

**CITY OF NORTHFIELD SPECIAL MEETING OF COUNCIL
TO DISCUSS THE MAYOR'S VETO OF ORDINANCE 10-2009
AND THE AWARD OF CONTRACT
FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES
JUNE 10, 2009**

At 7:00pm this meeting was called to order by Mary Canesi, Acting Municipal Clerk. It was properly advertised according to Public Law 1975, Chapter 231. This meeting was held at the Northfield Community School, 2000 New Road, Northfield, New Jersey.

FLAG SALUTE

The flag salute was led by Mayor Mazzeo and was followed by a moment of silence in honor of all volunteers in our community; we thank them for their time and dedication and may they continue to serve.

Canesi announced that Councilman O'Grady would be attending this evening's meeting via speaker telephone.

ROLL CALL

Present: Carew, Martinez, O'Grady (*via telephone*), Smith, Turon, Vain, Kern

AGENDA REVIEW

President Kern welcomed the audience and reviewed the agenda. She announced that the public session would come before the vote on tonight's resolutions. Kern opened the public session.

PUBLIC SESSION

Robert Webb, 218 W Revere Avenue, referred to the Constitution of the United States and his own right to free speech. He feels NRS should stay in Northfield, and says Council is not listening to the people. Atlanticare will cost more money in the long run.

Paul Utts, 144 East Rosedale Avenue, said he feels this process has been tainted. He referred Councilman Carew in his capacity as business agent for the IBEW and said that Carew's union benefits from work awarded by Atlanticare. He feels Carew's connections and the \$100,000 contribution are a conflict. Councilman Turon should not have voted as he has a conflict in that he was a member of the

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squad. He said he has no reason to question Councilman Smith's integrity but he feels the reported response times are not valid because no one knows how they were arrived at. He recognizes Council President Kern's participation in community events. Utts says the decision to award an EMS contract should be deferred for one year to allow proper data collection, adding that the City should not give jobs away during a recession.

John Fredericks, 18 Forest Drive, said the decision to go to a paid squad was the downfall of the squad and is the reason we are all here. He recounted his own personal history with the squad. He feels Carew's affiliation is not a conflict. He said the allegations made by NRS of hostile work environment with the fire department are false, and that Mayor Mazzeo is aware of issues between the fire department and NRS.

Seth Brilliant, 2329 Merritt Drive, said Council's job is to do what the voters wanted. While this is not entirely true, as there should be no rubber stamp robot, they should do what is in best interest of the City. He does not envy their job. The 1st objective of the RFP process was to save money. When all bids came in at zero, it seemed like money was no longer important. Regarding response times, he assumes research is accurate, but you should not assume that Atlanticare can replicate Linwood's response times in Northfield. He does not think dynamic deployment system is practical as 95% of the time the ambulances will be on a call or will be parked, and said that in 3 years Atlanticare will raise the contract rate. All this proposal does is transfer the costs to the people who use the service, who just happen to be the people who can least afford it.

Robert Leeds, 27 Steelman Avenue, said he is 50-year Northfield resident and long time member of the volunteer fire department in Northfield. He recounted a recent personal experience where there was a lengthy delay while an NRS ambulance driver waited for another paid member of the squad to arrive so they could go to the scene of an accident. He was accused of spying when he reported the incident. He referred to the Press report that NRS left City hall due to a hostile work environment; he said the environment is not hostile. Paid NRS squad members are not always at City hall; they have to be picked up or others have to wait for them to arrive to deploy. He said he wants the best for the City; politics should not matter.

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Ed Hackett, 751 Pasadena Drive, read a letter from Northfield Fire Department Chief Hank Martinelli, who was unable to be in attendance this evening. The letter said that Martinelli has seen the safety of Northfield residents be put in jeopardy for the sake of monetary gain. Martinelli urges Council to vote yes for Atlanticare. On his own behalf, Hackett said it has been a pleasure to serve the City and urges Council to vote for Atlanticare.

Carolyn Peterson, 2312 Shepherd Drive, commended Mayor Mazzeo for his courage. She referred to a quote from Councilman Brian Smith in a past issue of the AC Press where Smith asserted that the RFP process in no way reflected on the service provided by the squad. She cited a recent quote where he contradicted himself by saying there were issues with the service issued by the squad. She said the NRS RFP assures that staffing needs will be met, and that Smith cannot predict the future financial viability of the NRS. Council did not do their homework and if they did the questions of residents would have been answered. She cited a quote from Councilman Vain where he said even if the bids don't save money Council has done their job. She encouraged Council to vote 'no' and show the same courage that Mazzeo, O'Grady, and Martinez have. To the Perri's, Adamases and all current and former squad members, she thanked them and said she appreciates them.

Joan Morey, 109 Fifield Avenue, is a nurse and has worked for Atlanticare. What happens to the cost of the proposals in 3 years, referring to aging equipment that will need to replacement. She said patient billing for those on Medicare is the same regardless of who the service provider is. The lay-public sees the dedication and compassion that the NRS displays; what the public does not see is that the system is more broken than you think. What is most important is who gets there first. Will the City be opened up to a lawsuit when an ambulance does not arrive promptly? She referred to the 'golden hour' for trauma patients, stressing that time is critical. She feels delaying the decision only raises more dangers due to response time issues. Regarding conflicts of interest – Carew's company made a decision, not Carew personally. She believes Turon's time on the NRS was a benefit because he knows what to look for. She urged the public to keep an open mind

David Seitman, 3 Cara Court, stated that he has no personal or professional associations with anyone involved. He does not feel his questions were answered

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at the last meeting so he did his own research. He found there are some issues with the NRS, with response times, with quality assurance, with following protocols such as having 2 EMT's in the rig when it departs. He also learned that there are personality conflicts. When performance is deficient, it should be brought to someone's attention and the party should be given a chance to remedy the problems or they will be fired. He said Council was not aware of the deficiencies. He said that the fact that only 1 bidder met all of the requirements of the RFP is an indicator that the RFP has failed and the requirements need to be revamped. He does not doubt that Council in their hearts want to do the best thing for the City, but two major mistakes have been made: one is that the NRS was not told to fix up their act and two was the flawed RFP. He would postpone the decision and sit down with the NRS and give them 3 months to get their act together.

Colleen Rodman, 23 Fifield Avenue, asked Councilman Carew to confirm that he is the business agent for local 351; he confirms that he is. She says there are members of this union working at Atlanticare and that he is their business agent. She attempts to ask additional questions but is told this is not a Q&A session.

Mike Kennedy, 24 West Johnson Avenue, Somers Point, said that his town did this a few years ago and it worked out well for Somers Point. As a result, \$120,000 went to NRS in the form of a donation. He would like to see that money returned to Somers Point.

Larry Carlson, 922 1st Street, said he has the utmost respect for Council. He was a member of Linwood's volunteer fire department, rescue squad, and was a Linwood police officer. He has the utmost respect for the donation of time, effort and money that the Perri's and their families have given to the residents of Northfield over the years. He said he is not advocating either way, he just wanted to publicly thank the Perri's.

Robin Dennis, 708 Debora Street, referred to the proactive stance that NRS adopts when it comes to the support of community events. She was told that at last meeting that Atlanticare would do the same if given a list; Kern announced that she has a list of what Atlanticare has done similarly in other communities. Dennis said she has never heard a complaint about the NRS, or any NRS related lawsuits. People without a degree in statistics should not be interpreting response times.

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Says NRS will go on, they will be fine, already have another location for themselves. She said tonight's vote is not for or against NRS; it's for or against the citizens of Northfield, for or against their wishes.

Ray Seiler, 506 West Vernon Avenue, former officer with the Northfield police department, said NRS is part of the town, and there is not enough reason to make this change at this time. He never got a complaint about the NRS in his tenure on the force and commends them highly for their time and service.

Irene Martello, 524 Burton Avenue, said on May 29th her granddaughter called NRS; the police and fire departments came ASAP but NRS was delayed. She was lying on the floor not knowing if she would survive. She has respect for the NRS; her son was a member of NRS, but her personal response time was very poor. She just wants to be safe and know that she can rely on whomever Council chooses.

Richard Hurley, 6 Catherine Place, urges citizens to make their opinions known the next time they go to vote.

Linda Foy, 2425 Shepherd Circle, said Vince Mazzeo is a great Mayor and is trying to do what people want; they don't want Atlanticare and don't have the money for Atlanticare. What happens when someone doesn't call for rescue service because they can't afford it? The NRS is there for rich and poor, and she speaks from personal experience. She said to stop trying to find fault with the NRS, they are always there for us. Urges Council to vote wisely because this is an election year, and citizens don't forget.

Eileen Toland, 4304 Dolphin Avenue, applauds Mayor Mazzeo for vetoing the ordinance last week. She said she does not know him personally and just met him at last week's meeting. She recounted a personal experience where the NRS was there for her. She feels the reputedly poor response times are not to be believed because such instances would have been reported in the press. She feels Councilman Carew should recuse himself and that Council President Kern should have removed him from the committee when the donation (to Atlanticare) came to light. She referred to a Linwood Councilman recusing himself for trivial reasons. She said Atlanticare will garner hefty profits over the next 3 years and likened the

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zero bid to low or no interest credit card offers. She wants the vote for EMS service put on the ballot for voters to decide.

809 Dan Rodman, 23 Fifield Avenue, cited the cost differences between Atlanticare and NRS and says it will cost the citizens of Northfield about \$800,000. The residents lose as they will be charged a lot more money for the service and that EMS service does not cost the taxpayers any money, unlike the police or fire departments. He feels energy should be focused on a department that costs the taxpayers more money. He said researched Robert's Rules and the reasons for voting and not voting and said any personal connection to an issue precludes voting. He urged Carew and Turon to recuse themselves.

John Phillips, 631 Herzel Avenue, told Councilman Carew that even if there is no conflict he should recuse himself to avoid the appearance of a conflict.

TJ Wolfe, 2519 Helen Drive, said the IBEW members vote as a group on charity efforts and Carew is one of 500 other members. He reminded those present of the free lights installed by the IBEW. He asks that the City and residents keep the politics out of the IBEW charity efforts.

Ray Adams, 238 Mt Vernon Avenue, wanted to clarify issues of response times. He said in many cases the police department is on scene for quite some time before they decide they want EMS. Delays are falsely increased by the length of time it takes to determine that EMS is needed on the scene. He said Carew and Smith never asked questions about the response times; if they had he could have explained. He apologized to Mrs. Martello, but says the NRS was on scene in 3 minutes and 5 seconds. At the last meeting someone said the NRS took 11 minutes to get to their granddaughter, but on that call the NRS was there in 3 minutes and 53 seconds. He stands by his members and asserts that there is no public safety issue.

819 Ida Margolis, 106 Cara Court, said police fire and rescue are all here to help people, and that it's a very tense environment here. At the recent tax appeal hearings people were screaming at each other. The last time she heard about saving money it was about the library and that didn't save any money. She wants everyone to get along.

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820 Mark Doherty, 405 Chestnut Avenue, asked when was the last time the venue had to be changed for a Council meeting; that in and of itself should tell Council something.

821 Frank Perri, 7 Haddon Avenue, President of NRS, said he is a volunteer, not a paid employee. He thanked Mayor Mazzeo for the extra time to regroup. In his 50 years in Northfield he acknowledged that this is the hardest decision that the governing body has ever had to make. Many options were explored to make this work. He feels the RFP was discriminatory. He acknowledged tension between the NRS and the fire department and said that no one person is to blame. They tried to work it out but in the end had to move their base. There are rumors of them going bankrupt, but they are not, they have substantial reserves. He feels the report of response times was a disservice to the squad, no one ever asked for an explanation. Taxes were raised this year and Atlanticare is no better than NRS. NRS volunteers have saved the City millions of dollars over the years. He asked for Council's support as they try to improve. If this decision is made it will change something that has been in this town for over 100 years. Even if not chosen, they'd like to operate, and provide service to the residents, provide mutual aid, but no provisions were provided. He asked if a rotation agreement is possible, and says he does have issues and ethical concerns with regard to some of the members not recusing themselves. Says Atlanticare is less service for more money.

Randy Dennis, 1708 Debora Street, said he got a call today at 12:44pm to go to Linwood. He signed on responding at 12:46pm, but was recalled by Atlanticare at 12:48pm. He later found out it took Atlanticare 13 minutes to get there and NRS was recalled when they were less than a minute out, before anyone had even arrived.

Seeing no one else from the public wishing to speak, Council President Kern closed the public session and announced that she will give Council a chance to speak. She thanked the public for coming out, and thanked the Northfield Community School and their custodial staff for their assistance.

Councilman Martinez thanked NRS for their years of service. He said there are a lot of personal issues that have come up tonight; he was EMS chair for 3 years and has had his own conflicts, but will be putting them aside tonight when he

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makes his vote. It takes a very special person to do the type of job done by our police fire and rescue. He's sorry for the personal issues that have happened internally; at one time there was a meeting between the Mayor and the Chiefs of fire and rescue and the Council President, and it seemed like that meeting went well but here we are again. He recounted his own personal experience with the squad and thanked them, wishing them all well.

Councilman Turon said he was not a member of the review committee and until now has said very little about the RFP process. A resident of Northfield for 42 years, and long-time member of the Northfield Volunteer Rescue Squad, he said the original reason to go out to bid was to look at cost savings. In recent years, NRS received City funds in the neighborhood of \$17,000 per year for operating expenses and line officer stipends. The squad raised an additional \$30,000-plus from fund raising efforts. Approximately every 5 years, the City has funded the purchase of a new ambulance at a cost of around \$150,000. In 2007 the squad asked for \$50,000.00, and in 2008, \$70,000. Until this year, the City paid for the fuel, workman's comp and liability insurances, vehicle maintenance, mailing labels and postage for fund drives, funding for hepatitis B vaccinations, radio equipment and numerous one time expensive equipment purchases. In an attempt to get the city to forgo the bid process NRS Inc. changed their budget request this year to \$0 plus an offer to pay fuel costs. By design the RFP process has saved the city nearly \$80,000. The EMS vehicles in use by NRS are City-owned with several years of loan payments remaining. If Atlanticare is chosen, these vehicles can be sold, reducing our annual debt payment, with the proceeds of the sale being returned to the City. Former democratic Council representatives Notaro and Zlotnick both supported going out for bid last year during their terms despite not knowing the legal requirement to do so or by bringing partisan politics into it. Independent of each other, Linwood's and Northfield's shared service committees rated Atlantic Care 1st, Shore Memorial 2nd Hammonton 3rd, and NRS Inc. 4th of the four bids received. Atlantic Care offered fair market value to lease or purchase the rescue vehicles; NRS offered \$1.00. Atlantic Care EMS will not be asking the city to supply them with a new ambulance during the course of this contract. Based on past practice and a ten year life expectancy of an ambulance the city could face the possibility of purchasing two ambulances for NRS as they are not in a financial position to do so on their own. He has received more emails and phone calls in favor of switching to Atlantic Care for EMS than staying with NRS. At the last two meetings, the number of concerned residents paled in

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comparison to the number of NRS employees, family members, and friends who spoke in their favor. His life experiences, review of the proposals and the recommendations of the committee are why he will support an award to Atlanticare.

Councilman Vain thanked everyone who has come to the last few Council meetings, and thanked NRS for their years of service. He has listened as people shared their views in support of NRS and in support of Atlanticare. This process began in early 2008 when Julie Zlotnick, former democratic Councilwoman and Chair of the Rescue Squad Committee, approached Vain with concerns about response times and other issues with NRS. She suggested the City research other EMS providers for cost and service comparisons, and in February, Northfield and Linwood joined forces to solicit bids for an EMS provider to service both towns. Four bids resulted from the joint RFP, each coming in at \$0. The question that continues to arise is where are the savings? In the past 3 years the City spent over \$300,000 for NRS to operate. Going from \$300,000 to \$0 is a direct savings to the taxpayers. The City-owned EMS vehicles can be sold, reducing our annual debt. Others asked why choose Atlanticare if NRS also submitted a \$0 bid? The City could not just award the contract without reviewing what other companies had to offer. NRS is a business, just like any other EMS provider. They are a private contractor that pays employees and bills patients. According to the 2008 NRS Annual Audit, they paid over \$143,000 in salaries and wages to 16 employees. Only 3 NRS employees live in Northfield according to the NRS proposal. Once bids are accepted, it is incumbent upon the committee to make an unbiased decision. Atlanticare was the independent and unanimous selection of both committees based on the merits of its proposal. No special consideration was given to any of the bidders. Vain said during his 1st two years on Council he worked closely with Dave Notaro, a democrat, and not once did politics play a role in their decisions. Vain asked everyone to remember that this is not and should not be considered a democrat or republican issue. All Council members should have looked at the issue without prejudice and decided which organization would provide the highest quality of care for the residents of Northfield. He is disturbed that some people made this into an 'us' against 'them' fight. It is the job of every Northfield Council person to work together for all the citizens not a select few. Vain said after careful review of the facts it is clear that Atlanticare has presented the best proposal, has the best organization, and will provide the best EMS service to the people of Northfield.

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Councilman Carew referred to Frank Perri's comment that this is the most difficult decision Council has ever had to make. Carew said his wife is a 3rd generation Northfield resident and he feels this is the greatest small town in the world. He cited his own community involvement, including Allsports, the volunteer fire department, and 9 years as a member of Council. Things change over time and things are not as they used to be. He said he wants to do the right thing for Northfield, and thanked everyone for coming.

Councilman Smith said he was born and raised in Northfield, but chose to live here even though his wife is not from here. He became a teacher and only applied for a job at one place, Mainland Regional. He was asked to join Council and believes this is his duty. Has no biases as a Council person, no ties to the 'players'. He was charged with making an informed unbiased opinion and feels he has done that; he stands by his reasoning and his decision.

Mayor Mazzeo thanked everyone for coming out for this difficult meeting. He said he still did not see cost savings, despite what was said by Council this evening. He commended the fire department for doing a great job, and said he thinks feels he has a 'feel' for the community. He referred to issues last year that he thought were resolved and said he hasn't heard any negativity until the RFP process began. Mazzeo urged citizens to move forward with whatever decision is made, and said he appreciates them from the bottom of his heart.

Councilman O'Grady said he had nothing to add at this time.

President Kern said she knows, and everyone can see, that this is not an easy decision. She thanked NRS, Lynn, Frank, Ray, Barry, and all of the families, for their service.

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RESOLUTIONS

103-2009 A Resolution Overriding The Veto Of Ordinance 10-2009 Entitled 'An Ordinance Repealing City Of Northfield Ordinance 37-1977, Adopted By The Council Of The City Of Northfield As Ordinance No. 4-77, That Established The Northfield Rescue Squad, Inc. To Render Emergency Medical Services In The City Of Northfield' Vetoed By Mayor Vincent Mazzeo On May 29, 2009

Councilman Turon motioned, Vain seconded for the adoption of Resolution 103-2009.

Acting City Clerk Mary Canesi stated that adoption of this resolution requires an affirmative vote by not less than 2/3 of the members of Council.

Roll call: Mr. Carew – yes; Mr. Martinez – no; Mr. O'Grady – no; Mr. Smith – yes; Mr. Turon – yes; Mr. Vain – yes; Mrs. Kern – yes. Motion carries.

104-2009 Award of Contract for Emergency Medical Services to Atlanticare

Councilman Smith motioned, Vain seconded for the adoption of Resolution 104-2009.

Roll call: Mr. Carew – yes; Mr. Martinez – no; Mr. O'Grady – no; Mr. Smith – yes; Mr. Turon – yes; Mr. Vain – yes; Mrs. Kern – yes. Motion carries.

On motions properly made and seconded, this meeting was adjourned at 9:08pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Canesi
Acting Municipal Clerk