Minutes

TCCOG Emergency Medical Services Task Force

Department of Emergency Response Conference Room

November 8, 2016

Meeting #1

Present: Irene Weiser, Lisa Holmes, Brad Perkins, Brian Wilbur, Doug Keefe, George Tamborelle, Patrick Brunner, Bill Goodwin, Casey Powers, Dan Klein, Michelle Wright, Lee Shurtleff, Marcia Lynch

Excused: Frank Towner, Ed Kokkelenberg

Staff: Joe Mareane

Irene Weiser opened the meeting at 5:10 PM and welcomed the members. She said the idea of the task force came out TCCOG in the wake of the Town of Caroline losing its ambulance service after 57 years of having a volunteer ambulance service. It appears that other communities are also challenged by not having volunteer ambulance service or have operations that are in a weak condition. The task force was created to explore ways to meet the needs of our communities

She said that when membership was being considered, the goal was to ensure the views that came out of the committee were solid, which requires people who understand the issues and field; have the respect of their colleagues and community; and who are bold enough to think out of the box. She feels the membership satisfies those goals.

Members then introduced themselves.

[Dietary restrictions: Casey Powers, Vegetarian; Michelle Wright, no mammal; Dan Klein, no dairy]

In his self-introduction, Lee Shurtleff said that he is concerned about the ability to sustain necessary levels of service and meet public expectations; that we are at risk of not being able to sustain services financially or career- or volunteer-wise. He said similar challenges exist in many other communities. He hopes that the broader perspective of this group can give guidance about how to address this emergent problem. Lee’s concerns were echoed by other members of the group.

Ms. Weiser said the group will meet twice a month, on the 2nd Tuesday and 4th Wednesday of each month. She expects the group to continue its work for a year.

Recognizing that the group will be together for a long time, Ms. Weiser suggested talking about how to make sure the meetings run well. She led the group in an exercise to identify the “Do’s and Don’t’s” of an effective meeting. Negatives included lack of focus; meeting for the sake of meeting; dragging things out too long; too long of an agenda; lack of follow-through; doing committee work in the larger meeting; egos and posturing; story telling; lack of action after brainstorming; making things too complicated; too much “politics”; and an imbalance of who speaks. Positives included active listening; clear meeting goals; respecting adversaries; materials circulated in advance of meeting; a set time for adjournment; focus; progress between meetings; focus on things within the group’s control; recognizing opportunities to stretch; utilizing outside resources; tangible reward system; sense of urgency.

Ms. Weiser suggested the group discuss the Charge from TCCOG, including the basic goals and specific tasks. (see attached resolution.)

Mr. Keefe asked for clarification that response and transport was being divided. Mr. Tamborelle said transport and response are two separate things. Bangs, Groton Ambulance, Dryden Ambulance, and Trumansburg Ambulance are the only transport agencies in town. The others are first response agencies; not transport. Other than the ambulance services, the other agencies do not have the time (20 minutes to 2 hours each run) or manpower to handle transport. Bangs Ambulance has a Certificate of Need from the State for the entire county, so if an ambulance service folds, Bangs would pick up that area. Mr. Shurtleff asked whether that model is sustainable, or whether something different need to be considered. Traditionally, we’ve had a two-tiered system of first response and transport. We’re not sure that can be sustained with the agencies currently providing the service, so he believes we need to look at the overall picture. He questioned whether the existing ambulance services will be able to stay in business, and is not sure the others could step in to fill the gap. Others agreed that this is a concern.

Mr. Keefe noted that in Caroline, a group was started to identify something to address the Slaterville situation, which left the fire district without a first response agency. He said first responders do most of the life-saving (others agreed). The people who get there first can stabilize and prep individuals for transport. He said the Caroline effort to find a solution has stalled because of some personal issues of a Town Council person.

Mr. Brunner said there is no first response in that area, although a truck is still there. A Bangs ambulance out of the City responds. When Slaterville went out of business, the town assumed that mutual aid would cover needs in that area.

Mr. Keefe said Speedsville provides non-certified EMS. Slaterville is the only area without first response.

Mr. Tamborelle discussed the reliance on other agencies to provide back-up. He said it works great, and that the County has a great mutual aid system. No one is afraid to ask for help, and the system is not broken. However, when other agencies are asked to pick up calls, the increase in calls will result in fewer volunteers responding to calls, as volunteers get tired. If Slaterville is relying on Brooktondale, there will come a time when volunteers cannot respond to all of the calls. He said every agency is running into manpower problems.

Ms. Weiser returned to the question of the Charge. All agreed that the 1st Resolved is acceptable. The second Resolved is silent on who will chair the group. Ms. Weiser said she would be willing to continue to serving as chair, but is open to another member of the group serving as chair. The third Resolved speaks to the County’s support for the work of the group.

The “bullets” within the Charge that define the group’s tasks were discussed. Mr. Wilbur said that nothing clarifies the needs and expectations of the community that were referenced in the first Resolved. Mr. Keefe said that recruitment and retention is not mentioned, and that the group should explore possible recruitment and retention strategies. Ms. Lynch suggested language for a subsequent bullet that called for the exploration of strategies including, but not limited to, recruitment and retention of personnel.

Ms. Holmes asked where the interim and final reports of the task force will go. Ms. Weiser said they will go to TCCOG and others.

Ms. Weiser suggested the task force may want to follow a model followed by TCCOG’s recent courts task force by calling in experts and stakeholders to provide insights, perspectives, and ideas. Mr. Keefe noted that Cornell’s Johnson School students are mid-way through a study that included a survey of past and present volunteers, and came out with some interesting findings that they will work on in the coming year. Mr. Brunner noted the linkage to BOCES as an important resource for training and recruitment. Ms. Lynch said the County has had good experiences with Cornell’s CIPA program. She also said, based on the experience of the courts task force, we should guard against being bogged down by the desire to hear from all potential stakeholders.

Mr. Tamborelle said that the lack of EMTs is a major problem, and noted that there is only one training program in one location (TC3) in Tompkins County. It is hard for someone in Newfield, for example, to go to TC3 for training in the evening. We should try to make training more available in different locations. He suggested much could be done to increase the pool of EMTs by taking training to the volunteers, either through TC3’s trainers or an outside agency. This is particularly important as training needs have escalated. Training requirements for firefighters have also gone up significantly in recent years.

Mr. Shurtleff said there is an impending crisis in our ability to provide advanced life support. There is a question of how we can train people to fill the gaps in coverage. Mr. Tamborelle said there is not a paramedic program in Tompkins County, the one in Elmira is in shambles, and the one in Syracuse is a two year program (with a long commute.) Mr. Shurtleff suggested Tim Bangs be invited to talk to the group about the difficulty in retaining trained personnel, who often continue their education to get a nursing degree in order to make a higher salary.

Ms. Weiser suggested that the group begin considering outside resources to help inform the group on various topics, and that the next session focus on brainstorming problems and solutions that draws on the expertise and experience of the task force members.

Mr. Goodman asked for a list of all departments and agencies involved, showing who does transport and other levels of service. He also asked for a quick summary of the known problems (such as training) and ideas that have been offered in the past.

Ms. Powers asked to see what each municipality has in terms of EMS resources, and the size of their membership. Ms. Weiser noted that this is consistent with the first bullet on the task list included in the TCCOG Charge.

Mr. Shurtleff said he can provide that information relatively quickly, although he does not have personnel levels.

It was noted that compensation for EMTs is very low. Mr. Shurtleff said a question to be considered is whether the current system is sustainable, particularly given the significant training requirements that have been imposed in recent years.

Mr. Wilbur noted the importance of task #3—the legal and regulatory framework of the system. The makeup of the group was defined strategically to get providers and municipal officials in the same room. The legal context is an absolute bear, and there needs to be a common understanding of those issues.

Ms. Weiser said at the next meeting, the group will try to identify the topics that we will need to learn about, who are the resources, and what is the order that should be followed (e.g., the most basic first).

Because of the holidays, the next meeting will be December 13th. Ms. Weiser will poll the group about meeting on the 28th.

Ms. Weiser asked whether members have a familiarity with Google Docs. She believes a Google Doc account for people to begin submitting their list of problems and potential solutions. She will work to set that system.

Ms. Weiser adjourned the meeting at 6:30 PM.