



TOWN OF BROOKLINE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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Public Hearing Minutes Ambulance Billing Evaluation Committee Monday, November 26, 2018

Committee members in attendance: Brendan Denehy, Shawn Jackson, Tim McGettigan, Jim Deffely, Brian Rater, and Tad Putney. Absent: Todd Christensen.

Residents in attendance: Ann Somers, Loring Webster, Roger Ogden, Valerie Ogden, Judy Cook, Peter Cook, Francis Gavin, and Lisa Shutt.

Brendan opened the public hearing at 7:00pm. Committee members introduced themselves. **Brendan** provided background on the charter of the committee and the history of prior committees that looked at the question of ambulance billing and related town meeting votes.

Shawn provided information on work the committee has done to date. He said that prior to his hiring ambulance service personnel had developed a spreadsheet to model the financial factors of billing. He noted there are also non-financial factors that need to be considered, including more stringent documentation requirements by ambulance personnel. **Shawn** explained that multiple staffing models have been considered for Brookline ambulance as the members have said that if we bill, then BAS members would need to be paid. He also said that a small majority of the current members of the service do not want to bill, but the margin is small and less than it was when the service was surveyed about a year ago.

Shawn reviewed the billing spreadsheet for attendees. He said it assumes \$600 per BLS transport and \$1,000 per ALS transport and uses full-year 2017 transport data as only transports can generate a bill. He said the model suggests total annual billings would be about \$272,000, but Medicare and Medicaid pay only a portion of their bills. With the actual rates paid by these groups, and private insurance, the total would be about \$182,000, including the proposed 2019 Mason ambulance contract of about \$75,000.

Shawn said that in Milford they tried to do billing in-house and it was very challenging and time consuming for ambulance service members. As a result, if we decide to bill, we would use a third party to do the billing work.

Returning to the model spreadsheet, **Shawn** said it assumes 7% of revenues are paid to the third party company. He said the actual percentage would vary depending on how aggressive the town wants to be in collecting. He said he spoke with four different billing

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companies as part of the research. **Shawn** noted the model also assumes 40% uncollectibles, which is the average percentage provided by the billing companies.

Shawn said that the model estimates annual income, after the fee to the third party and uncollectibles, of about \$97,000 without any additional staffing costs included. He said that the 2019 ambulance budget assumes ambulance personnel will be paid on a per call basis similar to the fire department and the initiation of “call pay” was initiated due to a Fair Labor Standards Act issue, not billing.

In response to a question about the demographics of its calls, **Shawn** said 38% of Brookline ambulance calls since 2016 were for individuals age 65 or over. It was noted that residents over 65 comprise only 9.1% of the town’s population.

Judy Cook said she suspects some of our seniors are likely to call for a transport that is not an emergency and that with it not being an emergency, it will not be paid by Medicare or Medicaid.

Judy Cook said the ambulance has the smallest of the three emergency services budgets, but is being asked to be the only one to charge for its services. She said she feels that billing is not the right thing to do to our seniors who get no services from the schools.

Peter Cook said that he had reviewed the last twenty years of annual reports and found that our fire department provides about five times the mutual aid *to* other towns than it *receives* from other towns. **Shawn** said he believes the ambulance service has similarly gone to about five times the mutual aid calls than it has received from other towns.

Roger Ogden asked how many other NH towns do not bill. **Shawn** said that he is not sure, but we are one of very few, if not possibly the only one left.

Lisa Shutt said the headaches associated with reporting, etc. that go with billing is, in her opinion, not worth the estimated \$44 a year in savings that could result from billing.

Ann Somers said she is not in favor of billing, but asked why so many other towns bill. **Shawn** said they have decided to pursue the revenue stream.

Roger Ogden said he had heard earlier that 9.1% of the town’s population is over age 65, but 38% of the calls were for this older segment of the population. **Shawn** said yes.

Roger said that **Judy Cook** makes a good argument and he does not want to put more stress on our seniors. He said, however, that a Comstar representative had suggested to the Selectboard last year that we could potentially not bill seniors. There was discussion that it may be possible, but we have also heard that everyone must be billed.

Ann Somers said that if she was in a position of needing an ambulance, she does not want to be in a position of needing to go to the Selectboard for a hardship or to be thinking how much the call is going to cost her and she is comforted knowing if there is a need for an ambulance, our friends are there to take care of us.

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Shawn said there was a meeting last week with the Mason Board of Selectmen and we explained to them the contract cost for 2019 will be about \$75,000, which is up from about \$23,000 in 2018.

Brendan closed the public hearing at 8:12pm.

Tad said a resident had suggested we invite Hollis Fire Chief **Rick Towne** to our next meeting to hear from him about his experience transitioning to billing for Hollis's ambulance services. Members agreed. **Tad** will reach out to Chief Towne. **Brendan** said the next meeting will be Tuesday, December 4th at 6:30pm in the Town Hall meeting room.

Meeting adjourned at 8:16pm.

Minutes submitted by Tad Putney.