

**CITY OF NORTHFIELD BUDGET WORK SESSION  
FEBRUARY 23, 2012**

At 4:00pm, this meeting was called to order by Mary Canesi, Municipal Clerk. It was advertised in the Press of Atlantic City on January 28, 2012, in accordance with Public Law 75, Chapter 231.

**ROLL CALL**

Present: Mrs. Brown, Mr. Dewees, Mr. O'Neill, Mr. Perri, Mr. Polistina, Mr. Vain, Mr. Carew

**FLAG SALUTE**

The flag salute was led by Mayor Mazzeo; following the flag salute a moment of silence was observed.

**READING AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

On a motion of Councilman Vain, second of Council Dewees, all in favor of approving the minutes of January 24, 2012.

Council President Carew introduced new Northfield CFO Dawn Stollenwerk; Ken Moore and Nancy Sbrolla from Ford, Scott, and Associates, were also in attendance.

**PRESENTATION**

Mayor Mazzeo introduced Peter Miller, Administrator for the Township of Egg Harbor. Miller was asked to attend to explain the proposed increase in fees for dispatch services.

Miller said he has been the Administrator in Egg Harbor Township since 1989, and the original dispatch agreement dates to 1996. The contract was renewed in 2000 and 2005 and the original terms were never amended. It most recently expired in December 2010 without change or renewal. Towards the end of 2011, Linwood and Somers Point approached EHT for a price for dispatch services; that exercise brought to light that the amount Northfield was paying was insufficient. For the past three years EHT has been subsidizing the Northfield operation by approximately \$150,000 annually. Miller said the Township is not looking for back-fees. He said it was originally anticipated that Northfield would generate 28% of the call volume, and costs were figured accordingly. Over time, dedicated dispatchers were assigned, and a 3rd person was added to handle the Northfield calls. It costs close to \$390,000 to handle Northfield but they only bill \$180,000 annually. This year there is an additional \$60,000 in Northfield's share of capital improvements, in accordance with the terms of the contract. He distributed a spreadsheet which included cost allocation.

Councilwoman Brown asked if Northfield has a say in the purchase that results in the

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additional expense of \$60,000, and if EHT would choose lowest bid. Miller replied that Northfield does not have a say and yes they do publicly bid and choose lowest bidder, sometimes from state contract.

Councilman O'Neill asked for the total budget for dispatch and for the population of EHT; Miller said it is \$1.6 million and 43,000 residents. Brown asked if Northfield is still 28% of the calls; Miller affirmed. Brown questioned the increase if the call volume is the same; Miller said the number of hours required to handle the calls has increased. Service has evolved to a superior level as a result of dedicated staffing. Miller explained that the changes made to staffing were gradual, over a period of years; the number of hours could be reduced to former levels but that may result in delayed response times. Calls would go into a queue and be answered in the order it was received.

Mayor Mazzeo commented that he does not think we want to downgrade the level of service. O'Neill said the City should look at going back to original contract terms, the original method. Whoever gets the call gets the call. Polistina countered, saying that if Northfield still has 28% of the calls, there won't be any savings.

Councilman Perri said EMS calls are not going through EHT, resulting in a reduction in calls. Miller said there is no reduction; EHT dispatches Medcom and stays with the call. Perri asked how many employees dispatch for Northfield; Miller said four.

Councilwoman Brown expressed concern that staffing increases were made without Council knowing. Miller clarified how the changes were made.

Mazzeo said the problem is that we are finding out now and have to pay it this year; he does not want to downgrade service but knowing last year would have helped.

Miller reiterated that EHT is not looking to recoup past monies. They are looking forward, and can't subsidize Northfield any longer. It was never an issue of whether Northfield was paying their fair share.

Miller proceeded to review existing contract calculations, which he said have not changed since 1995. Fringe benefit costs have increased from 51 to 71%. Employer taxes were never included before, but have been added now. He pointed out a few miscalculations that resulted in unintended savings to Northfield in prior years. Miller responded to questions and said there are 13 employees total, with staff dedicated to Northfield. Both staffs help each other out as needed. He said in the end, EHT under-billed Northfield. He said he is not here to lay blame, but he needs to ensure that going forward the billing is appropriate.

Council President Carew said the City would be interested in some sort of transition for the cost. Brown repeated the request. Miller said he does not want to go back

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three or four years and correct the miscalculations; that would be a half a million dollars.

Carew requested that Chief James and or Chief Martinelli explain the evolution of dedicated dispatch staff. James responded, saying the changes evolved over a period of years and multiple Chiefs. The contract says we pay for 911 Service. The problem started when his officers were not getting air time. When there is an emergency, his officers need air time. He does not want to hear that there is a policy that prevents it. Had he known there was a cost issue, he would have brought it to Council.

Brown asked why dedicated staff is important; James replied that it ensures consistency and getting air time. He said his understanding was that the service would be the same. He was never privy to terms of contract.

Chief Martinelli stated that when Northfield first went to Egg Harbor Township for dispatch, there were problems due to understaffing in the early years.

Miller said the cost to provide the service at the level Northfield has been accustomed to is what is being required under the new agreement. He explained what it costs to run dispatch; wages alone are over \$340,000. EPL liability lies with the Township as lead agency. He also explained the infrastructure costs that would be associated with establishing a Northfield dispatch center. Miller apologized for the short notice; they just found out. If they knew sooner, Northfield would have been told. Egg Harbor Township's governing body can't tell Township taxpayers that they have to continue to subsidize Northfield. Northfield has to make a decision as to what level of service they want and what they are willing to pay for that service.

Council President Carew thanked Miller for coming, and said the Council will have to digest this information and will get back to Miller.

Councilman Perri suggested contacting other towns for pricing; Mayor Mazzeo stated that we are working on that.

**2012 BUDGET DISCUSSION**

Council President Carew resumed the budget meeting.

Ken Moore, from Ford, Scott and Associates, reviewed the proposed 2012 appropriations, and the changes made since the February 9<sup>th</sup> budget meeting. Discussion ensued amongst all of Council; each individual line item was reviewed.

Council President Carew said Northfield will introduce the budget at the meeting on March 27, 2012.

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Council President Carew opened the meeting to public for anyone wishing to speak; seeing no one, he closed the public session. He read the meeting notices.

At 7:57pm, on motions properly made and seconded, this meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Canesi, RMC, Municipal Clerk