

1/30/2016

Mayor Stephen Lee
Deputy Mayor Joseph Yates
Tabernacle Township
163 Carranza Road
Tabernacle NJ 08088

Gentlemen,

In response to your request for our ideas, the Tabernacle Rescue Squad, on a future of emergency services and the township in writing we submit the following. Unfortunately, with only three days to respond to this request, we feel that is not a sufficient time to provide a completely accurate picture of our ideas but, nonetheless we will submit what we can to not be left out of the process. We feel that there is much more to talk about in emergency services, especially in the EMS and Rescue world and we feel that this correspondence will not accurately and completely capture all the variables and possible changes facing EMS and our organization in the next few years. Also, we have had little guidance from the committee or subcommittee on the direction that the township is moving, which is one of the biggest variables that our organization faces. With all that in mind, here are ideas on the emergency services and Tabernacle Township.

The officers and members of the Tabernacle Rescue Squad has spent the last ten to fifteen years building a very successful EMS and Rescue organization that provides high quality patient care and rescue service to the residents and visitors of our community. We are also able to help our neighboring agencies by providing mutual aid, through the Burlington County Mutual Aid Agreement, with patient and rescue services when they have a large incident or insufficient staff to cover an incident. Through all of this, the squad responds to nearly every incident dispatched within Tabernacle Township (mutual aid was only used once in 2015) even with covering large or multiple incidents at the same time, without the assistance of other EMS agencies. We also have worked with Burlington County Office of Emergency Management to acquire and staff one of two Mass Casualty Incident trailers, which are set up to treat 50 patients. The Squad is responsible for housing and responding this equipment throughout the county to large scale incidents. This equipment is now housed within the township and allows us to deploy to a large scale incident in our community without having to wait for another agency to supply it. This trailer was supplied at no cost to our community. The Squad also provides Emergency Service Rehabilitation Services at fire and other emergency scenes throughout the county, with supplies again provided by Burlington County OEM. This equipment is also rapidly deployed at fire and other emergency scenes within our community for the benefit of our most valuable asset in the community, our first responders.

This Rehab service has also identified responders with acute medical conditions early on so they could receive treatment early and possibly prevented a tragedy and loss of a first responder.

All administrative activities such as; billing, training, recruitment, budgets, vehicle maintenance, staff oversight, future development, equipment purchasing, etc. are handled by the volunteers of the organization. These people are experts in their field, and know what is best for the community in EMS and Rescue services. This is all accomplished with volunteers that provide this service for a small reimbursement that is well below the lowest paid EMT in Burlington County and also well below minimum wage.

The Squad feels that the current system is not broken in the township, especially on the EMS and Rescue side. We do not feel it is the position of the Squad to comment on issues within the fire company if they exist. Their internal or township issues are for them to discuss with the subcommittee and it would not be proper for us to speak on their behalf. The township subcommittee should further investigate any issues that are brought by the fire company, including member responses. There was a claim in our subcommittee meetings that dual members are going to the rescue squad instead of the fire company. Both chiefs have been asked why this is occurring, without reaching a clear reason as to why. The subcommittee should meet with the dual members and discuss this issue. This would give the subcommittee the real reason, not what is perceived by Chief Smith or myself.

We feel that the township and emergency services have gone through changes in the past few years, with the dissolution of the fire district. Roles for some township staff have changed and those roles need to be defined. Also, there has never been a clear definition of what the township expects the Rescue Squad to provide to them as far as reports on responses, man hours and towns that the Squad has responded to.

Below is the Tabernacle Rescue Squad's idea on how emergency services should be handled in the township moving forward:

The Tabernacle Rescue Squad and the Tabernacle Fire Company remain separate private organizations as they are presently. The Tabernacle Rescue Squad will remain the EMS and Rescue provider for the township and the Tabernacle Fire Company remain the fire provider for the township. Allow the organizations to govern themselves as long as they are meeting the requirements set forth by state and federal laws and regulations and the requirements of the township. Members of the fire company may provide rescue services under the direction of the Rescue Squad by two ways. First, they may join the squad as a special operations member which does not require them to be an EMT. Or second, train with the squad as a member of the fire company and meet the same training requirements set for the members of the rescue squad. They will ride on the fire apparatus to the scene of an incident and can be used to supplement the staff of the rescue truck as needed. These are the current ways that are available to members of the fire company and have been for some time.

Develop a written agreement between the squad and township on what type of information and reports are requested to be provided. Define a schedule of how often they will be provided to the township. As discussed in subcommittee meetings, the squad is willing to provide information on responses to the township but it has never been defined or requested before from the township. Both parties should meet and come to an agreement of what can and should be provided. The squad will provide its audit to the township yearly, as it done for many years already.

Define the role for the township administrator with both organizations. Historically, Administrator Cramer has dealt with the Squad for our yearly budget's line item, large equipment requests to be purchased by the township, insurance, and more recently, building issues with the emergency services building. The rescue squad maintains all equipment and vehicles (including squad and township owned) out of the squad's budget and does not go through the township for repairs. Administrator Cramer had no involvement with the fire company while the commission was in place. During our subcommittee meeting it was identified that the relationship with the fire company and the Administrator has not been defined, which has led to confusion on who to report to and how to get some things done. Now that both organization are the recognized services by the township, and there is no separate commission, define the administrator's role in handling issues, requests and communications with each and between the organizations. The committee should have the administrator conduct meetings either monthly, quarterly or as required to deal with any issues and promote better communications and cooperation between the organizations.

The township committee also needs to internally define their lines of communications about emergency services. During the subcommittee meetings it was discovered that there were several things, over the past few years, that were communicated by our organization to members of the committee which was not shared with other members of committee. The committee needs to define a chain of command for the emergency services to communicate with the township. Our recommendation is for all communications to begin with the township administrator. If one of the emergency services agencies wants to communicate with the committee our liaison, the township administrator should at minimum, be aware of it all communication, if not control what is communicated to committee. The committee should define who, what, and how the administrator communicates with the committee. The committee should then define how that information is shared as a whole so everyone is aware of what they need to know.

Also requested was the inclusion of a 5 and 10-year plan for our organization. The squad has just recently completed a 10-year plan to improve our organization. The Tabernacle Rescue Squad is proud to report that we met and exceeded our goals that we have set. The rescue squad will continue on with its vehicle replacement plans as set out. The squad also plans to increase revenue and become less dependent on the township for funding in the future. The squad is constantly training our members in the latest patient care and rescue techniques to provide the best level of care to our patients.

Unfortunately, there are several reasons that we cannot provide a written plan at this time. First, the rescue squad does not know what its role within the township will be in the future. This makes it difficult to set any future plans. Second, there are several questions about expansion of our organization that we need to discuss with the township to get an idea on what the township expects from us. Third, there are several regulations changes coming and lawsuits in the EMS community (Virtua vs Cooper for example) that could deregulate advanced life support and completely change the face of EMS, not just in Tabernacle, but the entire State of New Jersey. We cannot put together a 5 or 10-year plan together in three days that we would feel comfortable with. When the squad plans its future, we will meet with our executive committee and discuss all ideas and spend time formulating a plan. We will take our time and be very diligent in outlining our plan for the future. Right now it is impossible to set any plans with these discussions going on. The squad needs to meet with the township, explain future goals and hear the expectation of the township before formulating a plan.

In closing, the Tabernacle Rescue Squad is a proud organization serving its community. The squad is running better than organizations around us and is doing so at a low cost to the community. As the officers of the Tabernacle Rescue Squad, we feel anything that may upset the operation of the organization at this time could do unrepairable damage that we may never be able to recover from. We have not seen a demonstrated value to combining the organizations into to one, the township assuming operational control of either organizations, the addition of a Public Safety Director or the rescue truck being transferred from the rescue squad to the fire company. The combining of both organizations may alienate one or both groups of volunteers which could lead to less staffing, something the township and the organizations cannot afford. The township controlling operations of the organizations will only add additional work to a small staff at the township. These activities are currently being completed by volunteers and would add a salary expense to the township and ultimately raise taxes. Also, replacing the volunteers who have been doing the work will alienate them and cause them to leave. The addition of a Public Safety Director again adds a salary to the community that would raise taxes. It adds another layer of government that is not needed in a community of this size. Most communities are doing away with the position. This can be accomplished by the Administrator, given a defined role and allowing him to manage the organizations. The Public Safety Director will still answer to the Administrator so it's just adding another step which is not needed. The Tabernacle Rescue Squad has provided Rescue Services to the township since the late seventies. The rescue squad has grown its program into a well-trained unit that provided the best trained rescuers to quickly aid those in need. The squad has the staffing to man and operate the truck. There has not been a demonstrated reason to change it. The rescue truck has always been manned since it was moved to the ESB. The reasons relayed to the rescue squad is the that fire company is bored and they don't have anything to do. They have the ability to train and participate in providing rescue services as defined above. There was also a discussion of the rescue being dirty and EMS being clean. We would say they are both dirty activities in their own way. The rescue truck is staffed by squad members which have the proper gear to perform its function of vehicle rescue. The staffing on the ambulance provides its function of patient care. If the rescue crew is needed to aid the ambulance crew most of the members doing rescue are EMTs or have trained with our EMTs, which leads to better patient care. Rescue is a patient driven exercise. Again the fire company members can participate with the rescue squad as long as they train as the members of the squad are required.

We feel defined roles and lines of communications between the township committee, the township administrator, the rescue squad and fire company is all that is needed to better our emergency services. Our organization is a very successful organization running at the top of its game. There is always room for improvement, and the officers and members of the Tabernacle Rescue Squad continue to invest in new equipment and train in new skills and techniques to provide the latest and best care to the community we serve. Thank you for your time. The rescue squad will need to meet with the Administrator and representative of Committee to discuss future plans for our organization. We look forward to discussing these ideas with the township.

Professionally,

George H. Jackson III
Chief, Tabernacle Rescue Squad

Jamie Wood
President, Tabernacle Rescue Squad