

**MINUTES
CITY OF LAUREL
EMERGENCY SERVICES COMMITTEE
MONDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2019**

An Emergency Services Committee Meeting was held in the Council Chambers and called to order by Committee Chair Bruce McGee at 6:00 p.m. on October 28, 2019.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

<input type="checkbox"/> Bruce McGee, Chair	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Richard Klose
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Irv Wilke	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bill Mountsier
<input type="checkbox"/> Pat Kimmet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Taryn Massa
<input type="checkbox"/> Richard Dawes	

OTHERS PRESENT:

Kent Kulesa, Assistant Fire Chief
Riley Hutchens, Ambulance Director
Mayor Thomas C Nelson
Travis Nagel, Volunteer Fireman
JW Hopper, Volunteer Fireman
Bethany Langve, Clerk/Treasurer

Public Input:

- Travis Nagel 2807 Brookway Drive - Stated that he's extremely unhappy with the closed-door mentality we've been getting. They've been told they will be getting a full-time paid Fire Chief, but nobody has come to discuss anything with the Fire Department. They would like to hear reasons why. They've been told this is how they are going to fix the EMS problem. He cannot see the correlation between EMS and Fire. Especially right now since they have been separated. He doesn't see how a full-time Chief will accomplish that. If there is money to hire a full-time Chief, why not hire full-time EMTs. He doesn't see the point in messing with what is working. They haven't been given any reason. Have they failed in some way? Have they failed the City or the outlying fire districts to where they don't trust the current system in the Fire Department? They have been told nothing and their Fire Chief has been told nothing except "nope we are getting a full-time Chief" because that is the way the current City leadership wants to move. There is no reasoning given whatsoever. He is thoroughly disgusted with the current situation.
- JW Hopper 504 Roundhouse – Stated the Ambulance was short staffed long before the combining of the services. Fire Drivers have been helping drive for the lack of ambulance people on shift, giving ambulance a better chance to respond to calls. Over the last decade there have been many days there are no EMTs or ambulance on, but there is still a Fire Department so how is the Fire Department failing? How can the Fire Department be on call, respond from home, have better response times than the EMTs that have signed up for shifts in the past? What are the real effects of hiring a paid Chief? How will hiring a paid Chief fix the shortage? Are EMTs willing to take shifts not just in Laurel but in Yellowstone County? It's a wage liability problem, not a problem that arose from combining the departments. There will still be a shortage of EMTs in Laurel, Yellowstone County and Nationwide whether we have a fulltime Chief or not. Other things that we want to think about having a fulltime Chief that may be affected by this are the 4th of July, Christmas to

Remember, Homecoming. Will paid Firefighters and EMTs follow? Wont this increase the cost to Laurel by millions in added wages? We will need a new fire station to house a 24-hour service. The partially paid volunteer service has worked to demonstrate community service and safety awareness in many ways. Will these things continue in the future with a paid Chief? Fire Prevention in the school, Santa ice cream, Christmas to Remember, and Homecoming as I mentioned before. What about Safety Day, that brings in many local area emergency agencies together such as AMR, Health Flight, Forest Service, and the Department of Transportation to get the community aware of safety. The Fire Department is here for the safety of the community and it is apparent given the current ISO rating. Even after the separation of the two departments they continued to drive for the ambulance department.

New Business: None.

Old Business:

1. Update from the Assistant Fire Chief, Kent Kulesa:

The Assistant Chief went through the hours for the month. Calls consist of one construction fire for a total of 9 hours, six wildland fires for a total of 65 hours, 4 extrications for a total of 71 hours, seven alarms for a total of 46 hours, two medical assists for a total of 10 hours, and four other calls for a total of 78 hours. 24 calls total, 260 total training hours, total maintenance 45 hours, for a total of 584 hours. here was one Fire Driver in the month of September, and Fire Drivers have driven three times in the month of October so far.

General Items:

1. Review and approve the minutes of the Emergency Services Committee meeting of September 23, 2019.

Motion by Council Member Mountsier to Approve the minutes of the Emergency Services Committee meeting of September 23, 2019, seconded by Committee Member Massa. A vote was taken on the motion, and all four committee members present voted aye. Motion carried 4-0.

Old Business Continued:

2. Update from the Police Chief:

The Police Chief was not in attendance to provide an update.

3. Update from the Ambulance Director, Riley Hutchens:

The Ambulance Director stated that the Ambulance Department has been busy. In September they were at 57% for answering calls. In October the response was much better. Part of that was the decrease in calls. The Ambulance Director did not have exact numbers to report as his reporting software was undergoing a server update. He gets two sets of numbers. One from the dispatch center and one from his own software. The missed calls are due to the same old, same old, nobody was available. This week the Ambulance and Fire Department has been involved in a lively discussion, given the state of affairs. The Ambulance Director would like to put his position on record on that splitting from the Fire Department did not improve the Ambulance response. That is not the catalyst nor the solution to the problem. They are still in deep water. To echo some of the comments made by the Firefighters, they are a great help to the Ambulance department and the Ambulance Department would not be here today without the past two years of commitment from them. Splitting from the Fire Department did allow the department to hire more specific staff for their staffing needs. That has been a great help but that is not a blame on the system the Fire Department has. That is just reality and what it is. The need for a fulltime service can ever not be stressed. We are in a difficult situation politically with this particular issue. There has been a lot of

talk regarding what the future holds for the two departments, and the Ambulance Director dissent from the Mayor regarding his approach. The Ambulance Director does not support a combined agency, at least not in the near future, and he does not see the need to hire a fulltime Chief. He feels that we are interfering in something that doesn't need a lot of change right now. The Fire Department is ok, and their issues can be addressed at a later time. The Ambulance Director wants to put it out there that there is some conflict and dissent regarding what the plan is moving forward. He feels that this needs to be brought back to the table before a final solution is made. Especially when moving forward with this mill levy, which will be discussed tonight. He doesn't feel the solution in place is the be all end all and he doesn't feel the solution is the best for Laurel. Some other updates for the department, uniforms are a big issue right now. The budget is not limitless, so the Ambulance Director is trying to work within the budget to get some additional uniforms. He is trying to acquire 10 parkas this year, which will replace some coats that were purchased in 1988. The department recently acquired two new toughbooks. The reports were too long to be typing out on a tablet. These toughbooks will go in service this week. There is a big update to the radio system forthcoming. The repeater is very dated and was purchased in 1993. It is currently being used at a rented antenna space down by the river. That is in need of repair and all three departments radios need updating. Many of the Ambulance Departments portable radios were bought in 1994, and you cannot get programming software for them anymore. Half of the channels do not exist anymore today. The Ambulance Director is putting in a quote to the Budget and Finance Committee for 10 portable radios. There was one CPR save this month. Two EMTs will be appointed this month, from Central Valley Fire. Next month a paramedic, who has volunteered for Laurel before, will be appointed to the Ambulance department.

4. Ambulance Safety Mill Levy:

As the Chair was absent the Mayor began the conversation. The Mayor had handed out the current schedule of fees and charges for a future conversation. The schedule of fees and charges are reviewed by the Emergency Services Committee annually. The Committee asked about the new billing for the Ambulance Department. The Ambulance Director stated that he could answer that. Last year the department moved to Pintler Billing. He is uncertain where the discussion is coming from regarding fees for service. The current fees for service work out to be the best charge that the City of Laurel can offer. The department is in a difficult situation in that it is a taxpayer funded service and charging a fee on top of the tax that is already provided. That being said Laurel's service fees are higher than average for most services in Montana and the United States. The Ambulance Director feels it would be quite foolish to look at increasing the fees and charges right now. We would get a plethora of denied Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance claims as they would not pay more than that. Federal agencies are limited by law as to what they can pay. Currently for a Medicare patient we are seeing about a 27% of the bill paid. The way Medicare works is every transport result in a bill, after that it is sent to the billing company, any private insurance company is billed first, any remainder not paid is then sent to Medicare. The specifics regarding how Medicare pays changes often. The Committee asked where they should go from here. The Clerk/Treasurer asked the Ambulance Director if the needs assessment was complete for the mill levy. The Ambulance Director stated that he is still working on the needs assessment. Trying to figure out what the future needs of the Ambulance service will be is hard due to the ever-changing cost of Ambulance services. The Ambulance Director anticipates on having the needs assessment done soon. He is waiting on feedback from the State of Montana and Helena. The Mayor stated that he is waiting on the needs assessment as well. The Mayor stated that he read in the last Emergency Services Committee minutes that there were comments made regarding a County wide mill levy. He stated that he was at the 911 Memorial and it was brought up to Commissioner Ostlund that the County was going out for a 911 mill levy for Ambulance. Ostlund's response was "no, it is too expensive". The Committee stated that was the last word they had heard as well, and somehow the

rumor got started that the County was going to go out for a County wide mill levy of some sort. The Mayor stated that he did not know where the rumor came from. The Ambulance Director stated that Casey Williams of Montana DEQ made it very clear that they are not seeking a levy. The Mayor questioned why this topic was brought up in conversation. The Committee stated that it was brought up because if the County was going out for a mill levy at the same time as Laurel it would make it harder for Laurel to get a levy voted in. The Clerk/Treasurer stated that without the needs assessment the mill levy cannot go anywhere. She stated that even if the figures are high, it gives the Committee a place to start. The Ambulance Director stated that the issue is, this needs assessment isn't just large items like an ambulance. This needs assessment is down to little things like the last vial of medication. The Clerk/Treasurer stated that the mill levy isn't intended to pay for things like vials of medication. The mill levy is just for capital expenses only. The Ambulance Director stated that everyone is just going to have to be patient. He will have the needs assessment done before the next meeting. The Committee stated that this discussion needs to be tabled until the needs assessment is complete. The Mayor stated that member of the community has come forward for awhile now asking for a fix for the Ambulance Department. He stated that the paper misquoted him when they stated after the two departments were combined the ambulance responses went down. That is not what he told the paper. It was in February the Mayor had a meeting with the Fire Department and the ex-CAO. It was at that time he was told he needed a full-time ambulance service. He said he wasn't going to do that because at some point the City must have a full time Fire Department and it would be idiotic to have a fulltime EMS service on top of it. This is not prolific throughout the State. During this meeting the option of a Fire/EMS was brought up and this intrigued the Mayor. He felt it was interesting and he began looking into it. He started looking at other Cities, both smaller and larger than ours, talking to City Managers, Mayors and County Commissioners. Everyone that the Mayor has talked to thinks it is a good idea to have a combined service. Although it would be a slow change, at some point we must have a fully staffed fully paid Fire Department, at a City population of 10,000. The Ambulance Director stated that MCA stated you must only have a full-time staff member. Assistant Chief Kulesa stated, if you have Fire/EMTs they would not go out on a fire. The reason why is if they are involved in a structure fire and you have an ambulance call, you've just cut your throat. JW Hopper asked how a paid Fire Chief fixes the problem. The Mayor stated that it is something we must have eventually, and it is not going to change the department. Assistant Chief Kulesa stated that Red Lodge does not have a paid Fire Chief. They have an EMS Director who is a paramedic, and their Fire Chief is a volunteer. Their service runs fine. The Mayor stated that their service is a different service. Assistant Chief Kulesa asked how it was different. The Mayor stated it is Carbon County, and it's a County service. Assistant Chief Kulesa stated that he is having trouble understanding how spending \$75,000-100,000 on one person when we could probably have three EMTs, not Fire/EMTs, but EMTs, that would be on call, would be better spent. That money would be much better spent than paying for one person to just sit behind a desk. The Mayor stated that the object was to do both. He stated that he has talked to community leaders everywhere and they all say it's a great idea. Assistant Chief Kulesa asked why the Mayor has not walked across the street and talked to the people who do it every day. The Mayor stated that he understands, and the Fire Department is great. He stated that he was talking to a Fire Chief in the State and he said Laurel is known for having the highest paid Fire Department in the whole State. The Mayor stated that he looked at him and said Laurel has the best Volunteer Fire Department in the whole State. The Clerk/Treasurer stated that she was there when the comment was made. JW Hopper asked why the Mayor was not hiring a full-time ambulance director. The Mayor stated that there are a lot of things we need to do, and we cannot hire ambulance personnel. The Firemen asked why not. The Mayor stated because eventually the City must pay for Fire personnel and then Ambulance personnel. The Ambulance Director stated that in his opinion the two departments should not be combined because the two departments are very specialized. You are expecting one person to be proficient in two very specialized roles. He is

afraid that the City is going to get a person who is 50% proficient in Firefighting and 50% proficient in EMS. This is unacceptable as you need someone to be 100% on a structure fire and 100% on a CPR call. He stated that the Fire/EMS model was made to save money and that is not fair to the community. The City needs to let people specialize, and this combined model is failing. Healthcare is changing and people need to specialize. (at this point the Ambulance Director left the meeting to go on an ambulance call) The Mayor stated that the individuals would be EMS and would back-up the firefighters. He then stated that he hasn't done anything yet. He stated that he has met with the Chief, once in July and recently. He saw in the minutes that the Chief stated he didn't know what was going on, however they have talked about it. The Mayor stated that he has great respect for the Fire Department. He stated that he speaks very highly of them. JW Hopper asked the Mayor to fix the problem, not the Fire Department. He stated that without the Fire Drivers the ambulance would have a lot more dropped calls. He asked the Mayor to go over and ask Jessica in dispatch to pull the reports and he could see for himself. The Clerk/Treasurer asked if the Firemen had watched the Facebook feed when the Mayor commented about the Ambulance answering 100% of their calls. She stated that the Mayor stated they could not have done it without the Fire Drivers. JW Hopper stated that he understood that, but he didn't understand why they had to fix the Fire Department. He stated that the Clerk/Treasurer was missing the point. The Clerk/Treasurer stated that she personally felt like people think the Mayor doesn't have any respect for the Fire Department, and she stated that he does. She stated that she has been there and heard him defend the Fire Department and have the upmost respect for them. She stated that the Mayor is looking for a solution and to be fair we have had nobody come over give us any idea. Her and the Mayor have flown blind with this. She stated that some things may have been given to the CAO, but they never made it to her and the Mayor. So, when they were trying to fix the problem and trying to find ideas and plans for the Ambulance problem it was just her and the Mayor with nothing. JW Hopper stated that the Fire Department meets every Wednesday night and the Mayor is more than welcome to attend. He stated that he has seen the Mayor maybe 5 times in the twelve years he's been a Volunteer Firemen. The Clerk/Treasurer stated that she goes through the Fire Chief for communications. JW Hopper stated that he knows the Fire Chief will welcome the Mayor at any time. He stated that the Mayor can come on Wednesday night and speak to the Firemen as that is what they want. He is one of the Deputy Chiefs and he knows that is what the guys want. They want the Mayor to come and talk to them and address them. The Mayor stated that he hasn't done anything yet. JW Hopper stated that a lot of people don't know what to think because no one is talking to them. The Mayor stated that he thought the Fire Chief was talking to them. JW Hopper stated that they want to hear it right from the Mayor. He stated that if the Mayor comes over and states what he is doing he will gain respect. The Committee asked when the Fire Department meets and if they could attend a meeting. JW Hopper stated the meetings were on Wednesdays at 7:00pm and everyone is welcome. The Committee stated that they are at a stall with the mill levy without the figures from the Ambulance Director. Travis Nagel stated that he had never officially met the Clerk/Treasurer before, to which the Clerk/Treasurer stated no, he stated that she stated she had zero input during this whole exploratory period trying to find a solution and he cannot believe that's a bold faced lie. He knows that both Levi and Riley have been heavily involved in coming up with strategy and wording for creating full-time EMS, and now she's going to sit here and tell everyone that you've had no help whatsoever. The Clerk/Treasurer asked who it was given to. Travis stated the Mayor if not the Committee. The Clerk/Treasurer stated that like she said before if things were given to the CAO, they were not given to her or the Mayor. Travis then asked the Clerk/Treasurer if she could attest as to why she responded to the Outlook Facebook post that there is budgeted full-time EMTs and a full-time Ambulance Director. The Clerk/Treasurer stated that is the plan the Mayor came up with on his own. She stated that when that plan was crafted there was no input from across the street. Anything that was given to the CAO didn't get passed along to her. She stated that this is only a plan, and nothing has been done with it yet. She stated that if anyone has other ideas to please pass them

along to either her or the Mayor. She stated that she just spoke with the Ambulance Director regarding grants yesterday because she is a money person but not an ambulance person. An unidentified Firefighter stated he was told the City would no longer be pursuing grants. The Clerk/Treasurer stated that is not true and the Mayor echoed this response. The Mayor asked who Levi was. JW Hopper stated that he was a paramedic, and he used to be a Volunteer Firemen. The Clerk/Treasurer stated the reason why she responded to Travis on Facebook was to inform him of the Ambulance personnel that was budgeted. She felt that he only knew there was a Fire Chief budgeted. She explained that just because staff is budgeted doesn't mean that they are set in stone. She stated that the budget is a fluid thing. She stated that she wanted him to know that the Mayor had budgeted four staff members on the Ambulance side because she wasn't sure if Travis knew that. The Mayor stated that AMR is still waiting for his decision regarding getting some bodies in Laurel to back up the volunteers. Assistant Chief Kulesa asked if there is a paid Fire Chief will he do his job before he does his job, yes or no? The Mayor asked if Brent would take Command. The response was not always. Assistant Chief Kulesa stated that a paid Fire Chief will not let him be in command because he will be getting paid. JW Hopper stated nine times out of ten if him or Travis are on scene and Chief Peters arrives, he leaves it in their command. The Mayor stated that he didn't have an answer for them at this time, but it was a good question. Assistant Chief Kulesa stated that he felt the money was better spent hiring EMTs. He stated if you want to know what happens when you hire a full-time Fire Chief go ask Lockwood Fire. It took twenty years to sort that out. He stated that hiring EMTs or buying a new brush truck would be a better use of the funds. The Committee thanks the Firemen for being at the meeting and thanked them for their service to the community.

Other Items:

Announcements

5. Next Emergency Services meeting will be held on November 25, 2019, at 6:00pm

Motion by Council Member Klose to adjourn, seconded by Council Member Mountsier. A vote was taken on the motion. All four committee members present voted aye. Motion carried 4-0.

The Emergency Services Committee adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Bethany Langve
Clerk/Treasurer

NOTE: This meeting is open to the public. This meeting is for information and discussion of the Council for the listed workshop agenda items.