

MINUTES  
RECONVENED MEETING  
April 13, 2018

A reconvened meeting of the Council for the City of Covington was held on Friday, April 13, 2018 at 3:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall located at 333 W. Locust Street, Covington, Virginia.

The meeting began by Mayor Thomas H. Sibold, Jr. making note that all members were present as follows: Mayor Sibold, Vice Mayor David S. Crosier, Councilwoman Mary Ann Beirne, Councilman Raymond C. Hunter and Councilman S. Allan Tucker.

Mayor Sibold began the meeting by stating that the Covington Volunteer Rescue Squad was asked to come up with a plan to better cover hours that are not covered by the part-time paid staff. They presented the plan to Richard Douglas, City Manager and Chief of Police & Public Safety Director, Anthony Morgan. The plan that the Rescue Squad gave to City staff would cover 60 hours of the 180 hours needed for coverage to citizens. Mayor Sibold noted that Covington doesn't have the population that it once had in the 1960's and there is a shortage of volunteers to serve the citizens of Covington. The Mayor also noted that the Council has respect for the volunteers and asked that everyone respect each other in the meeting.

City Manager, Richard Douglas, thanked rescue squad volunteers for their time and dedication for all they do. He thanked Tim Yancey, and the part-time paid rescue squad staff and also the fire department volunteers. There was a lot of overtime put in this week. The Covington staff including, Mr. Douglas, Chief of Police & Public Safety Director, Anthony Morgan and Finance Director, David Bryant, Jr. were asked what the City can do to assist with the lack of coverage for ambulance services. Chief Morgan has a background in Public Safety and they have also contacted the Virginia Office of Emergency Services.

They wanted the issue broken out short term for 120 days to find out how to provide services and that the long term cannot be decided today. The various ways of covering the hours that cannot be covered by volunteers could be covered by AMR (American Medical Response). They could also use volunteers. The volunteers can also assist with paid staff. The contracted agreement with AMR will be an additional \$103,723.39, to cover additional personnel above the existing 80 hours per week allocation. If this is approved by Council, AMR would be used as an emergency response and would not be long term. After 120 days, if further service is needed, then an RFP-Request for Proposal, would be advertised. AMR's services would begin Friday, April 20, 2018. Of course any other support from the fire department for drivers, etc... are also welcome. The City does not want to over burden them either.

Mr. Douglas recommended to Council to approve this plan for emergency services to hire AMR with paid part-time staff to assist the Covington Rescue Squad for 120 days.

Upon a motion by Vice Mayor Crosier, seconded by Councilman Tucker, Council voted 5 to 0 to approve recommended plan for emergency services to hire AMR with paid part-time staff to assist the Covington Rescue Squad for 120 days.

The Mayor opened up the meeting for anyone that wanted to come to the microphone and speak.

There were many volunteers that spoke at the meeting. Topics discussed included the concern of the cost to the citizens for the assistance of AMR and volunteers who have given their time/lives to be volunteers.

It was asked if volunteers would be asked to leave by the paid staff while on calls. Chief Morgan will confirm the answer and let everyone know. It was restated by Mr. Douglas that the volunteers are encouraged to assist with calls.

There was discussion that: (1) the volunteer rescue squad has existed for over 84 years and the volunteers want to continue their service to citizens; (2) they feel they do not have the trust and support; (3) that there could be additional volunteers join the squad. Recently on a call to a citizen, it was a critical situation a volunteer went to the scene, the police department where assisting the patient, using AED and doing CPR and this volunteer was late for work, received a reprimand and lost pay. Volunteers do this because they are dedicated; there was discussion that the wait times for an ambulance are 30 minutes or longer and could the City spend more on volunteers services than other things. The Mayor stated that not all wait times are that long and Council met with the City Manager, staff and volunteers to come to a short term plan and can work together for a long term plan.

There was further discussion of the rescue squad possibly being disbanded, and thought that the plan that the rescue squad submitted would be considered. Mr. Douglas stated that this plan was considered and that he, Chief Morgan and the Finance Director took everything into account while discussing all aspects of having ambulance coverage for citizens. There was clarification that Council are not staff. The Mayor noted that the City Manager was hired to give recommendation and the Manager hires staff, such as, the Chief of Police.

Volunteers stated they are committed to area events such as the bike rodeo, Cork & Pork, etc.. and are dedicated to cover 60 hours. Mr. Douglas stated that volunteers are encouraged to come out, they are a vital component of this plan.

It was noted that lack of certified rescue volunteers is a problem across the area and throughout America. There are not as many volunteers as volunteers are not allowed to leave their place of employment as in the past, have longer work hours, and family responsibilities, etc...

With AMR there will continue to be soft billing of ambulance services.

The Mayor stated that the Council and staff are looking at how to move forward and serve the citizens of Covington.

It was suggested that if there are to be staff for 12 hour shifts that there will be a need for bunks/cots at the firehouse. One of the volunteers is at 32 hours and there are safety concerns.

In the future, if there are complaints about the paid staff to advise Chief Morgan. There needs to be other maintenance work being done in the fire house, on vehicles, etc... by AMR, not just going on calls.

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City staff are working with hospital personnel on assisting the volunteers with the long wait at the hospital after getting a patient transported.

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There are a lot of emotions because volunteers care and are dedicated to volunteering. They were given two days to come up with a plan and do not feel that it was enough time.

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Mr. Douglas noted that they are networking with others who have the same issue, such as Lexington and have not recommended disbanding the rescue squad. If coverage continues to be a problem, then an RFP will have to be put out for part time services. The Council and staff want to keep the volunteer rescue squad.

It was noted that a person in the ambulance with a patient has to be certified. There is concern if the squad would go to all paid staff that it would become hard billing for citizens and a heavier burden on tax payers. The part-time paid staff are appreciated and the squad does not want to be disbanded.


There was discussion that other areas have paid staff and are receiving \$16-\$20 and hour and one of the volunteers in attendance noted that he was receiving less than \$16. The staff are going to check into the pay scale for all paid staff.

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A volunteer noted that they want to work with Council and staff and will work on getting more volunteers. Another volunteer thanked everyone for listening and working together.

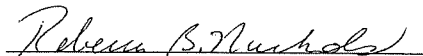
No further discussion or business to come before Council, the meeting was adjourned.

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THOMAS H. SIBOLD, JR., MAYOR

ATTEST:

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RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY  
REBECCA BRATTON NUCKOLS  
SUBSTITUTE CITY CLERK

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