

**WEAKLEY COUNTY, TENNESSEE
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE**

Monday, October 29, 2018 – 5:30 p.m. – Conference Room, Weakley County Department of Finance

Public Safety Committee Members Present: Commissioners Scott Fortner, James Roy Pope, David Bell, David Hawks, Jack Vincent, and Eric Owen

Public Safety Committee Members Absent: None

The Public Safety Committee met on Monday, October 29, 2018, at 5:30 p.m. in the conference room at the Department of Finance in Dresden. Others present included Mayor Jake Bynum, Director of Finance John Liggett, county commissioners, healthcare representatives, many Weakley County Citizens and Residents, and representatives of the media.

Chairperson Jack Vincent called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Approval of Minutes:

Commissioner Fortner made the motion to approve the minutes from the October 3, 2018, committee meeting, and with a second by Commissioner Owen, the motion to approve passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

Chairperson Vincent recognized Mayor Bynum who explained that the way the meeting would operate would be to allow the providers an opportunity to introduce their organization, provide details outlined in their previously submitted RFP, answer questions from the Public Safety Committee, answer questions from the rest of the Weakley County Commissioners present, and answer written questions from the residents and citizens in attendance. Having no questions, the presentations began.

A. Discussion of Weakley County Ambulance Service RFPs

1. West Tennessee Healthcare Presentation

Chairperson Vincent recognized Mrs. Joyce Noles, Executive Director of Medical Center EMS. She outlined many details of the RFP, including the fact that there was no subsidy, some specifics of the equipped ambulances including GPS technology, salary details of EMTs and paramedics, community events coverage, education and training of staff, medical and insurance benefits, programs and inclusions, pre-employment particulars, and more. She stated that Medical Center EMS has a network of 45 ambulances over 5 counties and said that they wanted to offer all current employees a position of some kind with Medical Center EMS.

2. Baptist-Priority Ambulance Presentation

Chairperson Vincent recognized Mr. Eric Messer, Vice President of Operations for Baptist-Priority Ambulance. Mr. Messer began by explaining the details of his RFP with two options: 1.) a Regional County Solution, one in which Weakley County will receive dedicated and resources without paying a subsidy with three dedicated ambulances and the utilization of a regional system of 11 ambulances from neighboring counties; or 2.) four dedicated ambulances located within the community with the requirement of a subsidy of \$350,000 annually. Mr. Messer talked about the system in Obion County, the mistakes that had been made in the past, equipment, and other details including community events coverage and education and training of staff.

3. Weakley County Ambulance Service Presentation

Chairperson Vincent recognized Mr. Jeff Washburn, CEO of Weakley County Ambulance Service, Inc. (WCAS). Mr. Washburn provided some history about the organization, saying that WCAS had been the county's ambulance service provider for the past 35 years, and stated that due to that fact they are the most

familiar with the county's numbers and revenues. He spoke about the previously submitted RFP and the fact that it contained a subsidy that the more recently submitted RFP omitted. He said that, if chosen, WCAS would be operating 'in the red' as would the other providers who submitted an RFP. He went on to speak on the ambulance count, purchasing of new ambulances and rotation out after 250,000 miles, and the WCAS selection as being selected for pilot program for certain certifications. He also stated that the WCAS had sought to be ventilator trained but that the hospital's ventilator classes were closed; he said they were still in the process of obtaining ventilator training.

QUESTIONS FROM PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Commissioner Bell asked Medical Center EMS where they planned to station their ambulances. Mrs. Joyce Noles said they planned to station them in Dresden, Martin, and Greenfield.

Commissioner Hawks asked whether all ambulances would be ALS (advanced life support) ambulances, and the organizations replied that yes, they would all be ALS ambulances.

Commissioner Fortner asked Mr. Washburn what the county would be sacrificing with a zero dollar subsidy. Mr. Washburn said that Weakley County Ambulance Service would be operating at a loss, but they would continue to operate as they always have and went on to say that the organization has saved all of their past years gains and they would be operating on those funds.

Commissioner Pope asked which counties Medical Center EMS was serving to whom they required a subsidy. Mrs. Joyce Noles stated that Benton County was the only county out of the five they serve for which they receive a subsidy, and this was due to Benton County being long and skinny with ambulance stations at quite of few miles' distance apart, as well as a demand for more ambulances from the citizens there despite a lower call volume. Mrs. Noles stated that they hoped to eventually bring Benton County's subsidy to \$0.

Commissioner Fortner asked about the threshold. Mr. Messer stated that the more calls that come in, the more ambulances are required and subsequently used. He went on to say that Baptist-Priority Ambulance makes money transporting patients, not taking patients to the hospital.

Commissioner Owen asked if all of the bidding entities had GPS tracking devices equipped on their ambulance fleet so that it was always known where the ambulances were located in or out of the county. Both Mrs. Noles and Mr. Messer stated that yes, their fleets were equipped with GPS tracking, and Mr. Washburn answered no, that his fleet is not equipped.

Commissioner Owen asked if there would be problems or issues with dispatch relative to how the county functions at present. Mrs. Noles and West TN Healthcare CEO Mr. James Ross explained that they were looking at new technologies to hopefully streamline the process so that Medical Center EMS and Weakley County Dispatch could work together most efficiently. Mr. Messer stated that it was clearly outlined in the RFP that Weakley County Dispatch would be the managers of the call system, so that item was not up for change or debate.

Commissioner Owen asked Mr. Washburn what would happen to the ambulance service equipment in the case that another entity was awarded the bid, and Mr. Washburn stated that the WCAS's parent organization is the Weakley County Rescue Squad and that all items would be the property of the Rescue Squad should the Ambulance Service dissolve.

Commissioner Hawks asked what each organization would do when all ambulances are out of the county and they receive a call. Mr. Messer said that they would utilize all of their resources and not let the county go dry. Mrs. Noles stated that extra personnel is called in, utilizing other units from other towns or even counties, and

that they wouldn't let the county go uncovered and reiterated the importance and benefits of having GPS tracking capabilities.

Commissioner Pope stated to Mr. Messer that if ambulances could be pulled from other counties to assist us, our ambulances could be pulled to help other counties. Mr. Messer responded that there are 11 ambulances in the area with availability to assist.

Commissioner Bell asked Mr. Washburn how many units were currently in service, to which Mr. Washburn replied that there were four ALS units currently in service out of seven total available units.

Commissioner Hawks stated to Mr. Washburn that he was confused about the Weakley County Ambulance Service's 2016 tax return and the annual profits showing of \$500,000, and stated that it seemed that there were discrepancies with the original request for subsidy that asked for an increase from \$235,000 to \$300,000 annually, then dropped the subsidy to \$85,000, and then offered the service at no subsidy. Mr. Washburn stated that the tax return was accrual based, said that the unpaid uncollectibles had not been written off at that point in time, which could've been upwards of half a million annually. He went on to say that the income, after those write offs, would be close to \$0. He said that the overall bank account had increased by around \$120,000 last year. Commissioner Hawks said that the organization's net worth reflects that \$500,000, and Mr. Washburn said that it does indeed on an accrual basis show that reflection. Commissioner Hawks observed that the tax return also shows \$1.6 million in cash and savings, to which Mr. Washburn agreed. Commissioner Hawks stated that with this knowledge, he doesn't understand how the original request for an increase in subsidy was justified. Mr. Washburn said that Weakley County Ambulance Service would operate at a loss just like the other organizations who bid, upwards of a \$150,000-\$200,000 annual loss, but that serving Weakley County was the primary goal.

QUESTIONS FROM OTHER COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Donaldson asked Medical Center EMS and Baptist-Priority Ambulance if, in the chance that they were awarded the bid, would they employ all of the current employees working for Weakley County Ambulance Service? Mr. Messer said that they aimed to offer all of the current employees a position. Mrs. Noles stated that they would give the current employees first priority and try to match up salaries and provide the most accommodating options and spoke about how things had been done in Dyer County.

Commissioner Donaldson asked who owns Weakley County Ambulance Service. Mr. Washburn stated that Weakley County Ambulance Service is a non-profit corporation formed by Weakley County Rescue Squad, Inc., also a non-profit organization, to which all ambulance service assets default and which is governed by a board of directors. Mr. Washburn said that the Ambulance Service building is rented from the Rescue Squad for around \$1250 monthly. Commissioner Donaldson asked in the case of another entity being awarded the contract, would they rent the buildings to the winning organization. Mr. Washburn stated that it was a possibility, but not the Rescue Squad building. He said he may be resentful about some things but that he was a savvy businessman who would do what was in the best interest of the organization.

Commissioner Usery asked Medical Center EMS whether they would try to keep our employees working locally should they be awarded the bid. West Tennessee Healthcare CEO James Ross stated that yes, it would be a priority to keep them local.

Commissioner Hawks asked all of the entities about the role of training for the betterment of the employees. Mr. Messer said that they have a program where future employees can attend school at cost to the state with a required obligation to work at least one year with Baptist-Priority Ambulance. He also talked about a leadership program and opportunities to grow and advance with training, classes, and certifications. Mrs. Noles talked about the various programs and assistance programs available through West Tennessee Healthcare of which

there were many. She went on to mention flexible scheduling, pilot programs, advancement past the First Responder Program, and future desires for advancing training programs. Mr. Washburn spoke about the Tennessee Promise Program and how his organization had considered the suggestions relayed from the Public Safety Committee back in April of 2018.

Commissioner Pope asked about the currently relationship between the Weakley County Ambulance Service and West Tennessee Healthcare and how the two entities might work together in the future, should WCAS be awarded the bid. Mr. Washburn said that the current relationship was strained but that the two entities do work together despite being strained. West TN Healthcare Vice President Mr. Tim Adams stated that they would always work to take care of the patient as priority number one.

Commissioner Taylor asked that should either Medical Center EMS or Baptist-Priority Ambulance be awarded the bid, would they be able to provide ventilator trained staff on the ambulances on day one. Mrs. Noles stated that all supervisors and all two-year paramedics are already ventilator trained, so if it meant that they would have to bring in a roaming supervisor, they would do that. Mr. Messer said that they would, too. Mrs. Noles said that West Tennessee Healthcare would be happy to help with ventilator training for WCAS should they be awarded the bid.

Commissioner Eddings said that WCAS has been transporting patients with ventilators, and Mr. Washburn said that for the last 20 years or so that was the case until new regulations within the year required new training certifications that haven't been obtained yet. Mr. Washburn stated that just around 6 patients per year were transported with ventilators out of the 4,000 patients transported total.

QUESTIONS FROM CITIZENS AND RESIDENTS

Chairperson Vincent recognized Erica Moore, Committee Recording Secretary, to read the questions collected from the citizens and residents in attendance at the meeting. Those questions are highlighted in bold text below. Unless otherwise indicated, Mrs. Joyce Noles answered all questions for Medical Center EMS (MC-EMS), Mr. Eric Messer answered all questions for Baptist-Priority, and Mr. Jeff Washburn answered all questions directed to Weakley County Ambulance Service (WCAS).

1. For all three entities: Can you provide an ideal response time for a 911 call?

MC-EMS: Ideal is zero seconds, but realistically, 8-10 minutes on an emergency.

Baptist-Priority: Ours is around the same.

WCAS: Ours averages around 8-10 minutes, which is the state average.

2. For all three entities: How do you plan to recruit and/or retain staff?

MC-EMS: We would encourage all of the employees who currently work here to stay here. We have parties interested in coming in from other counties to work here, too. Worst case, I have a paramedic license, Mr. Ross has an EMT license, Kevin has a paramedic license and we will get to work.

Baptist-Priority: We rely on current staff. We are at the mercy of the current staff. We look at pay scale and benefits.

WCAS: We have a problem across the state of difficulty retaining personnel. We offer good pay and benefits, paid time off and to be in the competitive range with other entities.

3. For all three entities: What do you plan to do in case of a surge in need such as a mass casualty?

MC-EMS: We plan to utilize all current resources we have here, paramedic units to respond, and call in mutual aid. Despite who gets the award, our counties help each other and must be on the same page. We have to operate and depend on each other; we would be all hands on deck internally and count on mutual aid.

WCAS: Mrs. Noles stated it very well. We would activate our emergency response plan and call in ambulances

from Jackson and all parts of northwest Tennessee. We all help each other as it's always been in EMS.
Baptist-Priority: Same for us.

4. For all three entities: What is your policy of maintaining equipment – not just ambulances – and staying current on technology?

MC-EMS: We stay current with the equipment we purchase. We have a shop supervisor who keeps us on point. We upgrade when necessary, and we have to do it in cycles with the amount of ambulances we have. We have regular maintenance on a bio-med schedule, some equipment gets inspection checks twice a year.

Baptist-Priority: We are always replacing equipment. We are about to buy some new monitors. We have dates on certain things, like stretchers – 7 years and they must be replaced. Inspections on equipment exists.

5. For all three entities: Is there a charge to patients for minor incidents such as needing help after a fall or one that doesn't transport?

MC-EMS: We have a policy in place that says that we can charge for those incidents but do not apply that policy unless there are individuals who are abusing the system by constantly calling and tying up an ambulance. What we usually do is try to resolve the issue; for someone who frequently falls, we try to find out why they are falling so often and get them the care they need to prevent it. Maybe get home health in or reach out to social services. We try not to charge without transport.

Baptist-Priority: We won't charge without transporting.

WCAS: We don't charge for those incidents. We do have people that abuse the system, but we address those on a one-on-one situation. We often don't charge those who we assist at the scene, even in the case of using a defib and if they refuse transport. There are exceptions.

6. For all three entities: Will an additional truck be available for events or will one be pulled from duty – for example, ballgames?

MC-EMS: We have a backup truck here, provide some staff opportunities for overtime and PR work, and we try to leave four units active in the county.

Baptist-Priority: We would not staff an additional truck. We cannot afford to do that.

WCAS: As you know, we try to staff every high school football game in Weakley County, but it's not always possible due to the amount of calls we may get during the game.

7. For MC-EMS and Baptist-Priority: Will all office staff and/or mechanics be retained?

MC-EMS: For us, we want to offer all employees the opportunity for a position. To say we could keep them in the same role, there's no way to commit to a position we're not familiar with. But every current employee has the opportunity and we will try to find them a position.

Baptist-Priority: We will try our best, but in our area, we cannot keep office staff. Administrative assistants, we don't have those. We have to run as lean as we can. Mechanics can stay, but not office staff. We don't do that.

8. For all three entities: Will First Responder Programs stay in place? Why or why not?

MC-EMS: Yes, they are very important. We want to be supportive for them.

Baptist-Priority: Yes, absolutely.

WCAS: Yes, and I believe the program needs expanding.

9. For all three entities: Can a patient request which hospital they go to? How is the closest hospital determined such as a citizen in the north and east part of the county?

MC-EMS: Patients have the right to decide to which hospital they want to go to. In the case of immediate life threat, we will take the patient to the nearest facility to stabilize them. Patients choose the hospital.

Baptist-Priority: We take the patients to the closest, most appropriate facility.

WCAS: We believe the patient gets to decide the facility they get to go to. In a threat situation, the closest facility is where the patient must go.

10. For all three entities: At this time there is no expense to the county to transport inmates. Would that continue?

MC-EMS: Mr. Kevin Deaton: A contractual agreement would be entered into and would be negotiable.

Baptist-Priority: If the inmate stays in the custody of the county, the county would be billed. The FBI would be in my office. We cannot do it. It's illegal.

WCAS: In the past, we have not charged the county for transport of inmates. At a zero subsidy, we would have to implement Medicare-based charges to the county based upon Medicare requirements.

11. For all three entities: Currently an ambulance has been dispatched to stand by for firefighters at no cost. Will that stay the same?

MC-EMS: Definitely.

Baptist-Priority: Yes.

WCAS: Absolutely.

12. For all three entities: What is the maximum number of trucks you would pull out of the county at one time to help other counties or transport to other facilities?

MC-EMS: We would stagger the transports to go down to two, and get the ambulances back into the county in a staggered manner.

Baptist-Priority: Two.

WCAS: Weakley County comes first and we would try to maintain two in the county at all times.

13. For all three entities: Who would activate Air Evac? Our dispatch or yours? Who would be responsible for setup of landing zones? Will that require an additional call?

MC-EMS: Most people do early activation. However they want to do it is fine. If they'd rather us do it, or if they'd rather – it's fine. Obviously, we'd need to coordinate to set that up.

Baptist-Priority: Depending on the situation, we might activate. We want the helicopter available for someone who really needs it, so we want to be sure of that.

WCAS: We check the availability of the helicopter and activate if necessary. We have a good relationship with them currently, and they usually know what's going on.

14. For all three entities: What level do you allow for first responders? A-EMTs allowed to first respond at that level?

MC-EMS: If you don't work for us, we tend to leave you at the first responder level for liability issues.

Baptist-Priority: Same for us.

WCAS: If you are working in our system, first responders can respond according to first responder protocols.

15. For Mr. Washburn only: Is it true that Air Evac and Hospital Wing and Vanderbilt LifeFlight offered free ventilator classes to your paramedics and they were denied opportunity to attend due to lack of staffing for county?

Mr. Washburn: Mr. Rick Workman has just notified me that the information is not correct. Those entities might offer that, but I don't know that it's been offered to us at this time. If it is available, we'll take advantage of it next week.

16. For Mr. Washburn only: How many paramedics do you currently employ? How many EMTs do you employ? What is your average response time in the last month, last year, and last 3 years of contract?

A big part of the response times I will have to research and get back to you on. Our times haven't varied much, 2 to 3 minutes, 75% of our calls and we're on our way, 86-89% of our calls we respond in 3-4 minutes. Are we perfect on every call? Absolutely not. We have stable response times. We have 14 or 15 paramedics, not counting part-time personnel. We have 7 full time paramedics. We have about that many part time. We are about 50-50 with EMTs. We have about 24 full time available slots. About 12 or 13 EMTs.

17. For the County Commission: How do you plan to ensure that contracted service is meeting terms of contract? Will there be any oversight by you our elected officials to ensure adequate service to citizens?

Commissioner David Bell: In the last meeting I made the point that I would like to see the numbers annually, but I am going to make the motion to have E-911 provide data to us quarterly for us to review.

OTHER COMMENTS

Commissioner Hawks stated that no matter who was awarded the service, if the county grows and the need for another ambulance is considered, please consider the area near McKenzie as their hospital is closing.

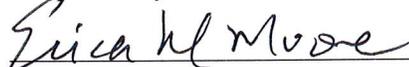
Chairperson Vincent recognized Mayor Bynum told all of the citizens who were concerned and wanted to express their opinion regarding the best choice for Weakley County's ambulance service award to contact their county commissioners by obtaining contact information from www.weakleycountyttn.gov, or by calling the Mayor's Office to speak with Erica Moore.

Chairperson Vincent thanked all of the citizens and ambulance service entities for attending and participating in the discussion.

OTHER BUSINESS

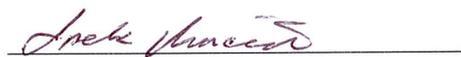
Having no other business, Commissioner Fortner made the motion to adjourn the meeting and with a second by Chairperson Bell, the meeting was adjourned at 7:32 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Erica Moore, Secretary
Public Safety Committee

Approved:



Jack Vincent, Chairperson
Public Safety Committee

Date: 6 Nov 18