

Walworth County Fire/EMS Study Committee
May 18, 2017 Meeting Minutes
Walworth County Government Center, County Board Room 114
100 W. Walworth Street, Elkhorn, Wisconsin

The meeting was called to order by Chair Dale Wilson at 1:00 p.m.

Roll call was conducted, and a quorum of members was present: Chair Dale Wilson, Vice Chair John Peters, Dave Nelson, Denise Pieroni and Bruce Vander Veen (arrived at 1:06 p.m.). Lowell Hagen and James Weiss were excused. Dr. Steve Andrews, Dr. James MacNeal and County Administrator David Bretl were in also attendance.

Denise Pieroni made a motion, seconded by Dave Nelson, to move item 9 for consideration after the first Public Comment period, and to approve the agenda as amended. Motion carried 4-0.

Vice Chair Peters made a motion, seconded by Dave Nelson, to approve the April 20, 2017 meeting minutes. Motion carried by voice vote.

Public comment period – There was none.

County Administrator Bretl said the County recently purchased a license to use Polco software to survey members of the public, which may be useful in assisting with the Fire/EMS surveys. UW-Whitewater graduate Robert Kane gave a presentation on how the software obtains citizen input through social media and web pages. The software has a “cross platform” which can be shared with others. The survey results are authenticated by voter registration. The system can be loaded with questions, distributed and information collected and analyzed. He demonstrated different formats that can be used for surveys, which include a summary of the study purpose and goals. Kane provided his email address if anyone has further questions or concerns: robert@polco.us. Bretl thanked Mr. Kane and said one of the County Board committees will be approving final survey questions before they are distributed to the public.

Presentation from Gary Bell on Waukesha County Fire/EMS survey process

Chair Dale Wilson thanked Gary Bell, Director of Emergency Preparedness for Waukesha County, for coming to share his experience with the fire service study in Waukesha County. Mr. Bell said the survey began in 2015 when municipal leaders contacted the Waukesha County Executive to assist in gathering information on current fire services and whether some could be combined or shared for equal or less cost. The county budgeted \$50,000 in 2016 for the study and asked for local governments to contribute to defray the costs of the study. A committee was formed to develop an RFP for a consultant to assist with the study, and Waukesha County’s purchasing staff researched similar studies to develop the specifications. The municipal leaders were asked to reach out to their fire chiefs for their input into the process. Bell said that several departments were reluctant to participate because of the concern over equipment reduction and shared services being driven by the municipalities. A consulting firm from Missouri, Fitch & Associates, was retained to conduct the survey. Bell said it was difficult to procure information from departments, which was requested in 2016, and the data was just put into a usable format several weeks ago. The consultant’s survey was comprised of 24 pages of questions on equipment, replacement plans, types of staffing, etc. The consultant is in the process of aggregating the data and condensing it for analysis. Bell said the survey process is still in the data gathering stage, and most likely additional funds will be allocated for completing the study in their 2018-2019 budget. Dave Nelson asked Bell what he thought was the principal reason that departments didn’t respond, and Bell replied that not engaging the fire chiefs at the onset of the study was a poor decision. When the municipalities approached the County, the first question that the municipalities should have been asked was whether officials had discussed the issues with their chiefs first. Bretl asked about the decision to

hire a consultant to gather and analyze data. Bell said engaging a consultant was considered paramount to the success of the study because of the great amount of time involved in the process and the ability of the consultant to remain objective. Bell said critical data to be gleaned from the survey includes equipment resources, staffing models, number of calls, and where hazard areas are. Waukesha County didn't conduct a citizen survey. He advised against sending out a general email with the initial survey before engaging departments one-on-one to walk them through the purpose of the survey and data requests. Bell said ultimately, the survey findings will be furnished to municipal leaders to share with the fire chiefs and decide what action, if any, should be taken. Bell said the industry trend is moving toward privatization, particularly on the east coast. He will share information he obtained from a city in Virginia that implemented privatized EMS services. Dr. MacNeal commented that it seems Waukesha County is resource rich and there are mutual aid agreements in place among all the districts, which is a much different environment from Walworth County. He questioned how decisions could be made without obtaining citizen input on expected levels of service.

Chair Wilson thanked Mr. Bell for his candor and insight on Waukesha County's survey process. Committee discussion ensued about meeting with fire and EMS chiefs before sending out the detailed surveys to identify the prime areas of concern and add to or eliminate questions to enhance results.

Discussion and possible action regarding surveying Fire/EMS departments and local government

Chair Wilson said regardless of the process used in interviewing and surveying, it is critical not to convey an impression that the Committee has developed any priorities or solutions before input from departments. Meeting with the Chiefs Association and local EMS associations before launching the surveys is paramount to cooperation in gathering useful information. Dave Nelson reported the next Chiefs meeting is in LaGrange on July 12 and suggested that would be a good venue for discussing the study. Dr. MacNeal said community input is crucial; if the chiefs identify a lack of resources and the municipalities don't have money to support improved service, citizen demand will be the driving force behind taking action and committing funds to resolve issues. Denise Pieroni expressed concern about changing the survey instrument and not receiving useful data as a result. Dave Nelson expressed concern about the length of the survey; if information received takes two years to compile and analyze, data on equipment age, cost and replacement will be outdated.

Chair Wilson suggested reviewing the draft questions for the Governing Bodies and Fire/EMS Personnel surveys again. Committee consensus was that the Governing Body Survey was fine as presented.

Fire/EMS Personnel Survey

The Committee reviewed the Fire/EMS Personnel Survey question by question, with changes noted:

Question 14 will be reformulated into a table asking what systems departments would be willing to consider: hospital based, countywide, public/private partnership system, current system, or other, and insert Yes/No for delivery service options (also change Question 14 on the Government Body Survey); Add a question, 20A, which asks departments how many times they have had to call private transport because of their inability to meet state minimums; Question 21: change "ALS" to "paramedic"; Questions 22 – 25 were modified to make the language similar: in Questions 22 and 23, eliminate the words "qualified" and "responder" and add the word "apparatus" after Fire and EMS; in Questions 24 and 25, after "median" add "actual"; eliminate the word "response" after Fire and EMS; and add "apparatus en route"; make Question 37 two separate questions for fire and EMS applicant trends; in Questions 38 and 39, after "budget reports" add "for revenues and expenditures."

Denise Pieroni made a motion, seconded by Vice Chair Peters, to move up the second Public Comment on the agenda before the last item. Motion carried 5-0.

Public comment period

Elkhorn Fire Chief Rod Smith addressed the Committee. He stated he agrees with conducting a survey, but noted that departments are well aware that major issue is inadequate staffing levels and lack of funds to hire additional personnel. He asked how municipalities could stay under the 2% levy cap and provide adequate services to constituents. He commented that as hospitals are usually the end recipient of services, he proposes they be solicited to provide financing for certain services. He emphasized that time is of the essence in addressing recruitment and retention of trained personnel.

Discussion regarding next steps the Committee should take in the Fire/Ems study

Bruce Vander Veen recommended the final draft of the surveys be presented for approval at the next meeting. Discussion ensued on other future agenda items. Chair Wilson said he would include discussion/action on the draft transmittal letter for the survey instruments for fire and EMS personnel and elected officials; add an item on discussion/action on potential surveys for private providers and citizens; and set dates for meetings with the fire chiefs, EMS associations and municipalities. He will try to schedule a local legislator to attend to the next meeting to discuss the state's similar study and any pending legislation. Vice Chair Peters suggested placing goals and a mission statement on the web page for this Committee.

Chair Wilson said he would follow-up with Polco to see if it could be used to administer the survey and if they would collect the information and tabulate the data.

Confirmation of next meeting date and time: The next meeting will be scheduled for June 22 or June 29, 2017 at 1:00 p.m., depending on the availability of a local legislator and committee members.

Confirmation of the next meeting date will be sent to Committee members.

Adjournment

On motion by Denise Pieroni, seconded by Dave Nelson, Chair Wilson adjourned the meeting at 3:36 p.m.