

**AT A WORKSHOP OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS HELD IN AND FOR GADSDEN
COUNTY, FLORIDA ON MARCH 26, 2018 AT 4:00 P.M.,
THE PROCEEDING WAS HAD, VIZ:**

Present: **Brenda Holt, District 4, Chair**
 Dr. Anthony “Dr. V” Viegbesie, District 2, Vice -Chair
 Eric Hinson, District 1 (Via Phone)
 Gene Morgan, District 3 (Absent)
 Sherrie Taylor, District 5 (Absent)
 Dee Jackson, Interim County Administrator
 David Weiss, County Attorney
 Beryl Wood, Deputy Clerk

General Business – EMS Workshop

1. **Welcome & Overview** (Dee Jackson, Interim County Administrator)

Mrs. Jackson gave the greeting and a brief overview of the meeting. She explained the EMS was one the essential services in the County that they must preserve at an efficient rate to the County. She then introduced Chad Abrams – Leon County and Brad Baker, Santa Rosa County.

Invocation, Pledge of Allegiance

The Invocation was led by Chief Andre Walker followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Holt followed by giving a welcome.

Mrs. Jackson presented the Gadsden Emergency Management Workshop PowerPoint. Where she discussed the following points:

- Gadsden EMS Statistics where a slight increase overall was noted from 2016 to 2017
- General Fund Balance Trends were presented from the Full General Balance from FY 2014 – FY 2017 with a decrease of \$900,000 versus the Unassigned General Fund Balance with a decrease of \$2,300,000
- General Fund Balance Trends (Unassigned) General Fund Balance FY 2014 to FY 2017 with a decrease of \$2,300,000 versus Total Transfer to EMS of an increase of \$582,000
- Fund Balance Trends Breakdown (Unassigned) Budget Transfer FY 2016 –FY 2017 resulting in total transfers to EMS FY 2016 -\$982,000 and FY 2017 \$1,095,000

- EMS Expenditures from FY 2011/12 –FY2015/16 as a result FY2012/13 revenues continued to decrease due to Medicaid/care rates decrease, and uncollectable bills increasing. FY13/14, added Midway site and personnel costs increase by \$462,000. FY14/15, FRS increased the retirement rates \$45,000 (20%). In all years, medical insurance rates went up and raises were given.
- ½ Cent Sales Tax – Fund – 140 – Indigent Ordinance Surtax – Total Expenditures reported FY 2013/14 - \$1,686,596; FY 2014/15 - \$1, 654,431: FY 2015/16 - \$1,634,620; FY 2016/17 - \$1,802,022

2. Presentation on County EMS Issues & Strategies - 5 minutes **(Chad Abrams, Leon County EMS Chief)**

Leon County EMS Director, Chad Abrams, thanked the Board for allowing them to be able to present before them. He said he would share their experience. He said if you looked at EMS systems there was a lot of difference. He said the total budget was around \$20 million. He shared the following:

Leon County EMS

- Request for service – 41,476
- Transports - 28,392
- 152 Staff – (FTE – 128 & PRN24)
- Budget - \$20.7M (\$17.6M Operating /\$1.3 CIP)
- Fees for Service - \$10.32M
- MSTU -\$7.41M
- Fund Balance -\$2.71M
- Interest -\$0.19M

History of Leon County EMS

- TMH provided EMS since the 1970s.
- 2003 TMH notified County of intent to discontinue service for financial reasons.
- County evaluated several service delivery methods and financing options.
- Determined that County-based system provided the optimum balance of control over effectiveness and efficiency.
- County began providing services December 31, 2003.

Leon County EMS

- System financing
 - User Fees
 - Outsource Billing
 - Collections Agency for unpaid debt
 - Financial Hardship Policy
 - Veterans Write-Off Policy
 - MSTU 0.500 mills
 - 42% provided to City for ALS first response services
 - FY17 MSTU revenue (\$7.16M) similar to FY07 levels (\$7.06M)

Mrs. Jackson asked that they speak toward finances and budgeting.

Mr. Abram replied they went to the Leon County BOCC needing additional expenses. He said their recommendation was that they treat EMS similar to an enterprise zone. He said under the budget they could only do 95%, you must keep 5%. He said his overage was Medicaid, Medicare, Uninsured and the Insured. He said with 80% they know they lose funds on and the cost would not be covered. He said that HMO's pay the best.

Future Challenges & Opportunities

- Call Volume Growth Outpacing Population Growth
- Fee Reduction
- Expansion of Financial Hardship Policy
- Medicaid Public Emergency Medical Transport Program
- Exploring Response Alternatives
- Partnership with Big Bend 2-1-1
- Community Paramedic
- Alternate Transport Protocols

Chair Holt asked questions regarding was that an extra taxing unit at 7.5% if they decided on the 8%. She suggested they put it out for a vote, people want the ambulance service, but they normally do not want a hike in pay. She asked about high volume rate versus low volume time.

Chief Walker said they try to have 6 ambulances, but not at all times. She said maybe they need to look at that during low volume times.

Mr. Abram said they there was a challenge with the available paramedics to hire.

Commissioner Viegbesie asked what was the cause or the lack of interest in becoming a paramedic. Mr. Abram replied it was a combination of things; people have more options of what they could do. He said it was a structure, pay was ok, very little flexibility. He said most do not want to work weekends and holidays. He said recruiting was a problem everywhere.

Carolyn Ford said the State of Florida opted out the Medicaid Program, she asked that they elaborate.

Mr. Abram said the rate hasn't changed over the last 14 years. He said it was a challenge.

3. Presentation on County EMS Issues & Strategies - 5 minutes
(Brad Baker, Santa Rosa County Emergency Management Director)

Mrs. Jackson introduced Mr. Brad Baker of Santa Rosa County. She asked that he go ahead and give his synopsis so that both he and Mr. Abrams would be able to answer questions posed with varied opinions based on what was going on in their counties.

Brad Baker, Santa Rosa County – Emergency Management Director, said he was here to give his experience. He said they worked under a contracted ambulance provider and that falls under the Emergency Management Contract Administrator. He explained he was present to give their experience and stated that he was not saying it would work in Gadsden. He said they were in contract with a private company and it was a zero subsidy contract.

Mrs. Jackson asked for clarity that their ambulances services were privatized. Mr. Baker responded yes.

He then presented his PowerPoint and gave a timeline history. He said they normally run 8 ambulances at peak time, lower they run 4 which provides adequate service. He said as relating to the private contractor they tell them if they are in compliance, not the other way around. He said they maintain a great working relationship. He said they require them to participate in the disaster operations also quarterly CPR Saturdays.

Historical Timeline

- 1985 Transition to Hospital-based EMS system
- 1996 Transition from Hospital based on private
- 2006 New RFP issued and transition to new private EMS provider

Highlights of Contract

- Zero subsidy
- Response Time Requirement
- Minimum staffing and Ambulance Standard
- The requirement to utilize County Communications Center for dispatching of EMS units (including the use of MDT and AVL0)
- Must utilize County Medical Director for oversight

Keys to success

- County maintains dispatching of EMS units
- County monitors compliance
- Maintaining a good working relationship/partnership building
- Quarterly meeting with dispatch & EMS supervisors
- Establish a regular line of communications
- Clear expectations
- County open to additional partnership opportunities

Commissioner Viegbesie compared the two counties Santa Rosa and Gadsden County. He asked about profit. Mr. Baker responded \$167,000. He said that their budgeted service for EMS was larger than Gadsden County because theirs came in at \$47,000. He asked did they have in write-off at the end of the year by running it private. Mr. Baker replied they do not. He said they don't have EMS in their budget at all.

Commissioner Viegbesie stated with the budget year approaching he suggested they get analysis to come together with serious options that would better work for Gadsden County. He asked which one of the options would minimize our debt and provide the services to the citizens of the County.

Mr. Abrams responded they do have budgetary funds to take of the indigent population. He said if they did have a bill they could not collect and it met the criteria, they do budget that. He said he didn't bring that number. He said they also have to do that with their hospital.

Chair Holt asked that they discuss collections.

Mr. Baker pointed out with Medicare and Medicaid they were capped at what they were going to pay. He said the collection amount that was being written off, should be considered in that number. He said if you billed more than what they were going to pay that would immediately be write-off money regardless of how you approached it. He said that you could also debt write - off by rates, the higher the rate the lower the write – off.

Chair Holt said her question was how to keep the trucks running and the people paid.

Mr. Abrams said Escambia County has three large hospitals and sometimes they lost patients to them. He said they have three one medium size and a couple of small hospitals. He said that is where the ambulance provider makes some additional guaranteed revenue and they normally negotiate that.

Chair Holt said in Gadsden they are transported to the Emergency Room, and could bill for that from the house to the Emergency Room but to go Tallahassee was a problem with Medicare or Medicaid where you could not bill twice. She said she was unsure how it went, but thought that you could not bill twice for a ride.

Chief Walker said once you transport from the house to the Emergency Room they get paid for that, but once you transfer from the hospital they consider that continuing care.

Chair Holt said what she was saying was the trip from the Emergency Room to Tallahassee was more expensive than from your home to the Emergency Room. She said that was where they were losing money because of the distance they were traveling and it added more liability with the lights and sirens. She said they were losing money because they did not have a hospital if they had at least one a lot of those rides would stop here and Medicaid and Medicare dollars would stay inside the County.

She discussed the swing beds the federal government would pay us so much. She said they needed to go back and look at the contract.

Arrie Battles commented how did they inform the public to make this choice? She said it was a no-brainer if they wanted to get out of debt. She suggested community meetings to inform the community of what has happened so they would not think they were not running any ambulance services at all.

Mrs. Jackson said she was of the opinion that there needed to be some more thorough research done as to what would work best in this County. She said they needed to do some more research. She said there were other counties experiencing some of the same issues Gadsden was and they were going about it in different ways: Outsource service to the Sheriff's Department and all deputies are EMS and Fire certified. All deputies work 8 hour shifts and have 3 shifts per day; Gas Sur-Tax Dollars (one thing that the Budget Director, Mr. Price was recommending)–\$2.4 million in gas surtax dollars and the way they are currently distributed is \$1.2 Million is given in Fire each year and \$1.2 million is in transportation and what Mr. Price suggested was that it be merged together. She said instead of giving to the transportation department they would merge EMS/Fire and give \$2.4 million just for those two and impose 1.5 cents local option tax as well as the 90 cent motor fuel tax which would give \$1.2 million dollars in transportation still. She said there were so many other options to discuss. She stated she didn't want them to feel as if all the options had been presented. She shed light on the issue that they do have and that they can't continue on the trend they have been going into. She said they need to purchase 10 new ambulances which are a million dollars, they are each \$200,000 and there are other concerns in Fire and EMS.

Mrs. Carolyn Ford commented that was what she was thinking, with these two rich counties. She noted that they are 66 out of 67 Counties with health and percentage in terms of the disparities. She said there was a high influx of seniors concerning their health. She said the debt was a lot higher and she was looking for someone such as Hamilton County or Jefferson. She said something must be done and one of the key things was to open up the hospital. She said they need doctors.

Mrs. Jackson addressed the first issue and said the points made were well taken about bringing in similar counties. She said, unfortunately, the smaller rural counties that were just like ours were in the same position and had limited resources. She said that the counties are just now trying something new. She said she wanted to bring a group in that had already done something and that could say this was what they recommended that was working well in their county versus bringing in a County that has just started something and they don't really have stats knowing whether they liked it or not. She also said there were other counties just like us that have tried doing everything they could to keep the same system and everybody was comfortable that they were at the realization that it was not going to work.

Mrs. Battles asked do we have to get this issue concerning the gas tax to the ballot in November or working toward trying to get something in place.

Chair Holt said it was an election year and it was easier to get something on the ballot now. She said it would have to be marketed because there are some amendments on the ballot coming up. She said it is early enough that they could look at it. She said it should be marketed, whatever they decided on and have community meetings and state these were the top 3 choices.

Mrs. Battles said with the ½ Cent Sales Tax, they have been paying for 30 years. She asked for a workshop on how it was spent. Chair Holt said they could have a workshop and that could be a part of the debate on how they were spending the ½ Cent Sales Tax. She said they should also look back at a contract with CRMC. Mrs. Battles asked when the contract would expire.

Attorney Weiss said he didn't have his notes, but he had brought it up in a meeting. He said they are coming up (9 to 10 months) on the date where notice could be provided if they wanted to terminate the contract. He said they were a little more than 2 years out. He said they would need to provide one year notice if they wanted to start having conversations with them about negotiating terms of the contract. Chair Holt said they have to give them one year notice. She asked how much notice they have to give the County if they decide to leave and his response was 180 days to give us notice, something like 6 months.

Mrs. Ford asked who did the contract. Chair Holt said it was led by Attorney Mike Glazer.

Commissioner Viegbesie said that there were two parties to this contract and the County has an attorney that is representing the County interest in these negotiations. He asked who they have at the table during the negotiations to allow the negotiations to be so skewed.

Attorney Weiss said he did not personally negotiate that contract. He said Attorney Glazer did the contract and that he was an expert in that area. He said he did as well as he could for the County. He said that if they want to pose some revisions to the contract they can move forward with that. He said there are two parties and at the end of the day, it comes down to what the two parties can agree with.

Commissioner Hinson was present via phone. Mrs. Jackson said they are at their time and she asked in which direction staff should go.

4. Roundtable Discussion Regarding Gadsden EMS and Presented Information (ALL)

Chair Holt liked the options of both and felt it was worth it to look at the combination of both. She said if they are looking at doing a private contract then they would have to look at the annual income of the citizens and see if there is something that is comparable and put it out and see if anyone is interested in that. She said she did like the options of Leon County.

Commissioner Viegbesie suggested staff look at different hybrids of any one model that would work and bring back before the Commission with four options, how each one would look and determine what direction to go in to run the Emergency Service along with coming up with something that is fiscally sound.

Commissioner Holt mentioned interest off the hospital trust and said it was something that needed to be looked at.

Mrs. Jackson thanked everyone for their presentation and that they would bring options back before the Board to review. The meeting was adjourned at 5:59 p.m.

Citizens Requesting to be Heard on Non-Agenda Items (3-minute limit) – N/A

Adjournment

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD, CHAIR HOLT DECLARED THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 5:59 P.M.

GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA

BRENDA HOLT, CHAIR
Board of County Commissioners

ATTEST:

NICHOLAS THOMAS, CLERK