

**VILLAGE OF QUESTA  
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
MONDAY, JUNE 27, 2016  
VILLAGE OF QUESTA FIRE DEPARTMENT**

**6:00PM**

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**I. CALL TO ORDER BY MAYOR MARK GALLEGOS**

Mayor Gallegos called the meeting to order at 6:10pm.

**II. ROLL CALL**

Mayor Gallegos asked Village Clerk Renee Martinez to take roll.

Present:

Councilor Lawrence Ortega  
Councilor John Anthony Ortega  
Councilor Brent Jaramillo

Not Present:

Councilor Julian Cisneros

Also Present:

Administrator Loretta Trujillo  
Village Clerk Renee Martinez  
Finance Director Karen Shannon  
Fire Chief Mark Ortega

**III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Mr. Jason P. Rael led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Motion: Councilor Lawrence Ortega  
Second: Councilor Brent Jaramillo

In Favor: All  
Opposed: None

To approve the agenda as presented. All voted yes. Motion carried.

**V. DISCUSSION -**

**A) QUESTA EMS SERVICES**

Mayor Mark Gallegos thanked everyone for being present and thanked the Fire Department/EMS for hosting the meeting. Mayor Gallegos stated that this issue came up for the reason that we are trying to provide excellent EMS

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services in Questa and the northern part of Taos County. Over the course of the past 6 months there has been some worry as to what has gone on in the department and how we are trying to run the department as far as EMS services go; in regards to collections, calls and response times. In 2015, there was a good increase in our collections. There has been a significant drop from January to now. If we don't get this money in, we have to start dipping into the General Fund which effects our budget. Fire Chief Mark Ortega stated that the call volume has dropped. Mayor Gallegos stated that this is one reason he would like to discuss his request to the Council about moving the EMS services up to the EMS building. His thought being that the day to day operations of the EMS department could be focused on more and also to see if there is an opportunity to re-structure the process for stability reasons. It was brought up at the last Council meeting in which the Council requested a Work Study with the EMS/Fire Department.

Mayor Gallegos asked the Council if they would like to s before Ms. Trujillo reviewed the proposed budget for the 2016-2017 fiscal year.

Councilor John Anthony Ortega expressed his concern to the Council about what Questa would do if the EMS personnel decided they did not want to continue working. Taos County is not willing to take over. He stated that it is the Governing Body's responsibility to support the EMS staff one hundred percent in any way we can. He stated that the staff is dedicated and they care about the people of this community and all of Northern NM. If we let them fail, we are going to be back where we were. He stated that this ambulance service was not started because we needed a hobby. It was started because there is a great need for ambulance service in Questa and northern Taos County. Are we going to go out and tell our constituents they have to wait an hour for an ambulance to come from Taos or are we going to back up our EMS/fire department? He stated that we are here for a work study session and he doesn't believe that negative comments are justified tonight, we are here to move forward and see what we can do positively to help this service continue on into the future.

Ms. Trujillo went over the EMS budget from 2015. Ms. Trujillo also reviewed the current proposed budget. Ms. Trujillo stated that she and Mayor Gallegos met with County Manager Leandro Cordova regarding the amount of funding that Taos County would give the Village this year. A request was made for \$100,000.00 but she has not heard back from the County so she does not know if they will receive that amount so \$70,000.00 was budgeted. Also, 23% of the property tax collected for the year is put in to the EMS to help supplement payroll services. A discussion was held regarding training funds. Ms. Georgiana Rael asked if any percentage of GRT's go to Public Safety. Ms. Trujillo stated no, we do not have a tax for Public Safety. Mr. Richard Kennedy stated they had been talking about this tax two years ago.

Mayor Gallegos stated that he proposed that we close two other locations to fund the EMS. He stated that we may have to make some tough decisions such as closing the library and the MVD office. If not, we stay with the budget we currently have. The intent is to come to some kind of scheduling and funding solutions. Councilor Lawrence Ortega asked if there are grant out there that we are not pursuing. Councilor Brent Jaramillo stated we may have to look at one or two lay-offs on the General Fund side. Mr. Richard Kennedy stated that the Fire grants they can pursue but when it comes to the EMS grants they need the backing of the Village. Mr. Josh Wright stated that it has to be a collection of entities that apply. The County EMS just received a Systems Improvement Grant. If the Village of Questa, along with its agreement with Taos County and the surrounding departments declared themselves as a 'system' they would be eligible for this grant. Fire Chief Mark Ortega stated that they are now accepting single entity applications.

Ms. Raynelle Sanchez-Cordova stated that this meeting was in regards to moving the EMS Department up to the Public Safety Department. Mayor Gallegos stated yes and in addition that there is not enough funds to adequately staff the EMS department.

Mayor Gallegos stated that he spoke with Mr. Rudy Padilla who informed him that the ISO rating has no effect on where the EMS is housed. Mayor Gallegos also stated that he was told at the last council meeting that it was important that we had the EMS and Fire together. Fire Chief Mark Ortega stated that he also spoke with Mr. Padilla and stated that EMS doesn't help us regarding the ISO rating but it doesn't help when we have our paid staff separated.



Councilor John Anthony Ortega stated that if we separate the two we are going to have to start paying utilities for both places. Mayor Gallegos stated that we already are paying for the utilities at both locations. Ms. Raynelle Sanchez-Cordova stated that in her experience the EMS runs on call volume. If we do not have the call volume we do not have the revenue. What if we delegated out responsibilities to staff such as someone be responsible for grants and someone for billing, reviewing reports etc. This way, someone is responsible for making sure these things are getting done.

Mayor Gallegos thanked the volunteers who have stepped up and committed to a schedule. He stated that he has had concerns from the public, dispatch and Red River. He stated he discussed Memorial weekend with Mark Ortega and stated that if he does not have the staffing and drivers he needs to let these other entities know that we cannot provide the services. This is where the pressure came from. We need to have an aggressive collections and make sure our reports are getting done correctly. It was suggested by Mr. Josh Wright that we bring billing in-house.

Former Fire Chief Max Ortega stated that he does not believe moving the EMS up to the Public Safety building is going to work and does not agree with the idea. He stated that maybe one of the part-time people can take on the billing. He stated that Holy Cross Hospital need to do something. They are running these EMT's into the ground with transfers; taking an ambulance out of the County. This is totally unfair and someone needs to address these issues. Mr. Ortega stated that yes, some calls have been dropped; but not during working hours. He sees this department doing all they can to help, but we do need to come up with a solution. We talk about it and talk about it. We need to step up.

Ms. Esther Garcia stated the people in this community need to step up to the plate and the Governing Body needs to tell them. They need to start paying for this service. Ms. Trujillo stated that we should not put it solely on the Village, we all need to do something. Mayor Gallegos agreed. He stated that if we don't light a fire under people's feet we can't get them involved. Ms. Vilma Bailon stated that Mr. Jim Vaughn had an idea in getting each family member to pay \$100.00. Also, regarding Holy Cross, (Ms. Bailon stated she is employed by them) they had 20 transfers the weekend of the 18, 19 & 20 which takes ambulances and EMT's away. She stated it is a burden, but the hospital has its own issues. She stated that the commission just passed something to collect money for the hospital but they have patients there for three days and then get transferred out. Mayor Gallegos stated that as a County Commissioner this was something the commission got blindsided by. Yes, they have aggressively pursued the decline of transfers. She stated that they really need to sit in and pay attention because she takes care of part of the transfers and she sees it. The hospital can't even take care of their patients, period.

Councilor John Anthony Ortega asked to see what the numbers were on the pay per runs. Ms. Trujillo stated that she believes it is illegal but if anyone knows any different please let her know. Ms. Shannon stated that it is an IRS issue. Mr. Josh Wright stated that Santa Fe County does this so they somehow work it. Mr. Josh Wright asked why we are only asking for \$100,000.00 from the County when they were supposedly going to run a 24/7 ambulance service here. The base cost to run a 24/7 ambulance is \$500,000.00 a year. They are giving us \$70,000.00 to run the ambulance service currently. That is a huge bargain that they are getting.

Mr. Michael Cordova stated that Holy Cross gives us supplies and meds for free. We need to move forward and need to keep the wheels spinning. We need an EMS Director, we have never had one. Pay across the board needs to be higher. He and Raynelle spoke with the billing company and are waiting to hear back from them. He stated that Raynelle is at home for a while and will be able to communicate with them. Someone also needs to take charge of the EMS service; it needs to be run more efficiently and professionally. He stated it does not matter to him where we have it located. We need to focus on how we can make this service better. We are going to have to take a leap of faith. Countless schedules have been done, now it is time to look at all of them and take action. We have our coverage for the weekends; it is not going to be easy but we need to take the chance. Questa needs Public Safety, people will not relocate here, visit here or open up a business without these services. We all need to spin our wheels and work together. Regarding pay per runs, we can put in for a recruitment and retention grant. There are other things that are priority. This is not a money making business. He stated that we shouldn't be sending people to conferences when there is free training available here; to keep the costs down. Mr. John LaCome asked how we could raise money for



the EMS. Mr. Cordova stated that he and the Fire Chief have discussed maybe sending out letters to the northern part of the county requesting donations since we do service them also. Councilor Lawrence Ortega stated that we need to find a way to get the message out. Mr. Cordova stated that even if we can compensate the people working after 4pm a dollar or two per hour, something to make it feasible. He asked the Governing Body to take the leap of faith with them.

Mayor Gallegos stated that budget we have is \$177,000.00 with one full time employee and four part time employees. If you feel we need more funds then it is up to the Governing Body to figure out where these funds are going to come from. Ms. Raynelle Sanchez stated what if we say we are not comfortable with it for this year and get things together and work really hard to meet the goal. She asked for the Governing Body to give them a year. No one can predict the call volume or what will happen in the future. Councilor John Anthony Ortega stated that that is a good idea but we are still going to have problems with coverage on Friday and Saturday nights. Ms. Vilma Bailon stated that one of the main reasons we don't have the staff is because of the low pay we offer.

Ms. Louise Gallegos stated that she is willing to volunteer to help with the billing or anything the EMS may need to help it stay afloat. She is very impressed with the loyalty and the vision of the department.

Mayor Gallegos stated that he agrees that the whole community is going to have to start contributing to this service. We as a Village along with the Fire and EMS department need to advocate for this. Mr. Max Ortega asked for a commitment to send at least one person to training for the billing. Mr. Josh Wright stated that maybe the County could help us train a couple of people. Ms. Trujillo stated that someone, as a representative from this department needs to come to her and let her know what tools they need to do their jobs. She would like the department to take the lead and we will support the efforts. Mr. Josh Wright agrees that an EMS Director is needed to oversee the department and that will make a huge difference sooner than later.

Mr. Max Ortega stated that he would like to go on record saying that he does not like the budget but it is the budget we have and he, along with the other members will do what they can to keep this department operating.

Councilor Brent Jaramillo asked Chief Ortega if the department has the proper equipment and software they need to bring the billing in house. He stated that they are working on getting a laptop. Mr. Josh Wright stated that we need to find out what we are going to need for the billing. Chief Mark Ortega stated that it would be great if we could cover 24/7. This is the goal. It can be done if we hire 6 people instead of the 4 to cover the same amount of hours. Mayor Gallegos asked if we have potential candidates to fill these positions. Mr. Cordova stated that we will for the reason that we can advertise on the EMS Bureau website on Region 1. There are three or four people that are willing to come from Taos County and work if we offer the 16 hours weekend schedule that Chief Ortega proposed. The only issue is the \$12.00/hour pay. Mayor Gallegos stated that he is still going to make the recommendation to the Council at tomorrow's meeting to close some facilities. He stated that we have gone through a lot of people coming in to work and then they leave. We have become a stepping stone for people to come and work, get certified, and move on to work elsewhere for more money. We need to retain them. Mr. Augustine Rael stated that he thinks we should shut down some of the facilities temporarily, maybe for a year, if it will help us get where we need to be. Mr. Juan Carlos Gonzales stated that if we are going to schedule people for the straight 16 hours it would be more beneficial to have the EMS offices relocated to the public safety building because there are living quarters available. Mr. Cordova stated that it is up to the Council to make the decision of where the EMS will be located, that is not the issue. The issue is getting the service covered.

Ms. Shannon stated that if we bill 800 people \$5.00 a month for this service it would generate \$48,000.00 per year. Other suggestions were \$10.00/month and \$100.00/year. Mayor Gallegos stated this will be an added charge to our utility bill which we have a hard time collected as it is. Mayor stated that he will inquire at the County Commission meeting tomorrow regarding the people we service outside of Questa. Ms. Cordova asked if we can start charging for burn permits. Ms. Trujillo stated that she is not sure why we don't charge, we need to look into it.

The following were some of the ideas that were proposed to bring in revenue:

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- 208 • Give Community a choice between shutting down services or pay (options)
- 209 • Go Door to Door for donations
- 210 • 'Members helping members' program
- 211 • Request donations from people outside of Village limits
- 212 • In-House Billing
- 213 • Fire Excise Tax
- 214 • Apply for a Safer Grant
- 215 • Apply for Systems Improvement Grants
- 216 • Bill citizens a fee for Ambulance Service
- 217 • Pay per Runs
- 218 • Community Engagement to initiate monthly fee
- 219 • Take advantage of free trainings that available
- 220 • Send out Mailers to the community to get the word out about a forum
- 221 • Look into a 'Go Fund Me' account

222

223 Mr. Cordova thanked everyone for being present at the meeting. He thanked the volunteers for coming up with an  
 224 EVO schedule and for everything they do. He thanked the Governing Body and the staff for all they do. We have  
 225 great ideas and now it is time to get things done. It is going to take time, it is not going to happen overnight. He  
 226 believes meeting with the community will work, but we need to stay on track and be prepared for the questions the  
 227 public may have.

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229 Mayor Gallegos thanked everyone for attending and stated that we will look at the calendar and get a couple dates  
 230 that would be convenient for everyone to have the community meeting. We then need to start campaigning and  
 231 getting the buy in from the citizens. Mr. Max Ortega asked that the Council give them some time to come up with  
 232 ideas and information. Mayor Gallegos suggested that we give ourselves a couple of months to get this meeting  
 233 together. Ms. Vilma Bailon suggested that we look at this again in six months and see our improvement and then  
 234 decide if we have to shut down the other services. Mayor stated that he would like to get the EMS the staff that they  
 235 need instead of having them struggle to make it better with the staff they currently have, because that's all we have  
 236 ever done.

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## 238 VI. ADJOURNMENT

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240 Motion: Councilor Lawrence Ortega

241 Second: Councilor Brent Jaramillo

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243 In Favor: All

244 Opposed: None

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246 There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 8:10pm.

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249 ATTEST:

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Renee Martinez, CMC  
 Village Clerk



APPROVED:

Mark Gallegos  
 Mayor