

SPECIAL SESSION RUSH COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MAY 31, 2018

The Rush County Board of Commissioners met in special session Thursday, May 31, 2018 with Commissioners Paul Wilkinson, Mark Bacon, and Bruce Levi, Jodi Harr, Auditor, and Leigh Morning, County Attorney, in attendance.

Paul Wilkinson called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. with the Pledge to the flag.

The purpose of the special meeting was to make a decision on the proposals presented to provide EMS transporting services in Rush County.

Commissioner Wilkinson thanked all EMS providers for their services and cooperation in this process. He hopes that whatever the decision is made today that all involved will continue to provide the same excellent services currently provided to county residents.

Commissioner Levi stated today is the toughest part of his job as county commissioner so far. He has talked with past commissioners who told him the ambulance has always been an issue for the county. He has also looked at the county and township tax rates. He believes townships can support their EMS services by increasing their township fire rates. He noted the county paid a consultant and we need to look at their recommendation.

Commissioner Bacon commented Rush County is blessed to have good people providing good services to county residents. The commissioners are trying to do the right thing for the citizens. He believes the commissioners need to make a decision and move forward. Decisions are not always about the money. We have to make sure we have the right services available. Bacon asked the following questions:

1. Rush Memorial Hospital talked about not having enough money now to meet their current budget. Why is their proposal so low?
 - a. Carrie Cloud, Legal Counsel for Rush Memorial Hospital, stated that more volume of runs create more opportunity to collect more revenue.
 - b. Cloud also commented that due to the county's financial situation, the hospital board had a rethinking of their policy. The board is willing to absorb the loss if needed.
2. Knowing the past history of cost increases at Rush Memorial, what happens in three to five years when costs increase and we have run out other providers?
 - a. Cloud responded no one can predict the future. The hospital is willing to work with the county.
3. How do we keep current volunteer EMT's and how do we recruit new ones?
 - a. Cloud commented they agree volunteers are invaluable and the hospital is committed to keeping the volunteers.
4. Is the hospital going to provide jump kits for volunteer EMT's out of the \$350,000 in your proposal?
 - a. Cloud answered yes.

- b. Jeremy Green with Carthage Fire Department commented that jump kits do not save lives. Trained EMT's save lives. Without subsidy from the county, they will not have the funds to train EMT's.
5. Is the current three ambulances that are currently provided at Rush Memorial enough to cover the entire county and also do transfers?
 - a. Cloud stated they are not sure. With the short time allotted for proposals, they have not had time to look at that. She understands the concerns.
6. To the Rushville City Fire Department, will one paramedic be on shift twenty four hours a day seven days a week?
 - a. Chief Chuck Jenkins responded there will be one paramedic twenty four hours a day seven days a week and one paramedic between 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
7. Can profit sharing be part of the contract between county and city?
 - a. Jenkins replied he does not see why not; however, that will be a decision to be made by the Mayor and the Board of Works.
8. Is it correct that if there is profit we can lower the cost of what we pay in the future?
 - a. Jenkins answered that those negotiations can happen after the commissioners make a decision on coverage. The county will see what is being spent, what is being earned and what is left. It can be reviewed annually. The county will definitely know where their dollars are.
9. The study done by Fitch and Associates recommended the county commissioners utilizing a person in charge of oversight for all services subsidized by the commissioners. Is everyone willing to cooperate with the oversight person?
 - a. Jenkins has no issue with that and agrees with it.
 - b. Cloud responded that since the hospital is a county wide service, there would not be a need for the coordinator because they would be the central provider. The commissioners serve on the hospital board so they would get the information on that board. Commissioner Levi commented they get those reports now at every monthly hospital board meeting. County Attorney Leigh Morning commented that all reports need to be reported in the same manner by all services. Levi stated this needs to be part of the commissioners meeting.
10. If we go to one county provider, what happens to the ambulances at the volunteer services?
 - a. Nick White with Anderson Township said they are still paying for theirs so it will be gone and no longer available.
 - b. Steve Cain with Raleigh Fire Department said there will be no EMT's on 911 calls. They will keep the ambulance for private use by Raleigh Fire Department.
 - c. Jeremy Green with Carthage Volunteer Fire Department commented they will not keep both ambulances but will work with Raleigh to provide services.
11. If we go to one county provider, what happens to the volunteers?
 - a. White replied Anderson Township will not require EMT's to respond.

- b. Cain replied volunteer numbers will dwindle. They have people who have completed their class but not taken the test because there is no sense in certifying if there will not be an ambulance to respond with.
 - c. Jason Cain with Raleigh commented as an individual it will be hard to maintain certification when someone's life cannot be saved because it took too long for an ambulance to get there.
 - d. Levi commented he keeps hearing we will lose volunteers if we go to one county wide service and not subsidize volunteer transport services. He asked if that is true. He wants the volunteers to stay strong. He ask if some services are paying volunteers. Raleigh Fire Department and Anderson Township do pay some volunteers during the day when coverage is short.
12. Posey Township and Glenwood operate without an ambulance and like it. Why would it be any different for other services?
- a. Brad Hatfield with Raleigh noted maybe it is because they are accustomed to not transporting patients or maybe because they do not have the funds for an ambulance. Raleigh has to have income in order to pay for the insurance and equipment.
13. Under the Rush Memorial proposal, will the hospital insurance cover volunteers?
- a. Cloud stated she would have to look into it.
 - b. Steve Cain commented the insurance for Raleigh says the volunteer has to be named on the department's roster of volunteers. He believes each volunteer would have to be listed on the hospital's roster.
 - c. Wilkinson noted this issue would need to be reviewed by the insurance carrier.

Phil Derringer with Rushville Township Volunteer Fire department commented that when their department was established several years ago, they set a tax rate and agreed they would not go into debt to buy anything. They still go by that theory. If they had to run on fire calls only, they would not be able to keep volunteers. EMS is what keeps the volunteers interested.

Krissi Williams runs Mays Academy. She stated that she is responsible for approximately two hundred children on a daily basis. Raleigh Fire department can respond to the school in three to five minutes. It would take Rush Memorial approximately twenty minutes. She reminded the commissioners there is more to this decision than dollars. She believes there are other items that can be cut in the budget if need be. Citizen's lives are the most important. EMS coverage should not be a topic to divide the county. She asked the commissioners to please weigh their decision very carefully.

Nick White remarked that history helps to teach us to not make the same mistakes over. Volunteers have remained consistently for forty two years in Rush County. They covered the central part of the county when service was not available. The cheapest service is not always the best and the citizen's safety should always be first.

Don Watson, IDHS EMS District Manager for districts three and six spoke next. He knows that dollars is the issue in every county across the state of Indiana. He understands that problem. He does not feel like EMS has ever been taken seriously enough. You are not going to make money in EMS. He believes when you talk of going to one service, you are jeopardizing public health. EMS refers to the golden hour meaning from the time of injury to the time a patient is in surgery if need be is one hour. You need local responders to provide care in outlying areas. It takes tax subsidy at a steady rate that they can count on to continue providing services. He believes that no service is better than the other. You need to appreciate volunteers who do EMS at no cost. Volunteer Fire Departments are an invaluable part of the EMS system. Advanced Life Support has a place; however, for severe trauma, time is of the essence to get to a trauma center. He provided his contact information to the commissioners and welcomed them to contact him with any questions they may have.

Rushville City Mayor Mike Pavey was next to address the commissioners. He stated the City could have given the county several different proposals. They feel like the central district of the county is their focus and that one service for the entire county is not in the best interest of all involved. Chief Jenkins has to report to the City Council, the Board of Works and to the Mayor. They all have varying opinions on how to handle this situation. They were not real clear on what was wanted in the proposals. He agrees that a system needs to be developed that can compare results based on everyone reporting in the same manner. We have to get this issue resolved and move forward. When the city decided to go into the ambulance business, they were told not to. Here they are three years later and are thriving in the ambulance business. Their proposal can be changed as talks occur and reporting is done. Wilkinson asked if the city can be operational by July 15. Chief Jenkins said yes they can be.

Hatfield shared a message from a patient treated by Raleigh Fire Department which thanked them for their quick response. Wilkinson stated that every service represented in the room has had situations like the one Hatfield described. He agrees the commissioners must consider patient care not just the financial impact. The decision that will be made today is no reflection on the quality of care provided by all EMS services in our county. Someone is not going to be happy but we have to get past this situation.

Derringer asked if the contracts can state that an increase in subsidy can only be a certain percentage. Wilkinson said yes it will have to. The county only has a limited amount of income. Any increase will probably result in making cuts in the county budget which will more than likely be at the expense of losing an employee.

Verlin Custer commented that the problem from day one is that the central district provider expected the volunteers to assist them at no charge. He believes that EMS in the 911 services is not a money maker. He also believes that a patient relaxes when they know help is close by. He stated volunteer services will disband if they are not subsidized by the county. He did find some errors on the Fitch report. He encouraged the commissioners as a tax payer to keep the

volunteer services. He asked if it would be wise for the commissioners to put this decision off until their June 11 meeting. All three commissioners agreed to make the decision today.

Jeff Wilson asked if Rush Memorial Hospital plans to put an ambulance on the south side of the county. Wilkinson said that was not addressed in their proposal. Discussion was held regarding the railroad tracks that run through the middle of Rushville. Levi asked if the City Fire Department and Rush Memorial Hospital have an intercept agreement. They do at this time. This will be an issue that will need to be addressed regardless of which proposal is accepted by the commissioners.

Deana Disney from Northern Rush County stated a report that she found on line shows that fifty percent of E911 answered calls are responded to by volunteers. She feels like the City has responsibility to city taxpayers and Rush Memorial Hospital has to answer to their shareholders. In two years if they are taking a loss, they have to answer to someone. You have to have a clause to work with the volunteers. They will arrive quicker. You must look at how many calls are answered by volunteers. Cloud responded that there are not share-holders at Rush Memorial Hospital. They are controlled by a board of seven people with three of them being the county commissioners.

Levi commented that he was involved when the county first contracted ambulance services with Rush Memorial Hospital several years ago. We had this same meeting at that time. It bothers him hearing that we will lose the volunteers if the county does not subsidize their service. We must come together or we will be in the same situation in three years.

Richard Tracy commented that in EMS definitive care is the ultimate care option. If you take a five minute ambulance response time into twenty minutes, you hurt the citizens. Wilkinson again noted the commissioners do not want to take away any services from the citizens.

Jason Cain stated it is not that the volunteers will not want to provide care. It will be demoralizing for the volunteer because they cannot get the patient care they need because they are waiting for an ambulance.

Wilkinson asked the services if they have an active program to recruit volunteers. Raleigh has several volunteers under the age of twenty five. Wilkson said volunteers sustain the service more than dollars. Anderson Township is trying to recruit but because of the uncertainty in knowing if their ambulance will be running in the future, people are not wanting to commit. Carthage has four new EMT's since Raleigh has started helping covering their area. Wilkinson said they must have a plan in place for recruiting volunteers and keeping them. Green believes having a county coordinator will be helpful.

Wilkinson then asked what each department charges for a transport.

- Raleigh charges \$500 for BLS, \$750 for ALS plus \$12 per mile. Their average cost for transport is \$440.
- Carthage charges \$380 for BLS and \$520 for ALS.
- Anderson charges \$500 for BLS. About one in five are billable runs.
- Rushville City charges \$400 for BLS and \$650 for ALS plus \$12 per mile.
- The representatives from Rush Memorial Hospital did not know the current charges.

Commissioner Bruce Levi made the motion to follow the guidelines of the Fitch Consultant report and award the proposal of Rush Memorial Hospital. There was no second so the motion died for a lack of a second.

Commissioner Mark Bacon made the motion to go with the three district proposals of Anderson Township Volunteer Fire Department, Raleigh Fire Department and Rushville City Fire Department with the addition of one county oversight coordinator with that person being EMA Director Chuck Kemker. Paul Wilkinson seconded. Discussion was held.

Wilkinson believes that Rush Memorial Hospital and the volunteers have all done an excellent job. Rush Memorial stepped up and provided paramedic coverage when the county needed it. He has difficulty naming a coordinator at this time because he has not talked to Chuck Kemker about this. The information shared by all has been honest. He asks that the cooperation he has seen over the last six months to continue. If Rush Memorial Hospital is going to be out of the ambulance business, the other services have to develop relationships with Rush Memorial Hospital. Rush Memorial is important to our county. Levi asked when Milroy does not have any one to respond, who is going to cover for them. We have had this problem in the past. Raleigh and Anderson Township have already talked about this. They will work together. Chuck Jenkins agreed that the City will also work with them and cover if needed. A mutual aid agreement can be done between all of the services. Wilkinson stated that if a service is not responding, the commissioners will have to take action. Bacon stated the oversight coordinator will have the knowledge of units not responding and report it to the commissioners. He would also support a county wide campaign to recruit more volunteers. County Councilman Scott Barnes asked the commissioners how they plan to cover the cost of these proposals. Bacon commented it will either be in money or in people. He knows the commissioners are going to be criticized for this decision but it has to be made. Krissi Williams commented there are other places within the current budget to cut. Wilkinson reminded everyone we are talking about EMS not budgets.

Commissioners voted on the above motion. Paul Wilkinson and Mark Bacon voted aye. Bruce Levi voted Nay. Motion carried.

Bruce Levi made the motion to adjourn. Mark Bacon seconded. Motion carried.

/Paul Wilkinson/
Paul Wilkinson Chairman

/Mark Bacon/
Mark Bacon

/Bruce Levi/
Bruce Levi

ATTEST:

/Jodi Harr/
Jodi Harr, Auditor