

Highland Ambulance Annual Budget Meeting
Wednesday, January 9, 2019 at 7 p.m.
Highland Ambulance Building, Goshen, MA

Representatives from the Towns of Ashfield, Chesterfield, Cummington, Goshen, Plainfield, and Williamsburg. Denise Banister (Select Board), Paul Wetzel (Finance Committee), and Charlene Nardi (Town Administrator) represented the Town of Williamsburg.

Cassandra Morrey, Highland Ambulance Treasurer, presented the FY2020 Budget breakdown. The total budget is \$641,101 with expected income of \$320,800. The town assessments are \$320,301 for the operating budget and \$66,177.91 for capital expenses. Income is from fees, and payments from Medicare. Collections are at 94%.

Williamsburg's breakdown based on a population of 2,539 (32.11% of budget) is:

Operating \$101,503.39

Ambulance \$6,338.17

Building Debt Service \$14,634.18

This is a reduction overall of \$2,376.27 from FY19.

The ambulance service covers 169 square miles. In the last calendar year (2018) there were 751 calls of which Highland Ambulance responded to 648 calls. The other 72 calls were covered by other ambulance services. The increase in calls for Highland Ambulance is due to Swift River (drug rehabilitation) in Plainfield. Highland will be working with Swift River to address the increase and possibly add another fee structure. Highland can only bill for actual transports, so they receive no income if they are called and they don't transport someone to the hospital. Therefore, when Highland responds to calls in communities outside of its normal service area (our six towns) and Highland doesn't transport to the hospital, Highland bills an intercept fee to the ambulance service they are covering for.

They locked in a rate for the building debt until 2028 for the purposes of keeping some stability to the assessments.

Highland Ambulance has two ambulances; however, they aren't both staffed 24 hours a day. Highland will be looking at staffing it full time in the next several years. The ambulances have to be replaced by regulation every 10 years or 200,000 miles. They will be replacing the oldest ambulance in the summer of 2019. The cost is \$200,000 to \$250,000. The funds for this purchase are coming from a \$150,000 donation from Kit Smith and other donations. The other vehicle is scheduled to be replaced in 2021. Highland has been assessing the communities a vehicle debt amount in an effort to reduce any borrowing for the 2021 purchase. Highland will also go out to fund raise. The Highland Board is also looking at the option of just replacing the chassis and saving the box (of the ambulance) to reduce costs of purchase.

Increases in the operating budget are due to keeping up with regulations and unfunded mandates. Mike Rock will share the details and specifics on the unfunded mandates so we can bring them to our State Senators and Representatives. Also discussed the urban and rural designations again which affect the amount reimbursed by Medicare. Williamsburg and Plainfield (and / or Ashfield) are both designated as urban. It was noted that the designation may come from the federal government (United States Dept. of Agriculture) and that the ambulance service is overseen by the Mass Department of Transportation.