

STEBEN COUNTY PUBLIC SAFETY AND CORRECTIONS COMMITTEE

Special Meeting

Monday, August 22, 2022

11:30 a.m.

Legislative Chambers, 3rd Floor, Annex Building

Bath, New York

****MINUTES****

COMMITTEE:	John V. Malter, Chair Frederick G. Potter	Jeffrey P. Horton, Vice Chair	Wendy Lozo
STAFF:	Jack K. Wheeler Tim Marshall Ed Fitzpatrick	Christopher Brewer Tina Goodwin	Jennifer Prossick Ken Forenz
LEGISLATORS:	Scott J. Van Etten James Kuhl Paul E. Van Caesele	Kelly H. Fitzpatrick Hilda T. Lando	Carol A. Ferratella Gary D. Swackhamer
ABSENT:	K. Michael Hanna		
OTHERS:	John Lyons, Town of Addison Ray Walch, Addison Mayor John Buckley, Hornell City Mayor Frank Brozowzski, Chief, Hornell City Fire Department Gregg Kramer, Hornell City Fire Department Randy Housel, Town of Tuscarora Judi Hall, Town of Cohocton Bridget Burte, Town of Addison Jim Neary, AMR Fred Grambs, Springwater-Wayland EMS Mark Ryckman, Corning City Manager M. Mahnke Manley, Town of Cameron Monica Recktenwald, Village of Canisteo Tim Thompson, Town of Bradford Nancy Kirby, Town of Caton Rita McCarthy, Town of Erwin Callie Perry, Town of Lindley Michelle Smith, Bath Ambulance		

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Malter called the meeting to order at 11:30 a.m.

II. GENERAL BUSINESS

A. Emergency Management Office

1. **EMS Study** – Mr. Marshall stated this is the sixth meeting that we have held to discuss the EMS Study. The study was done during COVID and looked at EMS services across the County. For several years I have been advising the Legislature that volunteer EMS services are struggling, and have been for a period of time. We hired the Center for Public Safety Management out of Washington, D.C. to conduct the study. The study came back with some

information that we already knew, which was that volunteer numbers were down and that we need to try to make changes with how we do our current operations.

Mr. Marshall stated our first EMS discussion was to recap the result of the study with updated numbers. Our second discussion was with the paid ambulance services; City of Hornell and AMR. We then held two additional meetings with the volunteer agencies in the County. The volunteers informed us that they are struggling and it is difficult to answer EMS calls. Both daytime and evening calls are difficult. Everyone is doing more with less. The number of volunteers have decreased and we need to come up with a different plan. Mr. Marshall stated today we wanted to bring the political officials together to look at the options that are available.

Mr. Wheeler thanked everyone for attending. The CEO's of the municipalities are very critical to the system. We are looking at municipalities that have paid departments or if towns have joint fire and ambulance or ambulance districts. We are all in the same boat. At the different levels of government we are confronted with an issue that is not unique to us. Every county, in conjunction with the municipalities, is working to try to study this issue, and this is an issue that is pretty much nationwide. There are different ways to address this. What has become clear is that action needs to be taken, but the question is what action. We want to hear your thoughts, as well as the issues that you are facing.

Mr. Marshall stated we have 21 EMS agencies in the County. One agency is federal; the Bath VA, and they provide coverage for their facility, however, we do see them coming off campus more and more. That leaves 20 agencies, including paid services. Only 7 agencies handle 75 percent or more of their calls. That number fluctuates some depending on the number of EMT's. He stated 9 agencies turn over half of their calls to mutual aid. The paid services are providing coverage to jurisdictions outside their agencies and that tasks the existing agencies and their resources. The calls that other agencies are missing is because they are answering calls for another agency. Mr. Marshall stated Mayor Buckley brought this issue to our attention. This situation is no different with Bath, AMR and the Town of Cohocton who hire paid EMT's.

Mayor Buckley thanked everyone for being here today and also thanked Mr. Wheeler and Mr. Malter for their leadership and for holding this meeting. In the City of Hornell we have a paid fire department, but in reality it is our ambulance service that provides fire protection. The City of Hornell is increasingly providing more services to outside municipalities. We have a contract with the Town of Hornellsville which covers Arkport and North Hornell. We are providing more and more to our outlying neighbors including the Town and Village of Canisteo, Greenwood, Hartsville, Woodhull and Troupsburg. We have been seeing a decline in the volunteer ranks. The State has put more burdens on the volunteers over the years and hindered their ability to provide these services. From the city's standpoint, we are ready, willing and able to perform the services, but the cost is very burdensome with the Hornell City taxpayers bearing the brunt of this operation. We do have a simple agreement which allows the City to bill the patient's insurance.

Mayor Buckley stated this year we acquired two new ambulances and we are in the process of acquiring another fly car. We have a paramedic that just graduated and two more individuals going to paramedic school. This is a large investment which the city taxpayers bear the burden of and the outside municipalities enjoy the benefit of, but they have no skin in the game. He noted that lift assist calls are increasing in our neighboring towns and villages. The city does not have the means to bill for that as it is a non-medical event. In a large sense, the City is subsidizing those communities. Our ambulance is on the road all the time and fuel costs are high, along with wear and tear on the vehicles. We also have manpower and staff shortages. When we send an ambulance out to another jurisdiction, that takes two of our people out. We also provide transportation to St. James. It is not uncommon to have three or four ambulances out at the same time. This stretches our resources very thin in the City. If we have three ambulances out, that is six people. It creates a vulnerability as well as more overtime, which is an additional cost. This has been an increasing burden over the past four or five years.

Mr. Malter asked for the number of calls that you respond to other than for the City and Hornellsville, what percent of area does that represent that you do not have a contract with? Mr. Kramer stated he is a fireman and paramedic for the City of Hornell, as well as the QA Supervisor for patient records. The breakdown of percentage of calls that are non-contract calls are 4 percent for Town of Canisteo, 3 percent for Village of Canisteo, 2 percent for Jasper, 2 percent for

Troupsburg, 2 percent for Woodhull and 2 percent for Greenwood. Overall, 10 percent of our calls are in areas that are not covered under a contract. Mr. Malter asked do those areas have ambulance service? Mr. Marshall replied yes.

Mayor Buckley stated our concern is their ability to turn out a crew. Do they have appropriate staffing to get an ambulance out? An ambulance is only as good as the people you have to staff it. We have a fly car which is an intercept vehicle and that is used to intercept for the BLS agencies. Over the last several years, the number of intercepts has decreased and the number of full rigs has increased.

Mr. Swackhamer asked how long are your ambulances tied up? Chief Brozowski replied routinely they are out for about an hour. Mr. Swackhamer asked what if they are going outside of the city? Chief Brozowski replied they could be gone longer depending on where they are.

Mr. Marshall commented an ambulance crew typically consists of an EMT and a driver. If it is a rural community and they cannot get either an EMT or a driver, they cannot get their rig out the door. Not having sufficient personnel is part of the problem.

Mr. Van Caesele stated when you do go outside of the City, the cost increases. He stated 10 percent may not seem like a large number, but it is multiplying because of the cost. Mr. Kramer stated the overall coverage outside of our contracts was 10 percent of the calls that the City of Hornell had for the year. Mr. Malter commented it is not just a shortage of EMT's, but also drivers. Chief Brozowski stated the State has mandated that in order to be a certified ambulance you have to have at least one EMT and someone to drive that ambulance. Most crews we would like to have at least three on.

Mayor Buckley stated another issue that we run into occasionally is when our ambulance responds to Jasper, for example, that person is expecting volunteers and are not expecting a bill. Our ambulance goes out and a bill is automatically generated. The person will contact my office and is asking for forgiveness of the bill or a deep discount. In some cases when they call, they are irritated. There is a large number of billing issues where individuals do not have insurance and we have to eat a portion of that and the insurance never pays out what you bill for anyway.

Mr. Malter commented maybe some education needs to be done with regard to what happens when the ambulance is called and explain that there is a lack of resources, as well as personnel. Mayor Buckley commented he is not knocking the volunteers; they have provided wonderful services, historically. In my opinion, the generation we saw growing up were volunteers and they wanted to volunteer.

Mr. Neary stated AMR concurs with everything that Mayor Buckley has said. I would say our call volume outside of our contract is 20 – 25 percent. On Sundays, our calls are typically higher. When we do send ALS, we send a full ambulance rather than a fly car. The County is still toning out to find an ambulance rig and then you have two ambulances committed to the call.

Mr. Van Etten asked what is the purpose of a fly-car? Mr. Neary replied ideally to provide emergency medical services without transport. If transport is needed, they would utilize the ALS ambulance. Mr. Van Etten asked if the City of Hornell is purchasing a fly-car? Mayor Buckley replied yes. Right now we have a Chevy Tahoe that we use to interface with other agencies. Next month we will have a new vehicle which will be a transit van; in essence an ambulance. It will still be an intercept vehicle, but it will be fully equipped. Mr. Wheeler commented we are seeing that become more of a trend with other counties because of the lack of resources.

Mr. Ryckman stated thank you for holding this meeting and conducting the study. The study was very thorough. It seems to me the issues are pretty well defined and well known among the municipalities. I am interested in walking through the options and going through the pros and cons of each to better understand what the situation is.

Mr. Marshall stated Option #1 is picking up part-time resources to provide support to municipalities during the peak daytime hours of 6am – 6pm. Option #2 is a paid service with the County jumping in and going with a paid service. Option #3 is a local utility model and would be a municipal district. This would be a separate corporation run by a

separate board that would oversee the ambulance agencies for the County. He noted at this point the County has not taken a specific path.

Mr. Van Etten commented there were four options today and they were on pages 128 – 132 of the study and each option was progressively more expensive. We do not want to be in the ambulance business as a County. That is not our core competency and is not something we could do easily with the size of our County. Providing resources in focused areas where there is reduced coverage is something that could be interesting. We could look at that and analyze it.

Mr. Wheeler stated the Legislature has not formally considered any of the options. The other thing is the steps that are being taken by other counties in New York State. A lot of counties are at this same point. Some have taken steps from creating an EMS department staffed with equipment and staff to the more augmented model where it seems like there is equipment out there, but there are staff problems. Some counties have put out RFP's and contract directly with agencies and give money to paid agencies to augment their services. I think it is important, to Mayor Buckley's point, for the municipalities to have skin in the game. A number of jurisdictions are very well covered right now and obviously going outside their district and have resources to respond.

Mr. Van Etten commented Chenango County did a hybrid approach. They created a plan where they can utilize the existing assets and it is up to the municipalities to maintain and replace those assets, but the County provides the staffing. Mr. Wheeler stated in my opinion, this is the most interesting model that I have seen. We do have equipment in place and staffing is an issue. Chenango applied for a CON and worked very closely to position assets and staff based on call volume and peak times. He noted that Chenango has part-time staff. He stated that he can send Chenango's plan to each municipality's chief executive officer to look at. Mr. Ryckman asked are these staff County employees? Mr. Wheeler replied yes, Chenango hired 18 part-time EMT's and paramedics. Mr. Malter commented we should have a chance to review Chenango's plan and have another meeting.

Mrs. Lozo stated there are 20 transporting agencies and nothing has been said about first responder units which is a huge supplement. AMR has a big district, but every town they cover has a first responder unit. Those units go and stabilize the patient, they get information and get the patient ready to transport. They do everything a BLS can do except transport. That saves a lot of time. Those units would spend maybe 30 – 45 minutes on a call. It saves time and if there is a transporting agency, that pulls all the central billing in one area. The first responders do not bill. There are first responder units in Thurston, Campbell and Hornby. It would not be that difficult for a small ambulance to look at a first responder unit. They would need a different CON and with our ambulance, AMR had to agree. I think this really needs to be looked at. Mr. Marshall commented I think there are 7 or 8 first responder units in the County. Mrs. Lozo stated it would get help to the patient faster. Mr. Van Etten stated I agree with you. Caton has a first responder unit and an EMT. Mr. Malter asked do they have to have an EMT? Mrs. Lozo replied they can be certified as a first responder EMT if they are certified through the State as a first responder unit. You just cannot go above your level of training.

Mr. Van Etten stated with the townships in the southwest corner, they have rigs but no staff. Is there still a human resource shortage? Mrs. Lozo commented some don't want to go out on calls as they are often gone for three hours. Mr. Van Etten commented he has also heard about concerns with aging volunteers. Mr. Wheeler replied that is the critical piece and that is a great point and something that needs to be incorporated into the plan. Before this, Emergency Services had a meeting with the ambulance corps about coordinating and identifying when units will and will not be in service. We can identify where to pre-position resources. I am Responding has been very helpful with that process.

Mrs. Lando commented I think one of my concerns is we know we need to do something short-range and long-range, but we need to get more young people involved. We have to come up with some clever ways to get young people to volunteer. Mr. Marshall commented you cannot get EMT certified until you are 18. Even if youth join at 16, they cannot be an EMT until they are 18.

Ms. McCarthy stated as the County is looking at a solution, I would like you to look at the Town of Corning and Town of Erwin tax contributions to the County. Our taxpayers are already paying to acquire ambulance services. As the County goes forward how are you going to account for that. Mr. Van Etten stated that is a concern for all that are sitting here. If you live in the City of Corning and you are already paying for ambulance services, why should they pay for something

that is happening in Greenwood? Mr. Wheeler replied that is a good point. Chenango County had a lot of discussion about this and the example they used was law enforcement. You are paying for troopers and sheriff's deputies. You can look at it from a public works standpoint as well. You are paying for county roads, but many people don't travel them.

Mayor Buckley commented the Chenango plan is very interesting. One of the challenges we have in the City of Hornell is related to our health care. We are community-rated and we have to stay under 100 employees. I would love to have more, but we cannot do it. The Chenango model is very intriguing. We want to provide the services and be able to provide the services. The City will have six full functional ambulances and we are also sending our people to school. We are now at the fork in the road; do we need six ambulances to serve the residents of the City? Absolutely not, but we see the need out there and needs are only increasing. He stated he just wanted everyone to be aware of the gravity of the situation and the reality of the situation. There is that extra 30 – 40 minutes of delayed response time. It is very appropriate to have the stakeholders being involved.

Mr. Malter stated over the course of all of these meetings, we have heard concerns regarding training costs. One of the proposals I have been thinking about is having the County pay teachers to provide this education. Ms. Fitzpatrick asked if a municipality or ambulance organization has a CON, what have they been doing to address the ability to meet that need? Have they looked at hiring career staff and what is preventing them from doing that? Chief Brozowski replied we are talking with Greenwood. We have had formal discussions with Avoca. There is grant money out there and those agencies have tried to talk to kids and have tried to set up programs. They only get one or two kids involved and by the time they get them from the level of first responder to EMT, they are off to college. What we have here in the County, is a big huge farming community. Our volunteers used to live and work in the community. Now they work outside of their community. It is not that the departments have not been trying; they have been trying desperately. They are wondering what to do next.

Ms. Fitzpatrick asked why not look at hiring full time staff and increase their budget? One option would be to form an ambulance district. They could budget for equipment and supplies. In my mind, that is a great idea as each district can tailor their needs. It does not make sense to bring it up to the County level. I love Mr. Malter's suggestion to provide training resources. Do these agencies only rely on donations? Mr. Marshall replied money is a big issue when you are just a municipal entity. Cohocton did form a taxable district and hired staff to provide an EMT during the day. They do not miss a lot of calls in Cohocton. That is the whole process and a local municipality would have a hard time funding that. The other thing is the call volume. Cohocton's call volume is smaller than AMR or the City of Hornell. They have to have revenue coming in from the tax base.

Ms. Hall stated in Cohocton our ambulance is paid for by our taxes. The other part is billing. Training is the biggest thing. We send 6 prospective EMT's to class and half of them dropped out because of their work schedule. Class is held two to three nights a week and the closest class is in Bath or Hornell. Of the remaining 3, one will not be able to pass the test as they are not test takers. The testing schedule is also difficult as many times they have to take the online test at 11:30 p.m. We pay for their coursework. If they drop out, they are supposed to reimburse us for that cost, but that does not happen. Training and staffing are huge problems. We are continually changing our paid staff. We now have a salaried, full-time EMT and we will see how that works. For the past two years we have been able to cover 100 percent of our calls and at least 25 percent of calls outside of our district. Many months we are able to cover 50 percent of out of district calls. Ms. Hall stated one of her big things is that if they get a call and staff a crew and get them out the door, that they are then called back. If you are out and on the road, then that should be your call. The County doing something with training would be a huge step.

Ms. Fitzpatrick stated with the CON, nobody wants to pay more taxes. That should start at the municipal level. I do love the idea of the County helping with training.

Mr. Potter commented equipment is not the issue. There are four ambulance corps in my district and manpower is the issue. An EMT will get trained and then will go work for a paid service. Retaining EMT's is a big problem. The current pay for an EMT is \$15.00 per hour. This is a very complicated problem. Mr. Malter asked in the areas where you have ambulance assets, does the town pay? Mr. Potter replied yes.

Mr. Van Etten asked for the CON's, does the State monitor their performance and have they ever pulled a CON because an ambulance corps is unable to do the job? Mr. Marshall replied the State monitors and they make sure the corps have all of the equipment needed on their rigs. They do not monitor the number of EMT's or the number of calls they take. I do not see the State pulling a CON due to lack of personnel or responses. Mr. Van Etten commented to me, it would be like a business franchise. What happens if they are not filling the need? Mr. Marshall replied there is a process to that. Another agency would take over the territory and they would have to prove that the corps was not fulfilling that need. Mr. Wheeler commented the CON is a process to work through. It makes it easier if the municipalities agreed. That is not a judgment on those municipalities or those services; that is just the situation we find ourselves in. If it is gone into as a partnership, it is not the County trying to take something over for the municipalities. It is just that we are all trying to find our way through this.

Mrs. Lando asked do we have any idea of the cost if the County did the training and if the County did hire the part-time staff since the equipment is already being provided in the towns and villages? Mr. Wheeler replied we do not have anything to share with you yet. At the next meeting we can provide our best estimates.

Mr. Malter asked is the CON that covers the County held by AMR? Mr. Wheeler replied yes, minus the City of Hornell. Mr. Malter asked do you have to contract with the municipalities? Mr. Neary replied AMR has the ALS-FR which is basically the ability to send ALS first response units throughout the County, minus the Hornell area. Otherwise our transport ceiling covers those areas that we are contracted with; Corning City, Corning Town, Erwin, Caton, Lindley, Thurston, Campbell and Hornby.

Mr. Ryckman asked under the Chenango model, do the municipalities reimburse the County for any portion of those part-timers or does the County just pay for those part-timers? Mr. Wheeler replied my understanding, under Chenango model, is the County pays for the part-timers. If the County staff are the ones running the full call, they will contract with the billing agency to get some of the reimbursement. The equipment is the responsibility of the municipalities.

Mayor Buckley asked what are our next steps? Mr. Van Etten asked that Mr. Wheeler send the Chenango study to everyone as their county is very similar to Steuben. Mr. Malter stated once everyone reviews that study, maybe next month we can have another meeting with this group and go over that report and see what fits with Steuben County.

Mr. Neary commented with regard to the County hiring staff, there is only a certain pool of EMT's and it sounds like we will all be competing for that same pool. Mr. Van Etten stated that is absolutely the case. What other options are there? Mayor Buckley asked will we be competing or creating more opportunities? We should look at it as creating more opportunities.

Mr. Wheeler stated when Chenango announced their plan, they had 20 people start training. There will be the competition, but the goal is to get more people interested in the field and get training in-house. Then we can get more people into the system. Mr. Marshall commented it would be similar to the program AMR put into place for career opportunities. There are more chances of an individual wanting to move forward because more jobs would be available. We have to open the door for more opportunities. Mr. Malter commented there are EMT's that are volunteers that might transition to full-time if there were opportunities available.

Ms. Fitzpatrick commented even if there was an ambulance district, there would certainly be a shortage of supplies. We would need to figure out a way to create those jobs. Mr. Wheeler replied if the County were to hire part-time staff, there would be no benefits, but they would accrue retirement benefits.

Mr. Malter commented the cost to Cohocton was \$100,000. In Wayland they are answering 90 percent of their calls with volunteers and are able to recruit. Other places are not able to do that. Mayor Buckley stated in the City of Hornell we changed our residency law. Previously they had to reside within the City and we changed the requirements to be within 15 miles from any point in the City and that really opened up our options in EMS. We have hired from our neighbors in Canisteo, South Hornell, North Hornell and Arkport. We are taking resources from those volunteer departments which helps us, but not them.

Mr. Malter stated we will send out the Chenango County study to all of the municipalities and schedule another meeting. In the meantime we can put some numbers together. Thank you all for coming.

Meeting was adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by

Amanda L. Chapman
Deputy Clerk
Steuben County Legislature