

Joint Public Statement from Town of Cornwall and Village of Cornwall-on-Hudson Boards

For Immediate Release

May 19, 2022

Subject: Proposed 3-Year Contract Between Cornwall and the New Windsor Volunteer Ambulance Corps (N WVAC) for Basic Life Support and Advanced Life Support Services

As most residents understand, individual municipalities are responsible for providing and maintaining an effective and sustainable ambulatory service to their communities. Of recent, it has become more difficult to provide this critical volunteer service due to soaring costs and the dwindling number of available volunteers. This issue has been a topic of debate within the New York State legislature recently, with legislation introduced to establish EMS (the provision of urgent pre-hospital treatment and transport for medical care) as an “essential service.” Long overdue, this effort could potentially reconfigure how ambulatory services are administered across New York State. Unless and until the County and/or State elect to make certain changes, municipalities must seek effective methods to sustain and improve services. Experts contend that the paradigm is evolving and that mergers, or consolidation, exist as an intermediate solution.

For over a year, New Windsor Volunteer Ambulance Corps (N WVAC) has contracted with the Town and Village to provide Advanced Life Support (ALS) services to Cornwall residents for a fee, while Cornwall Volunteer Ambulance Corps (COVAC) provides Basic Life Support (BLS) coverage for a fee, as well. ALS includes the highest level of emergency medicine – paramedic-level treatment – and N WVAC (or another EMS provider with ALS capabilities) has long answered calls within Cornwall for mutual aid, bereft of a contract. COVAC, staffed with Emergency Medical Technicians, or EMTs, has remained a fixture in our community since 1955.

A number of years ago, COVAC made the request to bill patients directly and a decision was subsequently reached to dissolve the “ambulance district” overseen by the Town. By billing insurance providers directly, this was to be a more efficient process that allowed for the Corps to remain solvent without monies allocated from Cornwall. The global pandemic and an attendant paucity of available volunteers has made staffing across the past several years a concern. This, coupled with significant debt accrual resulted in COVAC’s appeal for subsistence from the taxpayers – which the Town and Village jointly agreed to support.

Despite the provided financial support, there continue to exist a number of issues that have not been resolved, as relates to the professional administration of ambulatory services to our residents. Public safety is of paramount concern. Both the Town Supervisor and Village Mayor have met privately with COVAC leadership and members of COVAC’s elected board and operational membership appeared before a joint boards’ special meeting on January 11, 2022.

While COVAC maintains they have mitigated their insolvency issues and improved their first-call response rates, it is the consensus of both boards that NWVAC – widely regarded as the “gold standard” for local ambulatory care – will be contracted to cover both BLS and ALS responsibilities for Cornwall residents. This assumption of responsibilities can be considered a consolidation. Current COVAC members who wish to continue to serve Cornwall residents may interview with NWVAC, and be afforded opportunity to operate out of 1 Clinton Street location, be attired in Cornwall EMS uniforms, and respond to Cornwall service calls in a Cornwall-branded ambulance. This serves both professionalization and training standardization efforts.

On balance, we believe that this decision for establishment of a contemporary public/private partnership model -- created and supported by multiple municipalities, including Town of New Windsor, Town of Cornwall and Village of Cornwall-on-Hudson -- will ensure our residents receive the high-quality emergency medical care they deserve. NWVAC enables Cornwall leadership to remain confident in the model’s financial viability and sustainability, administrative transparency, leader oversight, and accountability while serving as an example for the region.

This was not an easy decision. Careful consideration was given to all impacted equities. Town and Village elected officials reflected deeply on the many decades of selfless service that COVAC and its volunteers have provided to our community; indeed, it is an honored local institution. But the primary responsibility of public officials is ensuring their constituents are afforded best available services for their hard-earned tax dollars. In our estimation, the proposed three-year contract with NWVAC ensures this. Know that we have explored innumerable options to guarantee confidence in the provision of EMS. And we have reviewed a number of similar municipal consolidated-services agreements. This is the best path forward for Cornwall.

On Thursday, May 26, 2022, at 7:00 p.m., inside the Edward C. Moulton, Jr. Village Board Room, located at Village Hall, 325 Hudson Street, Cornwall-on-Hudson, New York 12520, the Town and Village boards will convene a joint special meeting to address this matter publicly. Meeting will be publicly-noticed and contract provisions will be disclosed. The public will be afforded an opportunity to speak and boards will address some factors that led to this decision.

On behalf of the Town and Village Boards,

Joshua Thomas Wojehowski
Supervisor

James A. Gagliano
Mayor