



Colchester Fire & EMS

52 Old Hartford Road Colchester, CT 06415

Phone (860) 537-2512 Fax (860) 531-9393

firedepartment@ColchesterCT.gov

January 17, 2024

To: Board of Selectmen

From: Steve Hoffmann, Fire Chief

Re: Fire Apparatus - Ambulance

I submit the following to provide background and clarity on the process that transpired with the anticipation of placing a third ambulance in to service in the Town of Colchester. Colchester Fire & EMS has been in discussion for a third ambulance since around April 2023. The conversations began internally to articulate and justify the need for a third ambulance as well as to develop a plan for implementation. Once that internal process was completed, a meeting was scheduled on 8/30/23 with the First Selectman, Finance Director, Fleet Maintenance Supervisor, Deputy Chief and myself to discuss and review the plan that was formulated in order to move it forward. The lead time for a new ambulance was identified by the vendor as two years. This would place the new ambulance in service around the same time that ambulance 528 would need to be replaced. However, in our plan we would look to refurbish ambulance 528, which consists of changing out the cab/chassis and updating the existing "box" on the ambulance. This overall project would be cheaper than purchasing a new ambulance which is allowable up to two times per the Office of Emergency Medical Services (OEMS). When ambulance 528 returned, ambulance 628 would be due and we would complete the same process. At the completion of the process, we would have three ambulances in service, which with the continual rise in EMS responses would be needed. This purchase would ultimately enhance our service to the community and provide for more timely responses with ambulances from our department responding for a majority of emergency requests. During this meeting we also discussed the capital plan to support future replacements for the new ambulance. The decision was also made that the town would purchase the cab/chassis and the selected vendor would complete the work on the "box" of the ambulance to include mounting. The First Selectman was in support of the plan moving forward and gave approval to obtain the costs on the cab/chassis as well as the contract costs for the work.

On 9/26/23, a second meeting was conducted to discuss the process for the purchase to include the use of HGACBuy, which is a cooperative purchasing program Colchester is a part of. This provides for meeting the RFP requirement for purchasing of goods and/or services. Additionally, the review of the initial specs did not include the necessary equipment required on an ambulance to include the power load, stair chair and stretcher. This meeting provided additional details on the process and path forward as set by the First Selectman. This is also where the discussion elaborated on the need for a purchase order for the cab/chassis at a cost of \$60,785.02 for the new rig. Fleet would order and coordinate the cab/chassis to be delivered directly to the vendor. This was also expected to be delayed due to the demand for cabs/chassis for ambulance builds across the country.

On 10/16/23, a purchase order was secured for the cab/chassis by Fleet Maintenance from the Finance Department for the new ambulance and the order was placed. An update to the contract with the vendor was received, but it lacked the updated information with relation to the verbiage

concerning the use of the HGACBuy competitive purchasing program. The vendor was contacted, and an updated document was going to be received that included that information which would be provided to the First Selectman. During this meeting the Finance Director also indicated that the funding for the new ambulance would come from the ambulance fees account, which was able to support the purchase.

On 10/27/23, the updated contract was received at a cost of \$386,750 from the vendor with a deadline of 10/30/23, which after that date there would be an increase to the cost. The contract was reviewed with the First Selectman, and he authorized the movement forward. At that point, the vendor was contacted, and the request was made to move forward with the build. The vendor acknowledged and we maintained a holding pattern until the time came down the road for review of the next phase in the build process. The vendor had mentioned that there would be no costs until delivery was completed and up until this point, the process for review of a schematic had not been undertaken.

On 1/12/24, the Fleet Maintenance Supervisor advised me that the cab/chassis had arrived at the vendor for the new ambulance. At that time, I reached out to the Finance Department to follow up on the PO for the remainder of the project, since the authorization was approved by the prior First Selectman. During the search for those documents, it was determined that no money had been allocated or allotted for the requests. On 1/17/24, a meeting was conducted with the current First Selectman and Maggie Cosgrove for review of what had transpired with this project. It was confirmed that a purchase order was issued, but from a 2009 bond account that was no longer valid. Additionally, there was no general funding allocated for the remainder of the project. It appears this process was never vetted or approved through the Board of Selectmen or Board of Finance but was solely authorized by the prior First Selectman and Finance Director. Upon that determination, it was agreed that the current authorization be canceled immediately due to the lack of appropriate process and funding for the project.

I recognize that the process utilized was not the normal process. However, for the last two years the policies and normal process previously in place have not been strictly followed and department heads have been navigating the arena as it dynamically changed. This does not justify the course of action, but those involved in the project for a third ambulance were following the pathway provided by the previous administration. The prior First Selectman authorized the project to move forward and we followed the path based on that approval. Now having insight to all the pieces of the project I share the concerns I can imagine you may have. I look forward to reestablishing a structured process and apologize for the part I played in this conundrum. I should have used ulterior means at my disposal to ensure that the proper process was followed.

At this time, we have received written notification from the vendor and the authorized work on the ambulance has been canceled with no financial impact. Additionally, the vendor has indicated interest in securing the cab/chassis for future builds on their end since the demand for these resources is high. This would ultimately negate any commitment from the town's perspective. It will be our intent to come back at a later date, through the approved and normal process, to justify the need and support for a third ambulance for Colchester Fire & EMS. Thank you for your time.

CC: Bernie Dennler, First Selectman
Brad Bernier, Deputy Fire Chief
Sean Shoemaker, Fire Marshal/Assistant Fire Chief
Ruby York, Assistant to the Fire Chief