

**Herkimer County Legislature
Public Safety/Emergency Management
Committee Meeting
Friday, December 11, 2020
Via Zoom
9:30 a.m.**

Persons Attending:

John P. Stephens (Chairman, Public Safety/W&M committee member)
Gregory Malta, Sr. (Public Safety committee member)
Raymond Johnson (committee member, both)
Kurt J. Ackerman (committee member, both)
William Weakley (Public safety committee member)
Peter Campione (Public Safety committee member)
Vincent J. Bono, Chairman of the Legislature
James W. Wallace, Jr., County Administrator
Steve Billings, Personnel Officer
John Raymond, Director of Emergency Management

(Non Committee Members Signed In)

Legislator Mark Gaworecki
Legislator Robert J. Schrader
Legislator Bob D. Hollum
Legislator William E. Keeler, Sr.
Legislator Raymond Smith
Legislator Ray Donley
Legislator Frederick J. Shaw, Jr.

Absent:

N/A

Mr. Stephens called the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m.

Items Discussed:

PUBLIC SAFETY/EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT:

1. Request from 911 Director
2. Other

Committee Vote Record:

PUBLIC SAFETY/EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT:

Mr. Stephens: "On the agenda is a request from John Raymond. The Public Safety Committee, I sent them a letter that was sent to us by Director Raymond. He requested to have a discussion on Personnel. We are down to ten Dispatchers and as of January 2nd we will be down to nine Dispatchers. We have a supervisor leaving on the night shift. I've talked with Pat and Jim Bono about this. I believe this is a serious situation. That's almost 50% of our approved capacity up there. We don't know what the answer is. I do know that our pay is very low compared to similar sized counties around us. Our pay is \$29,000 and change. The next lowest pay around us is Fulton County. I believe they are \$34,000 and change. I know this is an issue with the entire County, with all of our departments. We have talked about it, pay wise but this is a service I believe is a necessity, not a want. These people answer emergency phone calls. I guess what I wanted to get everybody together for was to number one, let the Public Safety committee know what was going on. I feel that as the Chairman of that committee that's my job. I have pretty much been told a decision will be made by Ways and Means and that's fine. I don't necessarily agree with being

cut out of that but if that's the way it goes then that's the way it goes. I think at least the Chairman or the Vice Chairman of Public Safety should be involved in those discussions but apparently that's not the way it's going to go."

Mr. Ackerman: "John, can I ask a question just to educate me and maybe some of the others. How many people you say were hit like sixteen is their number, is that part time full time or both? How many do we have on at a time on a shift?"

Mr. Stephens: "We had sixteen full time positions in the budget. Dispatch positions. That includes Dispatchers and Supervisors. There are three people on at a time. We approved it to have four people be on at a time so there should be four people on a shift. There is four people on from six in the morning until six at night, there is four people on from six at night until six in the morning. We have two part-time Dispatchers currently on the books. One retired, I guess is the best way to put it. Way back before the pandemic hit and John approached him and asked him to come back and help out and he did. He is leaving again at the end of December. Unless John can sweet talk him back to help us out some more but he is gone and our other part-time Dispatcher is seventy-one years old so how much longer is he going to stick around. That's it for our part-time staff as far as Dispatchers in the room the cover shifts."

Mr. Johnson: "Is there somewhere we can tie it in with the college and make it an internship program and get the college kids to work part-time there?"

Mr. Stephens: "I'm not against anything Ray. You know, right now this is an issue. We need a plan for the immediate future. If one person comes into that room and is sick with whatever is going on, we are not going to have enough people to work there. Our crews right now are covering overtime left and right and I have information here from September all the way through to current date. They are just getting burnt out. Look, I know it's not a physically demanding job, I know that, I worked there but mentally being there for twelve hours is tough. These folks to me do a great job, they handle a lot of stuff. Some stuff they handle I don't think they should be handling but that's what we have decided to do with them up there. But, you are going from sixteen down to nine. Right now we are only at ten."

Mr. Johnson: "I have a sheet with twelve names on it."

Mr. Stephens: "Correct but we have other positions approved that aren't filled."

Mr. Johnson: "Say COVID hits what more is \$5,000 going to matter? That doesn't solve the COVID issue."

Mr. Stephens: "Well, no it doesn't. I understand your question Ray but if you have one shift affected, right now you can't bring in somebody from another shift to cover that because we do not have that ability."

Mr. Johnson: "But we don't know if the \$5,000 will solve that problem though."

Mr. Stephens: "No. We don't know if the \$5,000 will solve any problem but it would be a start."

Mr. Ackerman: "John, can I ask a question on staffing? Police departments I know we do this and nurses do it as well where the staffing doesn't just reflect four, four, four. It would be based on the need on the average. You have more calls on the weekend or more calls in the mid evening than you do the overnight so couldn't we save a few numbers here, not salaries, if we geared up for more heavier times based on history?"

Mr. Stephens: "Kurt, there isn't a flow time in the center anymore. It used to be at night time. We use to be down two Dispatchers at night instead of three because it was slower. It's not that way anymore. I'm not saying that it is never slow obviously, any job you have you have slow periods but there really isn't a slow time there anymore. We did 92,000 calls last year."

Mr. Johnson: "John, is that because we are answering the villages calls after the hours now?"

Mr. Stephens: "Yeah Ray, that's a great point. I would assume that that's a part of it but the only ones that we have really never answered are Ilion and Herkimer. So that is added to it and I believe when we discussed that we knew it was going to increase our numbers. From January to the 9th of December 91,643 calls came through the center that have been put in the computer what they call CAD, Computer Aided Dispatch. That's not including some calls that are administrative that don't get put in the CAD."

Mr. Ackerman: "Do they give us a break down of those calls? I'm just curious if 10,000 were missed calls, 10,000 were 911 for electrical problems that go to us, all the way down."

Mr. Stephens: "It's EMS, fire, law, other types, I would assume that would be what you were talking about Kurt. We answered some calls that are considered out of county that just happen to roll our way and then rescue calls."

Mr. Bono: "John, do we do DSS calls?"

Mr. Stephens: "I'm not sure. They might be under other."

Mr. Ackerman: "I think they go to the Sheriffs don't they?"

Mr. Stephens: "No. We handle DSS after hours. We being 911. That's a subject of discussion right now going on with the Director and Deputy Director up there at 911. We also handle the college alarm system which is another discussion going on up there. I do have it broken down. I just got this yesterday. Guys, I just want you to know what's going on. I really think this is a necessity that we talk about this. I did a little bit of research on my own. A family of four, if that was their only income...."

Mr. Johnson: "I'm not going down this path John."

Mr. Stephens: "Well, I am."

Mr. Campione: "Can we just take a step back and let Mr. Raymond speak on what's going on?"

Mr. Stephens: "Absolutely. John, before we let you talk I would like to go into Executive Session because we are going to start talking about salaries and contractual stuff."

On motion of Mr. Bono, seconded by Mr. Campione, the Public Safety/Emergency Management Committee went into Executive Session at 9:51 a.m., under Public Officer's Law, Section 105 (f). On motion of Mr. Weakley, seconded by Mr. Malta, Item #1 was voted on to send it to Ways & Means. Yes: Stephens, Malta, Ackerman, Weakley, Campione, Bono (6). No: Johnson (1). On motion of Mr. Malta, seconded by Mr. Weakley the Committee came out of Executive Session at 10:54 a.m.

Item #2 – N/A.

At 10:57 a.m., on motion of Mr. Bono, seconded by Mr. Johnson, the Public Safety/Emergency Management Committee adjourned.