

***“A WHITE PAPER PRESENTATION ON STRATFORD EMS”***  
**to**  
**MAYOR & COUNCIL**

**Thursday September 8, 2022 7:00pm**

**by**

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you, Mayor and Council and citizens assembled to talk about how Stratford Office of Emergency Management (OEM) can assist with the Stratford Ambulance Association.

First, if you would indulge me, I would like to let you know my background. In addition to being a Police Officer with the Stratford Police Department for the past 20 years, I am also an EMT. I received my initial certification in 1998, in Stratford, at the University of Medicine and Dentistry, (UMDNJ) which consisted of over 200 hours of training. My certification is current, and in the past 24 years I have hundreds of hours in state mandated training or CORE training in addition to hundreds of hours of elective training. Also, for 24 years, I have been a CPR/AED/First Aid Instructor with the American Heart Association. My initial EMT training was completed by State Certified Instructors many from the Stratford Ambulance Association.

I have been with the Stratford Police Department Ambulance Liaison to Stratford Ambulance for the past 20 years. I was a member of Pine Hill Fire and EMS, where I achieved the rank of EMS Lieutenant. In that capacity I was tasked with training and supply acquisition. I volunteered in Pine Hill in addition to the Stratford Ambulance Association. I worked for Kennedy EMS as a 911 EMT for 8 years in Lindenwold, Pine Hill, Clementon, Gloucester Twp., Washington Twp., and Pitman. At that time, when paid services were beginning to take over, Stratford Ambulance Association continued serving the residents of Stratford with an all-volunteer service.

As you are well aware, Stratford Ambulance had contacted you for assistance in November of 2021. The concerns were loss of billing revenue, lack of volunteers,

and desire of long-standing members, some with over 30 years' experience, to retire from service.

I have been catching up with all the meetings that have occurred between Council, Stratford Ambulance, Stratford Fire Department, and the OEM. I would first like to thank Mayor and Council for putting the citizens of Stratford first by researching every option to save a 67-year-old institution that provides lifesaving services to Stratford.

The Office of Emergency Management's job is logistics, which includes coordinating with organizations both in planning, during an emergency and after the emergency occurs. The OEM publishes the Emergency Operations Plan which is designed to protect lives and property in emergencies by coordinating response activities of municipal and volunteer entities to ensure their optimum use. It provides for actions to be taken to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from the effects of an emergency. It is the OEM's responsibility for implementing this plan and coordinating the response. I cannot think of a better example of an emergency then the loss of the Ambulance Association.

## **Finances**

The problem of finances is one of the primary problems that was identified by President Jayme Meyers. Currently citizens of Stratford are not hard billed. OEM immediately began searching for alternate sources of income for the Ambulance Association. The main costs associated with the Ambulance Association are equipment, supplies, building costs and maintenance, and manpower.

Multiple options were analyzed and rejected until ultimately using the existing structure to continue as a hybrid where Stratford EMS remains a separate legal entity, and where paid volunteers of the Stratford Ambulance Association staff certain hours. And an arrangement where supplemental staffing coverage is required and supported by the Sterling Alliance on a contract basis. Utilizing this option, the Stratford Ambulance Association and Sterling Alliance would both remain unchanged and the workforce unaffected. Under this model, Stratford residents would not be hard billed for EMS services.

## **How to obtain this?:**

### **Elimination of overhead and building expenses**

A plan developed in which the Stratford Ambulance Association would move operations into the Stratford Fire Department. This would allow the Borough to provide additional financial support to the Stratford Ambulance Association and to

the Fire Department. Stratford could in-turn repurpose the existing facility, saving thousands of dollars on gas, water, electric, cable tv, internet, etc.

OEM recognized that although no help was specifically requested by the Fire Department, costs have been rising for all Emergency Services. With the Fire Department “leasing space” to the Ambulance Association, the Fire Department would be able to acquire an additional revenue source. The OEM sees this as a two-for-one, win win scenario.

OEM recognized the additional tangible benefit to having all three emergency services within walking distance to each other and to the Borough Hall, and Senior Center.

- In times of emergency, similar to large weather events all three of the organizations could keep crews manned in-house. Additional manpower for maintaining equipment and services with housing and feeding the crews would be easier with a command post.
- Cross training Fire and Ambulance personnel could occur as both crews could meet at the same time. The training would not make Firefighters into EMTs, and would not make EMTs into Firefighters, but the cross training could only enhance the skills of both and only be beneficial to citizens of Stratford.
- In Pine Hill a similar approach was made when three (3) fire departments and EMS were merged into a Fire District. The additional funds provided by the EMS were used by the Fire Department for equipment.

### **Manpower Costs**

OEM has access to apply for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funding. This includes one-time funding and grants for federal events. These funds have to be accounted for through tracking. This is done through the accounting function in the Chain of Command, which in our case is vested with the Borough Finance Office.

Multiple Grants were searched, when the first grant was found and applied for. The Grant was won and was allocated for manpower. These funds were received and are to be used for future EMS costs.

All federal grants funds must be accounted for, especially since the Borough of Stratford was awarded the funds for EMS purposes.

An additional grant has been applied for, which is also in the process, for additional EMS costs. These grants cannot be re-purposed or be used for anything other than EMS related labor and expenses. With the members of the Association wanting to retire, the decision was made to transition the EMS Accounts Payable and receivable to the Stratford Borough Finance Office.

A trust account, approved by the Stratford Chief Financial Officer with the Division of Community Affairs, was established to deposit funds, including the FEMA Grants, for year-to-year use by the Ambulance Association.

### **Additional Funds**

The opportunity to secure additional funding was developed through the adoption of an Ordinance for EMS Subscription Service. Council had sought funds through Laurel Springs and Hi Nella who also are primary users of the Stratford Ambulance. These additional sources of revenue in conjunction with current revenue and grants would have secured funding for multiple years in the future.

### **The Unexpected**

The Ambulance Association suddenly contacted an attorney to dissolve during the first week of August 2022. The irreparable harm incurred from the decision to dissolve would have a ripple effect to our community.

- It would be impossible to secure any additional grant funding for a non-existent entity, making reimbursement for past expenses impossible.
- In addition to funding for manpower, if the resources like ambulances and equipment were given away to another entity, it would be cost prohibitive to repurchase these items.
- Void the contract between Stratford Ambulance Association and Magnolia Ambulance thus ending the Sterling Alliance.
- The Stratford Residents would be without local ambulance service.
- Ambulance services would have to be out-sourced to a hospital-based system or to another municipality. This is similar to what happened in Voorhees when Virtua Hospital was contracted to provide EMS service to Voorhees.

- The Stratford Fire Department would lose its additional revenue which was being raised by leasing space to the Ambulance Association.
- The Citizens of Stratford would have to incur the costs of the new service. Privatization comes at a hefty price tag.

Looking forward, it is imperative the Stratford Ambulance Association is kept intact. A comprehensive review had begun of the Stratford Ambulance Association By-Laws in order to keep the entity in place. The By-Laws are governed by the Ambulance Association, they control who may become a member and who may not. They are essentially a private company with their own board of directors.

A Resolution was developed by Council that would allow members to be added including the second request of President Jayme Meyers, an opportunity for her and other members to retire. A new Board was developed that required input from multiple agencies along with Ambulance Association to ensure its continued mission of service to the citizens of Stratford. The new board would not have to be limited to active EMTs. As membership was identified as a point of concern, this would only add to the diminished return and lead back to the same issue. Similar to Boards in the private sector that are comprised of specialized individuals, this could ultimately help a more streamlined and efficient management operation while EMTs could also have an opportunity to contribute to the overall emergency function. Additionally, it would reduce the amount of time that individuals may not have to commit to the organization.

## **Manpower**

With funding secured, the second issue of manpower has to be addressed.

## **Recruitment**

Most EMTs have multiple jobs due to the lower wages and time availability. New recruits could be obtained through:

- Postings on local electronic signs, Fire Department, Schools, etc.
- E Blast
- Social Media like Facebook
- Signage in the center of town
- Direct postings at local training centers:
  - Camden County Regional Emergency Training
  - Waterford Twp EMS
  - Gloucester County EMS Training Facility

- Rowan College EMS EMT Training Facility
- Direct communication with local EMTs and EMS organizations

## **Training**

All training costs are incurred by the Ambulance Association.

New EMTs first have to have a valid CPR certification, and then attend school for approximately 3 months.

24 hours of CORE Classes are required by all EMTs every three years

24 hours of Elective Classes are required by all EMTs every three years. Some of these classes could be taken by Firefighters which would also add to the value of both responders. These classes could be scheduled at one of the municipal buildings depending on size.

## **Salaries**

- Currently the members of the Stratford Ambulance are compensated at a rate of \$14.50 per hour.
- The salary could be adjusted to \$17.00 per hour which is an increase of almost 20%.

As a basis of understanding:

- The NJ Average for EMT Salaries is \$19.80 per hour. This includes EMTs that are part of paid Fire Departments, from towns to larger townships throughout the State.
- The National Average is \$19.50 per hour.

## **Conclusion**

OEM is continuing to support the efforts for the future of the Ambulance Association until and through the retirement of the current administration and implementation of the new board and continued service to the citizens of Stratford. To be absolutely crystal clear, it is not, and has not, been the idea or intention, of the Stratford OEM, Stratford Mayor and Council, or any other group or association to eliminate, or take over, the Stratford Ambulance Association. The countless hours of work to get everyone to this place has been in direct response to a request made from the Stratford Ambulance Association and the health and wellbeing of the citizens of Stratford. The only goal is the mission of the Stratford Ambulance Association, Service to the residents of Stratford.