

# Village of Hiram

## Finance/Safety Committee Meeting Minutes

September 27, 2022

**Call to Order:** Chairman Chris Szell called the meeting to order at 6:03 pm

**Committee Members Present:** Lou Bertrand, Mayor  
Chris Szell, Chairman  
Beth Greenwood, Councilperson  
Paul Spencer, Councilman at 6:11 pm  
Susan Skrovan, Fiscal Officer

**Committee Members Absent:** David Smith, Councilman

**Hiram Officials Present:** Bill Byers, Fire Chief  
Jason Groselle, Asst. Fire Chief  
James McGee, Village Administrator

**Others:** Frank Hemphill; Councilman, Steve Pancost; Hiram Township Trustee and Chris Knapp with Lifeforce Inc.

**Agenda:** A motion to approve the proposed agenda for Finance/Safety was made by Mayor Bertrand with a second from Mrs. Greenwood. Motion passed unanimously, 4-0.

**Minutes:** Chris Szell corrected on page 2 at the top of the page where James, "reported that Steve Schuller spoke with Nancy Rubin, CFO with Hiram College". A motion to approve the meeting minutes of August 30, 2022 as amended was made by Mayor Bertrand with a second from Mrs. Greenwood. Motion passed unanimously, 4-0.

**Guests/Public:** Chris Knapp with Lifeforce Inc. was asked to come and explain how they collect for EMS runs and their billing process. The Mayor asked her how we compare to other communities and how many do they collect for. Chris said they collect for over 106 entities in Ohio. Countywide, your rates are a little lower than surrounding communities. Hiram's rates could be increased by \$100-\$150.00. However, your database supports a lot of Medicare and Medicaid customers. You need to remember, even if you raise your rates, a good chunk of your EMS transports are related to fee schedules that you have no control over. The Mayor stated we do soft billing to our residents now and asked if she had any facts or figures on that. She would suggest that Hiram creates a "minimum" out of pocket fee for everyone. Then, once the insurance co. pays or denies the charges, then we go to your residents. Soft billing has worked for many communities as long as they were getting the support they need out of their local taxes. Chris said now, some communities are considering not soft billing because they are not making it with whatever is helping to support the safety services. They are looking at a minimum fee for all residents, no matter what their insurance will cover. Chris went onto explain how the billing process all works with resident transport. The Mayor asked Chief Bill Byers and Asst. Chief Jason Groselle what they would recommend. Chief Byers said they have been talking about this for a while now the amounts we are writing off. He cannot in good faith recommend to the Township or the Village to go back to the voters for additional levy monies. Bill would recommend having the people who utilize the services, then pay for it. More discussion on their run history.

Chris said approximately 60% of your transports are government Medicare/Medicaid which would not give you any more income from those transports. If you raise your rates, you will get some more from private insurance or motor vehicle accidents. In 2020, Chris stated that the Fire Department wrote off \$9,800.00, in 2019 it was \$8,200.00; this is from residents only!

Steve Pancost, Hiram Township Trustee, said some of their elderly residents already hesitate to call the ambulance because they do not want to pay for it. Steve wondered whether it might be better to try and increase the millage on our fire and EMS levies. Chief Bill Byers said whatever the whole committee would like; he was just concerned with the economy and our current situation, he thought it would be better to set a minimum fee for those who use it. Bill would like to explore this option and stay off putting on an additional levy for a year or two. Paul said there is not a big influx of people coming and going in our two communities. So these people that are here for 40+ years pay taxes all those years and never use the services. Paul felt to negate that and start charging the residents; he is not for that. Steve is not for that either. Chief Byers said we all have to take a look at future funding for our fire & EMS departments. The real issue is trying to collect from non-residents and dealing with the collection procedures of the Ohio Attorney General's office! Chief wants to stay ahead of all of the costs to run the department including new equipment and with staff!

Steve Pancost asked how our millage compares to Mantua or Garrettsville. Bill Byers said Mantua's is at 9 mills, our is at 6 mills, he believes. The Mayor said ours is at 5 mills. Bill said yes and we are one of the only departments that do not have a capital levy.

The Mayor suggested that the Chief check with other communities and present a proposal and a resolution. Set a fee across the board, for residents and non-residents. Chris has seen a fee anywhere from \$150 to \$350. The Mayor said if you need a resolution from Council, we will stand behind you, we always have and always will. Paul asked Chief Byers to look at a levy increase as well and maybe something for capital. Paul did not think that a \$100 or \$150 charge for a squad call is a bad thing.

Chris Knapp brought up another consideration of the billing for our Fire Department at the scene of an accident which is outside of Lifeforce and the medical billing and coding part of the business. This would be for other costs not related to the squad; your personnel, your trucks, your absorbent, anything else. Chris said they only collect for "at fault" non-resident accidents. Bill thought they outlawed crash billing! Chris said the Attorney General did start up again the "crash revenue" billing.

#### **Department Updates:**

**Police Department:** Police Chief Brian Gregory was not present to provide his report. Susan did report following a conversation with Brian that he and Officer Anthony Yoder have contacted close to 60 colleges; many have their own police departments! Some needed to check with their legal department before releasing any information about security contracts. They are still gathering information.

**Fire Department:** Fire Chief Bill Byers reported they may see the new rescue squad by November. His department had the Mayor swear in a new firefighter; Brandon Washington.

**Village Adm/Utilities:** VA James McGee reported paving of the rear parking lot work should start the end of the week. Utility Contracting Inc. (UCI) should also begin their work by the end of the week.

Paul Spencer asked James about brown water he encountered last weekend? James said they are running off of wells #2 and #3. Well #3 was down and now it is back up; it may have stirred up some brownish water. Well #1 is having new wires run to it and is currently offline.

Chris Szell asked James if there were any updates to the generator at the water plant. No. Susan and James explained how this is all on our insurance the rental costs of a CAT generator. We received one insurance check so far and those funds are almost depleted paying the monthly rental to CAT of \$6,500. They have to keep covering the costs until our generator is repaired or we will have issues with the EPA!

James brought up possible cost of living increases for next year. Susan passed out spreadsheets with personnel costs by department and various cost of living raise options. Chief Byers would think that if a decision is made to increase personnel compensation for those coming out of our General Fund, that the Fire Department increases should also come out of the General Fund. James said we have also discussed just doing the full-time personnel and allow the department heads to determine the part-time increases as they would see appropriate. Susan said that is what she believes those department heads are doing now. For the rest of us, that is not possible. Mayor Bertrand suggested that the department heads come to the Finance committee with their proposals and then they could make a recommendation to Council. Chief Bill Byers said department heads should also take a look at our current salary ranges; they may need to be adjusted moving forward. Paul felt Finance should think about this until their next meeting.

James reported that Tyler Herndon in our utility department has achieved his lab test license. James would like to give him a \$1.00 per hour raise for this achievement as he did with Simon. James will divide that amount between water and sewer. Paul asked whether Steve or him have gotten their licensing? James said no, they both have their lab test licensing, the water and sewer licenses are much more difficult because they would have to spend so much time down at the facilities physically working which takes them away from their daily work. Paul said at some point, he thought the goal was to have James and Steve be our licensed operators in order to not have to subcontract out. James said Simon almost has his water license.

**A motion to authorize the Village Administrator, James McGee, to give a \$1.00 per hour raise to Tyler Herndon for achieving his Lab Test License was made by Mayor Bertrand and seconded by Mr. Szell. Motion passed unanimously, 5-0.**

**Mayor:**

The Mayor would like to set a meeting with Hiram College to discuss the Fire & Police contract either Tuesday October 11<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 pm or Wednesday October 12<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 am. The Mayor would like to have Beth Greenwood and Chris Szell, the Police and Fire Chiefs and the Mayor. When is everyone available. Members would be able to meet on October 12<sup>th</sup> at 9:00am. More discussion followed on what was decided following the outcome of executive session at the last Council meeting and how we are going to have to move forward with Hiram College.

**Fiscal Officer/Admin:** Susan Skrovan asked Chief Bill Byers about what down payment, if any, we want to put down on the new squad purchase. Bill said as far as he knows, Council has not yet decided. There was discussion on possibly using part of the ARPA funds to use as a down payment. That is what Hiram Township is planning to do with their ARPA funds. Susan would prefer the check from Hiram Township come directly into her office and then she will send it onto the vendor. Our auditors prefer it that way.

There has been no unusual spending out of our General Fund this past month.

The Kubota Track Loader loan paperwork is at the bank for processing and electronic payment.

**Bills List:**

Bills list was reviewed. A motion to pay the bills was made by Mr. Spencer with a second from Mayor Bertrand. Motion passed unanimously, 5-0.

**New Business:**

a. **Understanding Police and Fire Cost of Services:** Paperwork from the Police and Fire Departments were passed out showing the actual costs of services to Hiram College. The Police is looking at \$27,046 in costs, the Fire is looking at \$30,327 in costs. We need to negotiate and resolve the contract with Hiram College or go to ala-cart billing. Paul Spencer wants to bring this before Council to review and then present it to the College. The departments will make sure all of Council have these figures!

**Unfinished Business: None**

**EMS Collections:** Were reviewed and signed off.

**Any Other Business:** None

The next Finance/Safety Committee meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 25, 2022.

**Adjournment:** A Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mayor Bertrand with a second from Mrs. Greenwood. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 7:49 pm.

**Respectfully Submitted by:**

**Attest:**

  
Susan J. Skrovan, Fiscal Officer

  
Chris Szell, Finance Chairman