



Emergency Medical Services
 Executive Oversight Board
 January 25, 2017
 Minutes

Board members in attendance:

Executive Louws, <i>Chair</i>	Kelli Linville, <i>Bellingham Mayor</i>
Barry Buchanan, <i>Whatcom County Council</i>	Terry Bornemann, <i>Bellingham City Council</i>
Scott Korthuis, <i>Small Cities Mayor</i>	RobRoy Graham, <i>Fire Commissioners</i>
Rick Kowsky, <i>Citizen at Large (Cascade Ambulance)</i>	VACANT, <i>Citizen Budget/Finance</i>
David Lynch, MD, <i>Medical Community Representative</i>	=not present

Also Present:

Tyler Schroeder, <i>EMS Administrator</i>	Chief Bill Newbold, <i>Bellingham Fire</i>
Brian Heinrich, <i>City of Bellingham</i>	Chief McLane, <i>Fire District #11</i>
Chief Gary Russell, <i>FD7</i>	Chief Dave, <i>Ralston, SWFA</i>
Jim Peeples, <i>WC Fire Commissioners</i>	Chief Lee, <i>Commissioner</i>
Tawni Helms, <i>Whatcom County Administration</i>	

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

Executive Louws welcomed everyone and roundtable introductions took place.

MINUTES APPROVED:

Executive Louws acknowledged that by affirmation of those present, the meeting minutes of September 21, 2016 were accepted into the record as submitted.

TAB REPORT:

Chief Newbold provided an update of the 01.11.17 TAB meeting. One of the items reviewed by the TAB was Transport fees for BLS and ALS. Districts are responsible for setting their respective BLS rates. The Whatcom County Council is responsible for setting the ALS fees.

The two ALS providers, Bellingham Fire Department and Fire District 7, charge the ALS rates set by the County Council. The City of Bellingham uses an automatic CPI rate increase for annual BLS rate adjustments. When developing the ALS service contracts the County did not elect to include an annual CPI increase for the ALS rates. As a result the ALS fees have not changes since 2014. The EOB directed the TAB to determine ALS Transport rate increases that would have been consistent with corresponding BLS rate increases. The rate increases based on the CPI adjustments are as follows:

	<u>Current</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
ALS Transport	\$750.	\$766.
ALS 2 Transport	\$950.	\$970.

Executive Louws asked if the ALS transport rates were consistent with peer agencies. Whatcom County BLS rates are consistent with peer agencies. Further, the TAB had previously contacted, Systems Design, an ambulance billing company used by several Whatcom County Fire Districts, who compared BLS rates of other agencies (over 30) and found that Whatcom County rates are neither the highest nor the lowest. Whatcom County BLS rates remain in the range of the majority.

Executive Louws asked if the recommendation of the TAB was to include the annual CPI adjustment along with any ALS rate increase. Chief Newbold responded that inclusion of an annual CPI adjustment would be determined by the council. The City uses an annual CPI adjustment because it's a good benchmark for rate adjustments. The TAB did not discuss or make a recommendation regarding the inclusion of the CPI adjustment. The TAB reviewed the ALS rate increases as directed by the EOB and made a recommendation to bring the new ALS rates forward to the EOB.

Mayor Linville stated that using the CPI as an automatic escalator allows for the adjustment to occur without the extra steps. City Council however, still examines the increase to ensure it is in line. It's an efficient method that reduces additional steps. Executive Louws agreed that the automatic CPI is an appropriate way to adjust rates and asked if the motion included an annual CPI adjustment with the proposed rate increases.

Councilor Buchanan made a motion to bring the proposed ALS Transport rate increases to County Council with the inclusion of an annual CPI adjustment. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bornemann. Executive Louws asked if there was discussion on the motion.

Dr. Lynch expressed concern about the increase in the charges particularly in light of the recent success of the EMS levy. Citizens just voted to tax themselves for the EMS levy. He inquired about Medicare/Medicaid rates. Both Medicare and Medicaid pay far less for transport fees. The Whatcom County system recovers less than 20% of the billed charges. The majority of claims are billed to Medicare/Medicaid the rest are billed to other insurance and those unable to pay. Payments are accepted as payments in full. The question was raised whether the system could be supported if full payment for services was received for the ALS fees. The answer is no. There would be considerably more revenue but the system would not be fully supported.

Rick Kowsky explained that the billing rates are more a matter of mechanics. Medicare/Medicaid hasn't adjusted their rates since 2006 and they just made a small adjustment this year. Medicare/Medicaid reimburses at their allowable rate and that is it. Increasing rates based on the CPI allows the provider to collect at the allowable rate. A very small percentage pay the full amount charged. Insurance pays only their approved rate. The system accepts those payments as payment in full.

The motion on the floor was reviewed and the Executive called for a vote. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Whatcom County Administration will prepare an ordinance to increase the ALS Transport fees with the inclusion of an annual CPI and submit for Council review and action.

PULSE POINT MAINTENANCE:

Chief Newbold reported that the What-Comm Board agreed to absorb the \$8,000 Pulse Point annual maintenance and application fees. When last reported we did not have the actual data for pulse point registrants. As of October, 2016 we have 785 followers on the Pulse Point system. That means 785 people have downloaded the app and are following the activities on their smart phone. Of the 785 subscribers/followers, 650 of them are CPR trained providers.

TAB MEMBERSHIP:

With the upcoming retirements of Chiefs Baar and Russell their successors will soon fill their positions on the TAB.

Fire District Chief Russell is retiring in June and Asst. Chief Hoffman will fill his position representing FD7 on the TAB. Lynden Fire Chief Baar is retiring in April. Chief Jerry DeBruin was chosen by the Whatcom County Chief's Association to succeed Chief Baar upon his retirement.

Lastly, the Hospital Representative position remains vacant on the TAB. We've been assured a recommendation will soon be coming forward to the EOB.

Executive Louws expressed his thanks and appreciation for the services of both Chief Baar and Chief Russell for their life long service and dedication to our community.

EMS LEVY NEXT STEPS:

Mr. Schroeder provided a draft outline summarizing the post levy actions and next steps. He indicated that he would be looking to the Funding Work Group (FWG) recommendations for guidance. The FWG recommendations outlined what needs to be done on a quarterly basis. He also suggested the EOB re-commit to those recommendations.

The first quarter work has already begun in response to the successful passage of the EMS Levy. The EMS Administrator job description has been drafted and routed for review. Bellingham Fire and Fire District 7 have been consulted for the development of the job description which was drafted based on the recommendations of the FWG. The EMS administrator job posting has been prepared and will be published in March. Selection and hiring of the new EMS Administrator is anticipated for the end of the first quarter -April. Mr. Schroeder said he would be looking to the TAB and other key partners to develop a hiring committee/panel and candidate testing. The question was raised who the EMS Administrator will report to. H/She will report to the County Executive.

Executive Louws described the attributes he is looking for in the candidate. It is critical that the EMS Administrator has the ability to think independently; to be data driven, to gather lots of information, and to compile the data sets that will be used for decision making. The system already has a lot of the necessary tools and resources in place. Finding the right person to bring all of that information together will be very important.

County Administration has looked into the possibility of housing the new EMS Administrator at the Whatcom Unified Emergency Coordination Center (WUECC). Mr. Schroeder has reached out to the Whatcom County and City of Bellingham emergency managers, Mr. John Gargett and Mr. Paul Gazdik. This location, jointly operated and staffed by the County and City, would enhance partnership and collaboration between agencies.

County Administration has been working to develop draft agreements between Whatcom County and each of the three Fire Districts impacted by the EMS Levy. Mr. Schroeder met with the Fire Chiefs from the three impacted districts #4, #11 and #16 to finalize the financial details of those agreements.

The existing ALS provider agreements must also be extended and revised to incorporate the additional contributions allowed by the EMS Levy. The Medical Services Officer (MSO) positions will be added to the system and covered through the new levy. A service agreement for the Medical Program Director services beyond the state funded position will also be developed as a result of the EMS Levy.

Finally, looking towards the end of 2017, enhancements to the EMS system will begin to take shape under the leadership of a new EMS Administrator as illustrated in the FWG recommendations. Although not a comprehensive list, here are some of those enhancements discussed and recommended by the FWG:

- BLS training programs,
- Enhanced accounting standards
- Countywide Community Paramedic program.

The Executive agreed with Councilor Buchanan that involving members of the Funding Work Group in the hiring process. Many of the FWG members also sit on the EOB and TAB.

Commissioner Graham asked if the MSO position was going to be based on the Bellingham Fire job description. It was explained that the FWG recommendations included examples of MSO positions from Bellingham Fire Department and other agencies. The decision will be to make the best hiring decisions possible.

Mr. Schroeder said he will be sending an email invitation out to the FWG, EOB and TAB members seeking input and involvement with the hiring process.

CLOSING COMMENTS:

Executive Louws thanked everyone for their contributions towards the success of the EMS Levy. With prudent and responsible stewardship of the EMS funds, it's possible the EMS Levy will allow the system to be sustained through the next 12 years.

The question was raised about the assessed valuation at the end of 2016. Mr. Schroeder will review with the Assessor and see how it compares to the FWG projections used for the EMS Levy.

BOARD VACANCY:

With Pat Dunn's recent resignation from the Board, Chairman Louws asked for Board recommendations to fill the Finance/Budget citizenship position. He encouraged Board members to consider local talent to fill the position. Members agreed to come up with some recommendations.

**NEXT MEETING: March 15, 2017
 Room 514, County Courthouse**

PUBLIC COMMENT: n/a

With no other items to report the meeting was adjourned at 2:50.