

EMS Advisory Board Meeting
July 9, 2010
10:30 – 12:30

Signed In:

Pete Kremen, County Executive
Dan Pike, Mayor – Bellingham
Gary Baar, Lynden Fire District
Randy VanderHeiden, BFD
Al Saab, WCFD #7
Tawni Helms, Whatcom County
Dean Whitney, WCFD #21
Gary Russell, FD7
Harry Andrews, WCFD 4

Dewey Desler, Deputy Admin.
Bill Boyd, BFD
Nick Kiniski – WCFD 5
Bob Busch, Lummi
Floyd Roorda, WCFD#1
Stan Snapp, Bellingham City Council
Dave Ralston, SWFA
Rick Kowsky, NREMS/Cascade Amb.
Sam Crawford, Whactom Co. Council

Introductions: Pete Kremen welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked for introductions around the room. He asked that Dewey provide an update of activity since the last meeting.

County update on EMS: Dewey provided an update to the Board. Since the last meeting the City and County went to mediation on two primary issues:

1. Training for 2010 (\$395,000.)
2. Administrative Cost Allocation for years 2006-2010

The City requested the mediation. An agreement came out of the parties involved with mediation. The delegation would recommend that paramedic training take place for Bellingham Fire Department. That training budget has since been approved by Council for \$395,062. There was also an agreement made that the County would not pay for the part of the indirect cost allocation pertaining to the expenses of the mayor's and city council's offices in 2010. The City and County would work on an agreement for future indirect cost allocations.

Recently, a request came from FD5 for support of Paramedic training costs in their district. The County put forth a request for \$50,000. for paramedic training for FD5. That request was approved at the same time as BFD's training request.

Dewey asked Nick Kiniski, WCFD 5 Fire Chief what the status of that training was.

Nick stated that the training was now being blocked.

Pete asked what prompted Nick's desire to pursue the training.

Nick stated it was patient care. He went on to say that having a trained paramedic in Point Roberts would be a make a big difference. He said that Local 106 is talking to Local 27 in Seattle and telling them that FD5 is taking jobs and the training allocation of \$50,000. from the County belonged to the City.

Mayor Pike stated that this discussion didn't belong at this meeting and that it also shouldn't be happening when Local 106 was not present to defend themselves.

Dewey asked Nick how he knew that Local 106 was talking to Seattle Local 27. Nick indicated that he was being told that through a series of telephone conversations with the Medical Director of the paramedic program at Harborview Medical Center. Dewey asked Nick if he had a letter stating that he would no longer be able to participate in the training program at Harborview.

Nick said not yet, because the decision isn't final.

At this time, Rob Wilson from Local 106 came into the meeting.

Dewey told Rob the discussion was focusing on the FD5 training and asked Rob if Local 106 had been attempting to block the proposed training.

Rob indicated that Local 106 had approached Local 27. They have definite concerns. He indicated that Local 106 and Local 27 do not have the power to block the training. Instead Local 106 has approached the foundation that offers the \$100,000. training scholarship recently awarded to Point Roberts and Nick . Rob said that Local 106 reviewed the Foundation's mission and don't believe Nick or FD5 qualifies for the scholarship because they have no express need for a paramedic in their District. Paramedic needs in FD5 are being met exclusively by Medic One.

Nick said Dr. Coppess who has been offering the training for over 30 years feels given the unique character of Point Roberts that there is a need for a trained paramedic in Point Roberts and he is sympathetic to the FD5's situation. Thus he wanted to help.

Rob Wilson said there wasn't a need. There were only 12 ALS calls from April, 2009 – April, 2010.

Mayor Pike asked what the benchmark number was to warrant the need for a trained paramedic?

Bill Boyd said it depends. Bill went on to say that he received a request for support from Nick a week before it went to County Council at which time he asked Nick for more information and a statement of need. He said he was

concerned about statements of inadequacy and substandard responses in Point Roberts in Nick's proposal. He checked the data and found that in some cases Point Roberts gets quicker response times than other areas of the county. That includes getting to the scene or the patient's side. We routinely meet at rendezvous sites in rural areas.

Nick said that to his knowledge Point Roberts is the only district whose calls are toned out. Those response times begin after we make the call to Medic 1. (don't understand this part – I think all response times begin after the call to Medic One.)

Bill indicated that if Point Roberts was such an issue why it didn't come up when we were working on the Plan?

Dewey said that at the time an earlier EMS Plan was being crafted former Point Roberts Chief Campbell was in his office on several occasions expressing concerns about service to Point Roberts. The Point Roberts problem didn't get dropped because the service issue to that area was resolved but rather because the problem couldn't be solved at the time the Plan was developed. Following the development of the 2005 Plan the Executive Office had two separate meetings with FD5 Commissioners asking for better service and a modification of the Plan. The Plan as not modified and Point Roberts was the only precinct in the County not voting in favor of the sales tax increase.

Dan Pike said his concern is that this is the first time he's heard about the training request.

Sam Crawford said he didn't think the Advisory Board should be making the Pt Roberts training a major focus of the meeting. Sam Crawford stated that the County agreed to pay the BFD paramedic training only with the knowledge the County would be terminating the interlocal agreement at the end of 2010. Our time today would be better spent looking at a new service model. At this point the Council is not willing to go beyond December 31, 2010 without a letter of termination. It's a broken and failed system.

Pete said he didn't agree that the system is broken. Yes we have problems and conflicts but the system isn't broken.

Sam said we can call it conflicts and disagreements. Patients are relatively satisfied with the provision of care. The broken part is the City of Bellingham and Bellingham Fire Department are not willing to make changes that allow the implementation of the Plan.

Dan Pike said the problem is that the County makes decisions outside of the system. When decisions are made within the system it works great. The problem is in this room and how we honor our agreements.

Stan Snapp said that this plan was voted on and approved because of this Board and the joint agreement to resolve disagreements and conflicts. How did it get so dysfunctional? The Board only met once last year. Why?

Marvin Wayne (via conference call) said we are the envy of the U.S. We're talking politics not patient care. The system is not broken. It works. My responsibility is patient care.

Pete said Point Roberts is a glaring example of patient care being priority 1. He stated that he wants to keep the system unified but the City of Bellingham and Bellingham Fire Department have to be true partners.....not bullies.

Marvin Wayne (phone) said we need to have less emotion in our discussion. How do we preserve what works well?

Bob Busch said that in 2005, we had an election which provided funding for the system we have now. Had the Fire Commissioners Association known the ability of 106 to make the county a closed shop the Commissioners would have thoroughly stumped against the tax. He said he didn't know what its going to take to fix this. We need to get this fixed. There will be another funding problem soon and we'll need to go to the voters with a request for their support.

Al Saab said that the 5 people who just went through the Paramedic training went through more upheaval than what we've just witnessed in this room. They stuck it out and are working very well. There have been some minor conflicts that have been resolved quickly and easily. There were some issues with the Hospital pro IAFF/106. The 5 went through extraordinary hurdles to receive their certification. He commends anyone who takes this on and is willing to contract with 106. He thanked the County for their letter of congratulations to the paramedics for achieving certification.

Dewey reminded the Board that Nick came to the County and City Fire Chief with a letter requesting support. County Administration took the matter to the Council. He also responded to the question of why the Board isn't meeting more frequently.

Recommendations for Trauma Verification Numbers:

Bob Busch representing the EMS and Trauma Care Council discussed a recommendation to increase the Trauma Verification min/max number from one to two.

Rick Kowsky introduced himself as the regional representative for the EMS and Trauma Care Council. He emphasized the distinction between licensure and verification. He said that increasing the trauma verification number is nothing more than allowing performance for the existing system.

Sam Crawford made the following motion: **“The EMS Advisory Board recommends to the EMS Council to pursue ALS ambulance trauma verified status for Fire District 7 by means of increasing the ALS min/max number from one to two.”**

Al Saab seconded the motion.

Marvin Wayne (phone) asked to clarify the implication that they are implying that there is 2 different systems?

Gary Russell stated that it was neither their direction nor desire. Rick Kowsky said that it isn't a system issue. The system is what it is. This supports what is already in place and is consistent with the adopted EMS Plan.

Marvin Wayne (phone) said that the goal was to limit duplication. It adds cost. What we're doing now with this motion is setting up two systems. It is not consistent with the Plan because its duplication. This is not directed as a negative to FD7.

Rick Kowsky said don't take this as disrespectful disagreement. Whatcom County is a great place to live. At the regional level all our counties are unique and different. Snohomish County has 13 providers and is moving to 14. The Plan is already established to accommodate growth in the Ferndale area. This only accommodates what has already been put in place and funded.

Jerry Martin said this requirement is from the State. We are unable to go under Whatcom Medic One's verification.

Dan Pike asked what the advantage/disadvantage is of waiting to do this until after FD7 has 12/7 capacity? I would encourage not doing this until we have capacity.

Bill Boyd asked what the timeframe is for obtaining new trauma verification number.

Rick Kowski said these things take time. The State works on a 3 or 5 year plan. The EMS Council as a group recommended moving forward realizing the timeline.

Roger Christensen said the min/max numbers are set for governments. It's how they control services. We're not setting a new number for Fire District 7. The State decides.

Pete asked for the motion to be voted on. It passed unanimously.

Progress of Medic 5:

Gary Russell reviewed the progress of Medic 5 and the logistics of working in the system. FD7 clarified service areas so resources aren't wasted. Operationally we are well coordinated. We run 21-22 days a month because FD7 doesn't have 9 medics yet. Service calls are interlaced with Medic 1. FD7 has connected with Harborview Medical Center for OTEP for training. There has been some confusion in calls but those issues are being resolved. For \$80,000 the County is getting a 2/3 Medic Unit.

Bill Boyd agreed there were some operational challenges initially. The Districts need to continue working on coordination. There were a few bumps but it's a new system so we'll see how it goes.

Budget Review:

Randy VanderHeiden reported that BFD is working hard to hold down expenses. The Medicare increase in reimbursement has been re-implemented and it is temporary. Mileage reimbursement is also changing. Thus, Medicare will now stop rounding up mileage and begin billing on the fractional.

Dewey asked why the capital costs for 2009 Actual were left blank. Randy was not sure but said he would look into it as there were capital costs incurred in 2009.

In the interest of time Dewey stated he had some follow-up questions that would be sent to Randy and Gary separately.

Dewey made some closing remarks stating that as a group continued discussion was important. He also reported that there was good news based on the fiscally prudent decisions of all the parties and the change in Medicare rates. The budget forecast puts the EMS fund in a slightly better position than what was anticipated in 2005. However, there are still other factors that will contribute such as the recent Department of Revenue position on the sales tax exemption for British Columbia residents.

Call volumes will drive a lot of our future decisions on our planning and timing of further changes to the EMS system.

Sam Crawford stated that again it needs to be clear at the table that until or unless something changes there is a strong desire by the County to move away from the County/Bellingham agreement. The Council doesn't necessarily want to drive the changes. They would like the Fire Chiefs and Commissioners to develop recommended changes. He noted the County will be sending a notice of termination before year-end.

The Chairman adjourned the meeting.