

TONOPAH TOWN BOARD
PUBLIC WORKSHOP MINUTES
JULY 27, 2016
Tonopah Convention Center
301 Brougner Avenue, Tonopah, NV 89049

Tonopah Town Board Chairman Duane Downing called the public workshop to order on July 27, 2016 at 6:05 p.m. Also present were Vice-Chairman Tom Seley, Clerk Janet Hatch and Board member Don Kaminski. Thirty-seven others were in attendance. Chairman Downing led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Public Comment

None.

2. Nye County Volunteer Ambulance Service

Director of Nye County Emergency Management Vance Payne introduced himself and noted that he will describe the situation of the ambulance service in Tonopah and surrounding areas with a power point presentation (see backup).

Mr. Payne explained that the Nye County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) created the ambulance service as the Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) describes it. He stressed that not one single tax dollar goes into the ambulance service, it is solely funded by the usage it receives. He pointed out that there has been a gradual decline in funds, but a cost increase for fuel, insurance, utilities, etc. He added that there are decreased payments from Medicare. He stated that the ambulance service in Beatty and Amargosa Valley are probably in the worst shape. Mr. Payne noted that about 40% of all calls in Tonopah are for Medicare patients and a lot of the other patients are underinsured. He emphasized that Nye County has receded \$1.3 million worth of bills over the last 13 months, but has only collected about \$386,000. He stressed that this ratio is pretty normal.

Vance Payne explained that since the hospital closed, calls have been very inconsistent, he added that the number has decreased even though traffic has increased. He pointed out that volunteerism is dying in America, especially in rural areas. He stressed that due to the closure of the hospital, calls now take four to six hours as patients have to be transported to Bishop or Hawthorne. Volunteers have to cut back or leave the service.

Mr. Payne stressed that it has been over 10 years since the ambulances have been replaced, the last new one was purchased in 2007. A private company (Simons Ambulance) had temporarily served Tonopah, but did not make enough money so they left Tonopah. Therefore volunteers are on call 24/7. Lifeguard International used to have two planes in Tonopah, but have cut back to one airplane. The company's owner has decided to serve Tonopah with a paramedic to help the situation. Mr. Payne stressed that this is not a long-term solution.

Tonopah resident Horace Carlyle noted that it was brought up at one of the BOCC meetings that the diversion of revenues was making Lifeguard International unprofitable. Vance Payne stated that he does not know anything about a diversion of funds or revenues. Mr. Payne stressed that Lifeguard International is currently losing about \$80,000 of funds a month. They are not profiting from serving Tonopah, but the owner thinks it is the right thing to do.

Horace Carlyle stated that one needs to look at NRS 450 and possibly supplementing the funding for the ambulance service through the hospital district. Vance Payne explained that the hospital district has gone through a legal battle as the District Attorney (DA) felt that the

use of the tax was not appropriate. The Attorney General (AG) decided that the BOCC can spend money as they see fit. Mr. Payne stated that he agrees with Mr. Carlyle that the hospital district can help fund the ambulance service.

Vance Payne stated that he can barely staff the ambulances and that they are in need of new EMT's. He explained that they have a new billing system so they can send bills faster and have a higher chance of collecting. He stressed that the collections are still not enough to cover the cost. He noted that he had to lay off one of the two employees and that he may be forced to close down some of the stations that they have.

Mr. Payne urged Tonopah residents to volunteer and get trained to be EMT's and to attend BOCC meetings to support the ambulance service. He emphasized that there is no law in any of the 50 States that you have to have an ambulance service. He stressed that there is the possibility of losing it. He added that he is afraid that Lifeguard International will have to leave as they are losing \$80,000 a month and are not a non-profit organization. He advised Tonopah residents to voice their opinion to the government. He noted that this does not just apply to Tonopah but every rural community all over the County and Country.

Vance Payne encouraged everyone to contact him if they are interested in helping or getting more information. He added that he wants to see the highest level of pre-hospital services as possible. He stressed that they need to have the support from the State government. He explained that NRS 450B is the section that needs change to help develop a new EMS system in rural Nevada. He stressed that the rural towns are held to same standards as Reno or Las Vegas.

Board Member Don Kaminski inquired how the collected money is used. Vance Payne explained that it pays the bills. It goes into one fund for all rural ambulance services. He stated that they ran the numbers and it is not feasible to separate the towns. He added that he is hoping to get sales tax money to repair some of the old buildings.

Tonopah resident Deb Cobb asked how Pahrump is running their ambulance service and why they are sustaining theirs. Vance Payne clarified that Pahrump had this on the ballot many years ago and the community chose to pay a special tax to support their fire department and paramedics. He stated that the solution for Tonopah and the other rural communities might be to have a system like Oklahoma which is a combination of volunteers, part time personnel, and full time personnel. They bill for their services and get tax dollars to support the services.

Board Members Don Kaminski inquired whether a class was currently held for EMT training which Mr. Payne affirmed. He explained that Tonopah will probably have five new EMR's who will hopefully continue to become EMT's. Mr. Kaminski asked when the training will be completed. Mr. Payne noted that they will probably finish all training and testing within 1.5 months. Mr. Kaminski inquired who carries the cost for the training. Mr. Payne stated that the County does.

Tonopah resident Cindy Kaminski asked how much the Pahrump tax is for the ambulance and fire service. Vance Payne noted that he does not know. Ms. Kaminski inquired whether Pahrump has volunteers and paid employees which Mr. Payne affirmed. She noted that this could pose a problem.

Nye County Commissioner Lorinda Wichman stressed that Tonopah taxes are capped and that the BOCC cannot add anything more. She explained that the BOCC has been trying to change some of the structures, but unfortunately the tax system protects the tax payer. She pointed out that there is a cap on the top, but no bottom cap. When property values decrease, the tax rate decreases, but it can only be raised by 3% every year, even if the property value has increased.

Ms. Wichman stated that the BOCC is trying to use the hospital district tax to pay for part of the services. She added that the BOCC is trying to get certain services outside the cap. She emphasized that if this decision was on the ballot, Nye County could charge for fire/ambulance services on top of the tax cap.

Fire Chief Rob Elliot noted that Pahrump has paid employees who are in a union. He explained that Tonopah used to have that system and it cost too much. Commissioner Wichman stressed that Nye County needs to have paid firefighters, EMT's, staff, etc. She pointed out that people usually do not complain about taxes if they know what they are for. She added that they only disagree when it goes to the general fund.

Board Member Don Kaminski inquired whether the hospital district tax can be used by the BOCC as they "see fit", as said before, anywhere in Nye County or only on the district. Commissioner Wichman clarified that this money is only spent within the district. Chairman Duane Downing added that if the money was used for an ambulance service, it could only be used within the district. Commissioner Wichman stressed that an ambulance service does not do Tonopah any good if they have nowhere to go. Cindy Kaminski stated that if Tonopah had an emergency room, volunteers would not have to take so many hours to transport patients. Ms. Wichman emphasized that \$800,000 from the hospital district tax a year will not pay for all the needed services in Tonopah. The BOCC has hired a contractor who will help the hospital board design a plan for Tonopah, write by-laws, help new board members, etc.

Tonopah resident Deb Cobb asked how Pahrump fit in the services inside the tax cap. Commissioner Wichman explained that they put it in before the cap. Vance Payne added that when Pahrump created their system, they knew it was going to be a blended system. He stressed that Pahrump does not collect enough revenue and therefore has massive write-offs.

Vance Payne stated that he will give this presentation at all the other towns. He noted that he is grateful for the input. He emphasized that it will take all the communities together to find a solution. Chairman Duane Downing pointed out that the problem is that it is not mandated by law and that this needs to change. He added that the property taxes are very low in this region.

Vance Payne thanked everyone for their time. Vice-Chairman Tom Seley thanked Mr. Payne for the presentation and thanked Fire Chief Rob Elliot and all the volunteer firefighters and EMT's for their service.

3. Public Comment

None.

4. Adjourn

The public workshop adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

Minutes transcribed by:



Kat Galli, Deputy Town Clerk

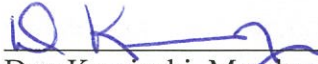
Approved:

Duane Downing, Chairman

Tom Seley, Vice-Chairman



Janet Hatch, Clerk



Don Kaminski, Member



Jay W., Member