

TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Special Selectboard Mtg. w/ AmCare

December 14, 2015 @ 6pm

Approved Minutes

NOTE: All actions taken are unanimous unless otherwise stated.

A. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Jeff Towle, Chair @ 6:00pm

Highgate Selectboard Members- Jeff Towle, Chair; Chris Yates, Vice-Chair; Paulette Tatro; Randy Connelly; Diana O'Hara

Highgate Office Staff – Wendi Dusablon, Town Clerk; Heidi Britch-Valenta, Town Administrator

Public / Other – Andy King, Public Works Director; Ben Lowell, Constable; Walt Krul, AmCare; Jacques & Donna Beaulieu; Chris Uzell; Jennifer Gagne; Alice (Sue) Cota; Keith Ploof; Crystal Lampman; Cody Domey; Jess Ramsdell; Lynn Billado; Josh Ramsdell; Brian Benoit; Henry Rainville; Richard Noel; Leonard Stell; Debbie LeBeau; Sandra Stone; Heather King; Paul Rocheleau; Duane Tremblay

Jeff Towle began by stating that the Town of Highgate Selectboard is comparing pricing for EMS services and doing their due diligence to the taxpayers of our town. The board will also be meeting with MVR on Thursday night 12/17 at a regularly scheduled Selectboard meeting which begins at 7pm. Tonight we are here to listen to the presentation from AmCare and hear questions and concerns from Highgate residents.

B. AmCare

Walt Krul began by stating that AmCare is a private entity unlike other EMS agencies in our area and that AmCare pays state taxes, federal taxes and local property taxes. All revenues go back into the business. AmCare is a career service and all crew members are paid. They do not utilize volunteer staff or anyone under the age of 21. He is the owner and has been since they started in 1989. In the first few years he did have a business partner, but over the last 26 years they have had a fairly consistent managerial staff. They are a busy service, with approximately 4,000 services per year which includes 911 and non-emergency calls as well. Besides himself as director, they also have a training coordinator, an in house quality insurance director who is a full time paramedic and a full time operations manager, who is also a full time paramedic. They are the largest EMS employer in Franklin County with 24 employees, 19 full time and 5 part time, no volunteers. They also have an in house billing specialist and office manager to maintain quality in house. This saves revenue and keeps it local, rather than farm it out to an outside contractor. Medicare is becoming more complex. In recent years there has been an uptick with veterans that require emergency care. AmCare works with both the VA and Tri Care to handle those claims. Medicare has made changes to coding recently which required upgrades and overhauls to their system. Medicare will be decreasing ambulance services reimbursements starting in 2016, which will affect all EMS service providers. Medicare refers to this as negative reimbursements. Expenses overall are going up such as payroll, it never goes down, everyone at AmCare gets a raise every year, it may not be the raise they want but everyone gets one every year. Equipment, regardless of the level of certification or licensing, is expensive. It has become unrealistic to even think about level funding, because eventually everything catches up. They are in a mode of consistent respectful increases over several years of a contract, understanding that the reimbursements won't always be there. Operationally, AmCare is based out of St. Albans and Sheldon. They have crews on the road all day long and have responded as back up to MVR, and vice-versa. They have responded in Highgate when MVR is tied up or in St. Albans or Burlington on a transport. AmCare has responded to all areas of Highgate over the years. In the past year their average response time overall has been 10.6 minutes in Highgate when they have been

asked or needed to respond here. The other side of this is providing the best and highest quality care possible, which goes back to paramedic advancement. AmCare has 6 ambulance units, all are licensed at the LS level to provide paramedic care. The slowest time is at night, noting AmCare is staffed 24/7. Weekdays during the day there are 3-4 staffed units, nights there are 2 staffed units and weekend days a minimum of 3 staffed crews. Their staff consists of 2 basic EMTs, 8 full time paramedics, and the balance are advanced emergency medical technicians. Walt noted that some of the faces are interchangeable in the EMS career field, adding that Chief Stell worked for AmCare years ago. AmCare and MVR have always had a very good working relationship. AmCare recently covered for MVR for their annual holiday party, and MVR covered for AmCare prior to that as well. Walt welcomed any questions following his presentation. Jeff asked about the new facility in Sheldon – yes, it will be completed in March, and in the mean time they are working out of the Sheldon fire station. Chris asked when the new building is complete, how it would be staffed – 1 full time unit 24/7. Chris also asked Walt to elaborate on the difference between an EMT and a paramedic. The difference is in the amount and type of training. EMT's receive 100-300 hours of classroom training and limited clinical time. Paramedics received 1,600 hours of extensive training with much more focus on the clinical setting. Paramedics have many more tools in their toolbox. Paulette asked about the unit in Sheldon, and how many crew members will be on site 24/7 – there will be 2 crew members. Chris had questions about training and if they facilitate their own trainings – AmCare has structured trainings, not necessarily open to the public. If HVFD were to create a first responder group, would they fall under the AmCare umbrella – technically, yes. It allows a first aid squad to do their own training and license on their own and not have to rely totally on the transport agency all the time. AmCare can provide documentation to towns regarding call volume, but there are lots of rules about the type of information they can release. AmCare can provide coverage at community events such as Field Days and sporting events if they are provided with the schedules. They would cover these events, including any contact sports, at no additional charge. Randy asked how the Town of Highgate would affect their response time and if they would require more crew members. Walt did not see any changes to response time or additional staff members needed if Highgate were to contract with AmCare. Diana asked if all calls from Highgate would be serviced out of Sheldon. This situation would depend on the call. Their dispatching is done in house and they know where their crews are. All towns are shaped differently, so it will depend on where the call is and where their crews are at the time. Sue Cota spoke emotionally about an experience she had 21 months ago when she lost her husband. MVR was there within minutes and she was very grateful for them that night. She is not saying AmCare is bad in any way, but MVR was wonderful to her. She also recently fell and had to call for help, MVR was again there in just a few minutes. Sue was very concerned with the issue of response time if a change is made. Duane Tremblay asked about backup and who would help AmCare if there was a big emergency. Duane had concerns about MVR being eliminated if Highgate makes a change. He has also had very positive experiences with MVR and doesn't think AmCare can match that. Jeff reiterated that the board is doing its due diligence to the taxpayers by reaching out to other EMS providers for pricing and information on services. Richard Noel added that back when he was on the board they did this as well, 20 years ago. They decided at that time to stay with MVR. Chris noted that last year was his first year on the board and when you see a big number come up, you want to see the taxpayers get the best bang for their buck. You also have to look at quality of care, not just numbers. Last year the board decided not to have AmCare come and present to them. The board has changed some, and this year they decided it was time to reach out and therefore, we are here this evening. The board is glad to see people here because it means you are invested in your community. Chris also added that Highgate and Swanton are paying the most per capita for EMS services in this area. Debbie LeBeau is a Highgate resident and feels that MVR is not broken so why do we need to fix it after all these years. She further stated if it had not been for MVR her sister would have been paralyzed. Mrs. LeBeau does not see any reason to reach out to Sheldon or St. Albans when we have an option right here in our community. Jen Gagne is a Highgate Springs resident and also the school nurse at Highgate Elementary. She too has concerns about response time and would like to see some data on response time from AmCare. Jeff again stated that we would be meeting with representatives from MVR at the Selectboard meeting on Thursday, December 17th. That meeting will start at 7pm. We need the best services for our dollars, and that may well be MVR.

Sometimes it doesn't feel good to reach out to others in cases like this, but it was not one person who had the idea, it was the decision of this board. Jeff further stated he does not want anyone to get bashed or feel bashed as part of this process. It has not been easy to put this out there, especially with the positive experiences being shared here tonight. Jeff lives in Highgate Springs and response time is a concern for him as well. Diana added some comments, based on personal experience as well. She has had involvement with EMS with a family member and MVR has been very good. There were times that AmCare responded to her family also and they had a very good response time, even coming from St. Albans. Diana added that Sheldon Springs is close to Highgate as well. Chris noted that he does not think MVR will go away, even if Highgate does back out. Jacques Beaulieu added that MVR does an excellent job. Sandra Stone is a Highgate resident from Rollo Road. She had questions about the budget and what would happen if the budget is defeated at town meeting. The EMS budget line item is part of the general fund which is voted on at town meeting from the floor. The Town of Highgate is currently in a contract with MVR until July 1st. Sandy has concerns with response time as well. She referenced an incident a few years ago during a snow storm that MVR responded within 20 minutes and Lynn apologized to her for the delay due to weather. Jeff thanked everyone for coming and reminded them about the Selectboard meeting on Thursday with MVR. Henry Rainville supports the board and understands that they need to shop around. Heidi added that MVR is not dependent on Highgate and they have the ability to invest in their community and expand as well. Jeff stated that in today's world it's all about social media and open meeting law. Henry asked about the average length of service with AmCare employees. Walt has 26 years, there are 2 employees at about 20 years, and then it goes down to 8-9 years of service from there. Paulette asked if individual families could subscribe to a particular EMS provided that is not contracted in their town. The request can be made with 911 but this is not routinely done. In many towns there are multiple providers where one may be closer than another, depending on where you live and where the providers respond from.

C. Other business

- Andy has located and obtained some lockers for the fire department and public works department, free of charge. They are located in Ohio and he needs direction from the board on how to get them here. He has some shipping quotes or, if needed, Andy will go pick them up himself this weekend. Jeff would like Andy to obtain more shipping quotes tomorrow and get back to them.

D. Upcoming events

Dec. 15	4:30pm	Arena Construction Committee Mtg. @ arena
Dec. 15	6:00pm	Planning Comm. Mtg.
Dec. 17	7:00pm	Selectboard Mtg. – MVR
Dec. 20	4:30pm	Skate with Santa @ arena
Dec. 24, 25		Municipal Offices – CLOSED
Dec. 31		Municipal Offices – CLOSING @ NOON
Jan. 1		Municipal Offices – CLOSED
Jan. 1	12 & 1:30pm	MVU Men's Alumni Hockey Games @ arena
Jan. 5	6:00pm	Finance Comm. Mtg.
Jan. 5	6:00pm	Parks & Rec. Mtg. @ arena
Jan. 6	6:00pm	Library Trustees Mtg. @ library
Jan. 7	7:00pm	Selectboard Mtg.
Jan. 14	6:00pm	DRB Mtg.

E. Executive session

Motion by Chris Yates to enter into executive session @ 7:10pm with Walt from AmCare to discuss contracts, where premature public knowledge would put the town at a severe disadvantage. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**. Motion by Chris Yates to exit executive session @ 8:10pm. The motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED**.

F. Adjournment

Motion by Chris Yates to adjourn the meeting @ 8:15pm. The motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED**.

Respectfully submitted by,

Wendi Dusablon, Highgate Town Clerk

Minutes approved by,

Jeff Towle, Chair – Highgate Selectboard