

Town Council Meeting
June 28, 2022

The June 28, 2022, Town Council Meeting was called to order by Denise L. DiFranco, President, in Foster, RI at 7:00 p.m.

The following members were present:
Denise L. DiFranco, President
Heidi Rogers, Vice President
David Paolino
Cheryl Hawes
Chris Stone, excused.

Also present:
Kelli Russ, Finance Director
Julia Chretien, Solicitor
Gordon Brayton

- I. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
- II. **OLD BUSINESS**
 EMS

Denise L. DiFranco said Mr. Stone was excused. She asked for a 15-minute recess.

Denise L. DiFranco said that tonight’s meeting is in regard to the letter sent from our solicitor to Mr. Petrarca in regards to the proposal that was made at the last council meeting which was to honor the request of the Ambulance Corps for three months at \$155,000. Ms. DiFranco asked for a response.

Virginia Colwell, Commander, Foster Ambulance Corps, said they were not accepting that offer but that there is an alternate plan in place. Gordon Brayton said the alternate plan is that Station 1 has agreed with Station 4 to take over their duties, leasing the rescues and the building. Right now it is set up for three months, hopefully in three months—or two months—they’ll come up with a permanent solution. He has tried to find an EMS Coordinator. The insurance company is all set, the vehicle insurance is paid until February. Liability will be picked up by South Foster. The Ambulance Corps liability insurance will go away.

Heidi Rogers asked what is happening with the Ambulance Corps on July 1st? Are they done? Mr. Brayton said they aren’t done, they are still an organization. They are just not going to participate in EMS.

David Paolino asked if they will be responding to calls. Mr. Brayton confirmed they are not taking calls, not getting dispatch, not responding. They remain an organization until they decide what they will do. Ginny Colwell said they would be assisting Station 1 as needed if it is needed.

Denise L. DiFranco asked about dispatch. Mr. Brayton said they will work on that tomorrow night.

Cheryl Hawes asked about the insurance policies. Mr. Brayton said they are paid. He said they could run under the DMV registrations they have.

Heidi Rogers asked about leasing the building. That isn’t saving any money. Mr. Brayton said nothing is going to save money. Ms. Rogers said if you close the building you are paying less. Mr. Brayton said until you reorganize the whole EMS, nothing is going to save money. In the next two or three months if they come up with a good plan, then they’ll figure out how to save money. That’s part of the consolidation. He said he is open to ideas. Maybe the new EMS director will have some ideas. Ms. Rogers asked how much he would be paid. Mr. Brayton said that when he spoke to him he wasn’t worried about being paid. Ms. Rogers asked if he was going to volunteer his services. Mr. Brayton said he told him he couldn’t volunteer his services. Jim Waterman, retired, from Smithfield said, “We’ll do what we gotta do to get you up and running.”

Ms. Rogers asked if he would arrange the scheduling. Mr. Brayton said yes. Ms. Rogers asked if he was going to do runs himself. Mr. Brayton said no, unless he needs to. Ms. Rogers asked again if he is volunteering. Mr. Brayton said

he doesn't think he should. He should be paid for the hours he is putting in.

Denise L. DiFranco said there has been a counter proposal, should we make a motion to accept it as presented?

David Paolino moved, Heidi Rogers seconded, to accept the counter proposal.

Discussion: Heidi Rogers asked if there was a written document of the lease. Mr. Brayton said it is being drawn up. Ms. Rogers asked if there were any restrictions as to where the rescues can be housed. Mr. Brayton said he didn't think so. Ms. Rogers said so we are keeping them there.

Denise L. DiFranco said in two or three months, when Gordy and his group has figured out something, it may be housed someplace else. Ms. Rogers asked if this was month-to-month or are we agreeing to three months? Mr. Brayton said they need three months, there is so much to do.

Ms. Rogers asked if the funds were going to Station 1? Mr. Brayton said Station 1 would pick up the payroll service. Kelly will write a check and they will write a check to them, so as not to make them town employees yet.

Denise L. DiFranco asked if the EMS Director would be a town employee. Mr. Brayton said he is temporary, he's helping us out; we can make him a town employee.

Kelli Russ said we don't know how it's going to work yet. We are trying to continue their benefits. The problem is that they are trying to keep their benefits as is. We can easily accept their per diem employees, it's very simple. We can accept the EMS director. We are creating account numbers for them. It gets a little more complicated with insurance for the vehicles.

Denise L. DiFranco asked if this was something that could be figured out in the next day or two. Ms. Russ said yes, we can see which one is easier.

David Paolino asked if a lump sum check could cover the liabilities. Ms. Russ said if they are going to have a payroll service, yes.

Cheryl Hawes said the bills that they have acquired will be theirs, and you will go forward and we'll be giving you less money than we were going to. Third party billing—

Mr. Brayton said he wanted Kelli to write a check for everything that they spend, as much as they can transfer through the town. He would rather leave South Foster's checking account totally out of it. If they have to make a separate checking account, they want Kelli to pay for those. Ms. Rogers asked if the third party billing would go to the town? Mr. Brayton said the money that is still owed to the Ambulance Corps should go to the Ambulance Corps. Ms. Rogers asked if after that it would go to the town. Kelli Russ said it would, on or before June 30th.

After June 30th the bills would come to us.

Ginny Colwell said the payroll will end this Saturday so it's only two days.

Cheryl Hawes told Gordy Brayton that his proposal was well received by the Ambulance Corps. Ginny Colwell said it was unanimous. Denise L. DiFranco wanted to thank Gordy, the Ambulance Corps, John, Charlie, for working this all out. This council appreciates it.

Lynne Rider, asked if all of the current personnel will remain there. Mr. Brayton said about 60 percent are staying on. Ms. Rider asked if they would be hiring anyone else? Mr. Brayton said yes. Ms. Rogers said she had some names of people who would be willing to return.

Motion passed 4 - 0.

Heidi Rogers, aye; David Paolino, aye; Cheryl Hawes, aye; Denise L. DiFranco, aye.

Denise L. DiFranco said they had discussed at their last meeting the purchase of a vehicle that Heidi had researched. She asked Heidi and Kelli to hold off on purchasing that until tonight so they could have further discussion.

Heidi Rogers discussed the rescue: An inspector said the vehicle is good. It may be in need of tires soon but mechanically everything is good. They took a vote for her to find the vehicle and they took a vote to purchase the vehicle. She understands that the rescues will now be with Gordy, but they will still not be in the town's hands. We also had discussed that we were working in tandem. You were going your way and we were still going to stay on our path. She said she still thinks they need to purchase this rescue, they don't know what's going to happen in three months. It can be up here by the end of the week. If everything works out, and we have the rescues and don't need a third, we can trade it in. We can replace the unit truck in Moosup Valley. Or it could go to DPW and convert it. It isn't money wasted. Or we could just sell it. We need to go our path in case something falls apart. If we end up with nothing for our rescue services, we will be liable. She feels they still need to get it.

Denise L. DiFranco said we did take a vote; it was before we realized that this was going to happen. We now have two ambulances, and it was brought out that there were many times where we only used one ambulance because we don't have the staff or the personnel. Now we'll have three ambulances when we're only going to be using one because we don't have the staff. The other is that you had said that you found several of them already so I assume there are others out there.

Ms. Rogers said you don't know how hard it's been.

Denise L. DiFranco said she appreciates that, and that they go quickly. She doesn't think it's frugal at this time or financially reasonable of us at this time to spend this money. Ms. Rogers said she understands that, but it's from capital. She just doesn't want to get stuck. We've been working on this for months, and yes, things change, and you're correct, this did change. As of last night, we have a new offer, but things can change in three months and she didn't want to be liable or stuck.

Ms. DiFranco said that we have three months to play with. She says she thinks about the town as her own household, so now your car breaks down, and you go to the car lot and oh you're going to buy it now because it's going to be gone in an hour! Get it now!

Ms. Rogers says but it's not. Ms. DiFranco said but we have three months now to say we can get another one if need be. Ms. Rogers said that she didn't think they needed a third ambulance either, she thinks we need an ambulance in case something falls apart here and you said three months but we're going one month at a time. Ms. DiFranco said she is going to take the word of the Ambulance Corps and of Gordy's group that we have three months.

Cheryl Hawes said she agrees and had been thinking about it all day. Should we have one in the wings? When she spoke to Gordy, she asked if this could go south, we don't want to be caught without anything. Everything that has been done has been done in good faith, and they are working together. She would hate to buy one and have it just sit there for three months, not needed at all. Then we are in the position of having to sell it. From everything

that's been said, she doesn't think this is going to fall apart. She thinks they are going to make this work. She doesn't know what the eventual thing will be—will the ambulances be sold to Station 1, are they going to ask an exorbitant price for one? That's something we didn't ask and don't know.

Julia Chretien said that according to 501c3, they would have to confer with their counsel before they can dispose of any assets, so it's not something they can answer now. Ms. Rogers said she thinks there is too much uncertainty. She's not willing to take that chance. If we have this extra rescue, no we don't need three rescues, but if something happens—we've been trying to do this for how many months?

Ginny Colwell said that in addition to a diesel inspection for any rescue vehicle, there's far more than just it's diesel. There's also all the wiring, the box, and it is going to pass RI inspection. Ms. Rogers said that has been checked. The company that does it do a lot of emergency vehicles.

David Paolino said two months ago there was no solution, no help, nothing like what has been presented these past couple of weeks. He is grateful for all that has been presented. He understands where Heidi is coming from. We didn't want any break in service. He doesn't want any animosity because they bought an ambulance. The way this is going, it's going to be split.

Cheryl Hawes moved, David Paolino seconded, that we hold off on purchasing a new ambulance until the need for an ambulance presents itself.

Discussion: Lynne Rider said it seems that for months the stated hope was that the town and the organizations work together and get somewhere together. You are getting that. At this point, she sees no cause for worry to have to spend another \$50,000 when you don't need to spend \$50,000 because you never know what's going to come down the pike. At the end of all this, she thinks it doubtful the Ambulance Corps will put the rescues in their pocket and walk off with them. If everybody acts in good faith and that seems to be the way it's going to go, and everybody keeps their cool, she only sees a positive resolution to this.

David Paolino said he understands where she's coming from, but the council has wounds from being mocked in the paper for not doing anything for months. It takes a few minutes to get over that.

Heidi Rogers says she appreciates the new proposal and believes they will act in good faith but she doesn't want to be stuck. It's not like it's going to go to waste. Denise L. DiFranco thinks there is a difference between a need and a want. When we started looking, there was a need. Now it's a want in her eyes.

Ms. Rogers said there are too many unanswered questions and too much to work out.

Denise L. DiFranco said that part of her vote is faith in what has gone on and the other is spending that money when we don't need to.

Catherine Bay said everybody is working together except for Station 3 and Station 2 in these talks and meetings they seem to be having.

Denise L. DiFranco said Station 1 stepped up and said let's help out. They wanted to do this. Yes, your Station 3 offered to take them on and house them, but we have a solution here that's going to work in the long run. Ms. Rogers said Station 2 helped. Catherine Bay said they weren't involved in any way.

Lynne Rider said how difficult it is going to be getting personnel. Purchasing the ambulance sends the message

that you are not all in and will make it difficult to get personnel.

Denise L. DiFranco said in defense of that, David and Heidi have justified it.

Denise L. DiFranco asked to have the motion repeated. The motion was repeated.

Motion passed 3 - 1.

Heidi Rogers, no; David Paolino, aye; Cheryl Hawes, aye; Denise L. DiFranco, aye.

Denise L. DiFranco said the next meeting is July 21st. The council thanked Heidi for her hard work.

III. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 7:56 p.m.

Submitted by,

Susan M. Dillon, Town Clerk