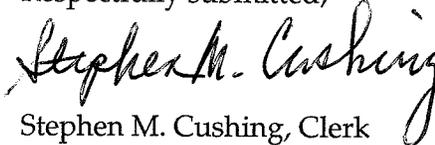
forms will go to Mr. Dawson for him to determine whether to write off the cost. Mrs. Sanz said that this is not clear—this is based on financial criteria and it sounds like the abatement requests for water and sewer—they say “no” to everyone. Mr. Dawson said that it is the billing company’s experience that these worries don’t materialize. Mr. Avila asked about billing Tabor Academy and Sippican Healthcare. Mr. Dawson said that he cannot understand this fear of calling 911 for transport to the hospital, because the hospital will absolutely charge the patient.

More discussion followed. Mr. Blanchette said that it was their responsibility to protect the fiscal stability of the Town. Mr. Dawson answered some general questions regarding the proposed contract with the billing company. The public hearing was concluded at 9:40 p.m.

Mr. Dawson summarized the process of choosing an ambulance billing company up to this point and recommended the Board hire Coastal Medical Billing. Mr. Blanchette said that there were too many details which need resolution before a contract can be awarded. Mr. Cushing and Mr. Henry agreed and requested action be deferred until the July 8 meeting.

Mr. Cushing moved to adjourn at 9:50 p.m.; the motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Stephen M. Cushing, Clerk

Date approved: 8/5/08