MINUTES
of the
KEENE CITY COUNCIL

THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2019

PRESENT: Mayor Gary Heinrich, James Belz, Lisa Parrish, Robert Cooper, Rob Foster, Cheryl Schram, and Gwen Beeson.

ABSENT: None

CALLED TO ORDER: Called the Regular meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

Invocation & Pledge of Allegiance – Mayor Gary Heinrich

1. Public Comments.

Don Beeson, 607 Woodlawn, came forward. Mr. Beeson stated that the Keene ambulance started in 1971. The reason we went to paid ambulance employees was because there weren’t any volunteers. It has grown into the crew that it is today. EMS is not a money-making business, but it is a necessity. Careflight and AMR are in the money-making business. They must turn a profit. I would like to see the ambulance service stay in Keene and yes, the Fire Chief needs help and more employees. I think the Council should grant the Chief additional funds for overtime and require a minimum of three employees each shift at least to the end of the fiscal year.

2. Mayor’s Comments.

No comments and no announcements.

3. Presentation and discussion with direction to staff regarding EMS/Fire services and related matters.

Chief Warner came forward with a presentation. Back in February, we started looking at the EMS issue. Staff was asked to look at the recommendations and those costs. Representatives from AMR and Careflight are here to provide any additional information. Staff asked for proposals from AMR, Careflight, MedStar and Acadian. MedStar and Acadian both sent information that stated that they will not be participating. Information we will consider is increase to
budgeted expenditures, lost revenue, capital cost of ambulance replacement and how we are going to fund them. Current revenue that funds Fire/Rescue is $1.1 million. 70% of that is paid for by maintenance and operations tax rate which is the general fund. We do get some provisions from our emergency service district, that is 12%. That is strictly fire related. Fire services is 0% but there is some money, but it is negligible. EMS collections is 18%. Any revenue collected here goes into the general fund and is distributed throughout the City’s budget. If we looked at that going strictly to the fire department it only accounts for 20%. The budgeted revenue is $286,200 less budgeted direct and indirect expenses calculated at $200,651 which equals net annual revenue of $85,549. This includes two full time staff on the ambulance every day. This number provides the most relevant expense information for budget purposes. Even so, there is not currently enough staff to assign two personnel to the ambulance and if the ambulance service was no longer a source of revenue, these ambulance related expenses would have a minimal decrease. Additional costs for personnel ranges from $201,000 to $603,000, with an increase in line items for training, uniforms, equipment ranging from $26,500 to $79,000. Last additional cost is an ambulance replacement cost of $225,000. Additional costs for contracted services would range from $30,000 to $225,000 with a lost revenue of $286,000. After initial year of implementation, revenue from sale of ambulances is $30,000 with a minimal reduction in line items for current expenses. NFPA standards recommends minimum staffing of four per fire engine and two staff per ambulance. The City of Keene is operating with three budgeted staff per shift to cover both the fire engine and the ambulance. This problem hinders the ability of firefighters/paramedics to safely carry out their jobs. Additionally, it affects the ability of the department to respond to calls and causes a reliance on other entities to provide mutual aid. Staffing levels are so low that if the ambulance service were no longer provided, the City of Keene would still not meet minimum staffing levels per NFPA. The City of Keene Fire and Rescue department has a high turnover rate due in part to not having enough staff to efficiently share the workload and lower salaries than nearby area by comparison. The data shows the number of EMS related calls in the City of Keene in comparison with nearby stations and the number of overlapping calls which required mutual aid. This is due to insufficient staffing levels in the City of Keene to cover the overlapping calls. In 2018, 1,888 total calls: 371 overlapping, 180 no crew and 141 EMS no crew. We are the 3rd busiest fire station in Johnson County. The 4th busiest EMS provider in Johnson County, municipally provided. We are number one busiest MICU, ambulance provided service in Johnson County. We are doing that with half the staff. A comparison chart was provided showing similar and nearby cities. Keene has 1 fire fighter
for every 609 people. To keep EMS services in house we need to prepare a plan
to increase staff to NFPA required minimum staffing or other determined level
of staffing for Keene Fire and Rescue to adequately respond to Fire and EMS
calls. We must prepare a compensation study with a goal of reducing staff
turnover. Review grant opportunities and other revenue sources with a goal of
increasing revenue to further subsidize increase in personnel related costs.
Review budget expenses for areas of possible decrease to subsidize increase in
personnel related costs and consider timing and staggering of personnel hires.
Finally, consider full time FF/paramedic and/or paramedic only for ambulance.
Possible grant opportunities and other revenue sources. The SAFER grant is a
FEMA grant which is intended to aid cities in reaching minimum staffing levels.
If awarded, the grant pays for 75% of personnel costs in the first two years and
35% the third and final year. We have applied for this year’s grant. We found a
local grant writer to assist for $1,000. The Firefighters Association paid for half
of that to assist us in applying for this grant. We have a good chance according
to the review board. However, their concerns are that we are far below staffing
standards. Another revenue source is the ASSPP which is a program that aids
entities by allowing recovery of additional payments from medicare from prior
billings and receipts. The deadline to apply each year is March 22. This may be
an option for an additional revenue source for 2020 if the ambulance service is
kept in house. Currently the City of Keene receives revenue from the ESD
which includes a stipend for using volunteers based on hours worked. A
breakdown of that revenue was shown on a power point slide. The next slide
showed a scenario for additional personnel and cost. This is based on current
salaries. Additional costs for personnel ranging from $201,000 to $603,000 and
an increase in line items for training, uniforms, equipment ranging from
$26,500 to $79,000 with an ambulance replacement cost of $225,000. For
contracted services, the additional costs would range from $30,000 to $225,000
with a lost revenue of $286,000. After initial year of implementation, revenue
from sale of ambulances is $30,000 with minimal reduction in line items for
current expenses. The question is how do we pay for this? The options will
either result in an increase in expenditures or a decrease in revenue. Possible
solutions for the near future are increase in property tax rates, increase in
water rates and transfer to the general fund or eliminate a city service.

Mayor Heinrich requested clarification regarding overlapping and no crew
situations.

Chief Warner stated that the two on staff right now are on a call. A second call
came in, so we are unable to respond. That is a no crew.
Mayor Heinrich stated we add a third person to each shift, what is the increased amount of possible revenue by making more calls.

Chief Warner stated that is difficult to answer because it depends on the call and the insurance of the person being transported.

Rob Foster asked about out of the 1800 calls, there were only 700 responses.

Chief Warner stated that there were 1,888 calls that we responded to. Of those calls, 371 were overlapping calls and 180 were no crew calls.

Rob Foster clarified that out of the 1,888 calls, we couldn’t respond to 180 because of no crew.

Mayor Heinrich asked about overlapping.

Chief Warner stated that overlapping is when his crew is divided and responding to more than one call.

Brian LaBorde stated that we only have one ambulance in service and only the ambulance is the revenue source because of transport. The number that needs to be looked at is the EMS no crew number.

Chief Warner stated that the EMS no crew number would go down and the overlapping calls would go up.

Gwen Beeson asked about depending on the call an EMT is necessary. Councilwoman Beeson asked if the Chief is an EMT and if he steps in when necessary.

Chief Warner stated yes. The Chief’s position in Keene is considered a working chief.

Cheryl Schram asked about the employee turnover. Is our turnover number greater than the surrounding cities or cities of our size?

Chief Warner stated that he doesn’t have that number.
Cheryl Schram clarified that employees do leave for better pay and that is typical but not to our extent.

Chief Warner agreed.

Ryan Howerton came forward. Captain Howerton believes that our turnover is more than others.

Cheryl Schram asked how he believes that could be changed.

Captain Howerton stated more pay and more manpower. This is a big safety issue.

Cheryl Schram stated that Fire and Rescue is asking for more manpower not only to meet the current needs of the community but to do more for the community.

Captain Howerton agreed. More manpower will allow us to do more and do it safely and more efficiently. With our current manpower, if I was to show up to a structural fire alone, I must make a choice to fight the fire or search for people.

Mayor Heinrich asked what would make you enter a structural fire.

Captain Howerton stated if he knew that someone was trapped inside.

Gwen Beeson asked why it takes two people to do CPR.

Captain Howerton stated that one does the compressions and the other does meds. It takes two to remove someone from a fire too.

Chief Warner added someone must drive the ambulance too.

Gwen Beeson stated that she understands the two men in and two men out rule. What are the exceptions to the rule?

Captain Howerton stated it depends on the stage of the fire.

Chief Warner added that the reason for the two men rule is while there are two men on the inside, there needs to be two men on the outside with the same
gear on ready to rescue those firefighters if necessary. The only reason to enter a fire without that rule is if a confirmed someone is in immediate danger.

James Belz stated that every time he hears the ambulance he is proud. We appreciate all of you. This is a major thing and decisions need to be made. We understand that more personnel are needed, and we need to try and find a way to make that happen.

Mayor Heinrich asked about the revenue from the ESD.

Chief Warner stated $193,000. That is strictly for firefighting. Some of that money goes for volunteers.

Mayor Heinrich asked when does the ESD take out of the budget the money they give us for ambulance.

Chief Warner stated that he can put the Mayor in touch with the Board to find that out. The ESD prefers supporting the paid firefighters more than the volunteers because the paid firefighters are the anchors.

Cheryl Schram asked if we get any of that .06 cents you mentioned earlier.

Chief Warner stated that the .06 cents is a tax paid to the County not the ESD. We get a portion of that. Johnson County contracted with AMR. However, the City of Burleson and Cleburne elected to not get any since they have their own ambulance service.

Mayor Heinrich asked if there were any stipulations on how much time someone is required to stay on if we send them to school and/or training.

Chief Warner stated that he is working with HR on doing that. We are looking at an agreement that if we, the City is going to pay to train them, they must work for us for a set amount of time. If they leave before that, they are responsible for paying back the City for that training.

Rob Foster asked how many are on staff.

Chief Warner stated on paper, we have three per day. Typically, though, we have one sick, in school or on vacation.
Rob Foster stated that $50,000 is a good number to entice someone.

Mayor Heinrich asked to see the slide for additional personnel and the cost.

Chief Warner went over the slide again showing the cost per personnel.

Mayor Heinrich stated that we need to look at adding $277,000 to the budget for three additional personnel for fire and $50,000 per year for five years for a new ambulance.

Lisa Parrish asked when they will let us know about the grant.

Chief Warner stated late May.

Brian LaBorde summarized tonight’s meeting.

Mayor Heinrich asked about Venus being 100% volunteer.

Chief Warner stated yes Venus is 100% volunteer except for the Chief. The Chief is paid.

Mayor Heinrich asked if they get to all their calls.

Chief Warner stated that he doesn’t have their numbers.

Mayor Heinrich stated that looking at similar cities in size, Keene’s pay is comparable. It looks like they go to larger cities for more pay.

Chief Warner stated that Keene has a reputation as a training city.

James Belz asked if the Chief is going to be able to hire three more.

Chief Warner stated yes. We currently have four applicants waiting.

Mayor Heinrich asked about Careflight’s quote on services. It shows that if we add $1.00 to the water bill that will cover Careflight’s services.

Chief Warner stated that Careflight would get all the revenue and it is a voluntary option.
Careflight representative came forward to explain the service.

Chief Warner closed his presentation.

Lisa Parrish stated that she would like to find a way to take care of the firefighters.

Brian LaBorde stated that we will bring this to the budget workshops and start working on a plan.

Blain Stroud came forward. We appreciate the interest of Council wanting to fix the problem. If it came down to pay increase or staffing, we want staffing.

Mayor Heinrich asked how long he had been here.

Blain Stroud stated ten years. I plan to retire here.

Ed Cheever came forward. One of the things worth mentioning are the intangible items such as pride. We have pride for our department. The citizens have pride in our department and they take ownership with their support.

4. Adjournment.

The meeting adjourned at 8:08 PM.

By: [Signature]
Gary Heinrich, Mayor

Attest: [Signature]
Holly Owens, T.R.M.C., City Secretary