

**Walworth County Fire/EMS Study Committee**  
**November 16, 2017 Meeting Minutes**  
**Walworth County Government Center, County Board Room 114**  
**100 W. Walworth Street, Elkhorn, Wisconsin**

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The meeting was called to order at 1.04 p.m. by Dale Wilson.

Roll call was conducted, and a quorum of members was present: Chair Dale Wilson, Dave Nelson, Denise Pieroni, Bruce Vander Veen and James Weiss. Vice Chair John Peters was excused. A quorum was declared.

Dr. Steven Andrews and County Administrator David Bretl were also in attendance.

Members of the public in attendance: Jim Baker-CEO of Medix Ambulance Service, Cheryl Kaufenberg, Dan Robakowski, and Chief Tim O'Neill

**Jim Weiss made a motion, seconded by Dave Nelson, to approve the agenda. Motion carried 5-0.**

**Bruce Vander Veen made a motion, seconded by Jim Weiss, to approve the October 19, 2017 meeting minutes. Motion carried by voice vote.**

**Public comment period**– There was none

**Unfinished Business**

- Review of citizen survey.

Wilson suggested holding off on the survey until the committee further analyzes the information they already have. Denise Pieroni, City Administrator of Delavan, stated she received two sample surveys with feedback concerning changes that could make the survey more user-friendly. She suggested committee members have at least a couple of people complete them and then have the subcommittee review the comments to look at revising some of the questions. She recommended deferring it until after the first of the year to avoid the holiday. Wilson agreed and mentioned that David Bretl, County Administrator, received feedback from the Leadership Walworth group as well. Bruce Vander Veen, Chief of Sharon Fire Department, stated he polled about five people in regards to how much more they would pay, but the question needs to have a number attached to it. Wilson and Pieroni agreed that thresholds were needed. **Pieroni made a motion, seconded by Nelson, to defer the citizen survey to the next meeting and that each committee member tries to obtain survey feedback from four to five people.**

- Review results of Governing Bodies Survey  
Item was deferred until after discussion of the Subcommittee's comments.
- Review results of Fire/EMS Personnel Survey  
Item was deferred until after discussion of the Subcommittee's comments.

## **New Business**

- Subcommittee update-chosen areas of focus

Wilson stated the subcommittee came up with five recommendations that the committee should consider to focus on going forward: how to appropriately share resources among departments, determine how to recommend a shared staffing model, inform the public of the staffing issue, discuss a potential centralized dispatch, and create partnerships for cost sharing. Weiss stated three of the five items all have the common theme of sharing and questioned if there is something that should be done to know it is not a waste of effort getting departments and officials to share. Wilson replied that entities will need to commit to it if they want to solve their staffing issues. Weiss stated the committee can provide direction, but the departments actually need to be willing to work together and it needs to be feasible to get it accomplished. Vander Veen stated that one of the focuses of the group is to educate. He stated municipalities were more interested in sharing than the departments and suggested that the group could inform them of the opportunities of sharing.

Dr. James MacNeal requested clarification on the differences between items one and five. Wilson stated that survey results showed staffing issues as a significant theme, so the subcommittee wanted to isolate it as its own item because if people are not willing to share other resources, maybe staffing might be something they would consider. The cost sharing factor suggests that departments/officials might not be willing to share staff, trucks, but divisions could come together and bid out services and come up with a model that could save funding but not necessarily share resources. Vander Veen stated the committee should not be too critical of the survey and that he has seen some answers that have potential and it is a matter of educating people. Denise stated the purpose of the survey was to see what people were actually interested in doing then come up with ideas. The survey showed that the majority were open to options and now it is the committee's role to explore the available options as a next step. Wilson agreed to make recommendations and give options to departments and municipalities. Nelson stated that committee members should take the five focus areas back to departments, discuss them, and allow departments to digest them. He thinks there may have been different perceptions on some of the questions and that the questions may need to be defined to make sure departments still agree.

Wilson stated there were some comments about centralized dispatch and felt it was fair to discuss it with the Sheriff to understand the current system and what advantages it has or will have if it were a centralized dispatch. Vander Veen added he would like the committee to follow up on the centralized dispatch; he would like to see what the county can do for the Fire/EMS system. He thinks it needs to be independent and not under the Sheriff; he suggested taking a look at Rock County's unified dispatches and see how it works and its advantages. He stated that some non-centralized dispatch centers cannot provide certain services depending on staffing and he thinks one centralized dispatch would help deliver a better product. Pieroni added when her municipality transitioned to a consolidated dispatch, it was more accepting and the terms of commitment were better since all the organizations involved had an opportunity for input on the matter. Bretl suggested touring the Sheriff's dispatch center and have the next committee meeting there as well as touring Rock County's dispatch center for a future meeting. Wilson suggested that the next meeting be focused on centralized dispatch and the tour.

**Nelson made a motion to take the five points and investigate each one and come up with a clear definition to what the committee is trying to get out of them and how we can take each one of those and go to departments and the governing boards to try and get some answers to solve our problems. Wilson seconded the motion.** Weiss stated he agreed with the motion and that they should make sure that each focus area is clarified as separate, unique items to get comparable answers. Pieroni expressed concern that the committee would not be moving forward and wanted to make sure that they are not just duplicating the purpose of the surveys. Wilson replied that the committee needs to consider how they address each focus point. Nelson clarified that his motion meant that the five focus points is a great starting point and they need to make sure each point is clarified and what the committee is trying to accomplish and get more data. Weiss agreed with Pieroni on moving forward; however, he stated that with all the different groups involved, each has a different opinion and the survey just touched the surface of those opinions. He continued to explain that the more information we can get from the people who gave the committee those ideas, they will be more willing to be involved because it is more of their ideas. Vander Veen suggested a brainstorm session with everyone to get people to open up and get suggestions that people will not write on a survey. **Motion carried 5-0.**

- Letter updating departments on the progress of the study  
Wilson suggested drafting a letter to send to everyone that completed the survey to communicate where the committee is headed, the focus areas, and their intent. Pieroni agreed and suggested stating in the letter that if the recipients had any ideas to provide those ideas to the committee. Wilson volunteered himself and Chief John Peters to develop a draft by the next committee meeting for feedback.
- Follow up regarding dispatch center (PSAPs)  
MacNeal stated the 911 committee met and they will be meeting with the EMD subcommittee. They discussed EMD dispatch criteria and adjusting those. It was also discussed to reduce the amount of automatic ALS they are sending. Their current system does not work well for a county that has medical directors involved or has their EMTs and AEMTs doing more skills. They are looking at cutting down criteria for automatic paramedic intercept to CPR indication, trauma to the head/neck/torso/penetrating trauma, altered mental status or uncontrolled hemorrhage after trauma. MacNeal thinks that those four criteria will stop the ALS from responding to every chest pain or dizzy person that fell. It could save some ALS availability per day. Andrews discussed the EMD lite which is for the dispatch centers that do not handle EMD; it provides pre-arrival instructions for cardiac arrest and bleeding. There are currently two, but it is something to be rolled out so there are some instructions for citizens before EMS arrives on the scene. Wilson questioned if this was something MacNeal and Andrew's agencies were undertaking to roll out to those PSAPs. Andrews replied that it had been reviewed and the intention is to send it out to the dispatch centers to implement. MacNeal stated the 911 committee also discussed the revision of the county-wide radio station and the ongoing study. He added that with a consolidated dispatch center, the consolidation of some of the alerting and dispatch channels could improve communication internally and between companies.

- Report/discussion from City of Delavan on private partnership for EMS

Pieroni introduced Tim O'Neill, the Chief of Delavan Police and Fire Department, and invited him to speak about private EMS. O'Neill stated that in Delavan they are at a disadvantage because they never had public EMS, it has always been private. For the last ten years, Delavan Rescue Squad has had full-time paramedics with two ambulances. Since Medix took it over, there has been one full-time paramedic rig with a second rig available during the daytime due to an increase in Delavan's population during the weekday. One disadvantage is that the private ambulance services a larger area, because no other Walworth County municipality has 24/7 paramedic service upon dispatch. He noted that the city challenge is keeping the Delavan ambulance available for responses in Dalavan. Delavan wants their resources available for their town but also to be available for other areas. Overall, it has been a success. Andrews questioned if there was an advantage to the fire component. O'Neill stated there is a working relationship; the paramedics are arriving before the squad cars so Delavan is not necessarily always using their resources.

MacNeal stated the City of Delavan is basically subsidizing the rest of the county's ALS. To his knowledge, they are the only ones in the county that are paying for ALS to be in their station. He finds it concerning that the City of Delavan, who pays for its own paramedic service, has had to call mutual aid 23 times in the past two months. He finds it interesting that the City of Delavan is paying people to be in their station, as are several other departments in the county, but they are also able to manage to have two ambulances in station with paramedic service. He questions why other communities are not able to get paramedic service for what they are paying and if they should be looking at the bids for the contracts that went out to the other municipalities to try and determine how the private revenue stream functions. O'Neill stated that it will be a part of their challenges as the availability of private ambulances decreases. Medix rigs have backfilled and Delavan has been able to help out, but lately private sector partners have not been able to backfill for the City of Delavan's station which has become an issue. He stated their scheduled people are out and they rely on mutual aid. Wilson questioned if it was due to call volume unrelated to Delavan's request. O'Neill stated he believes that it is and it becomes a county-wide problem because the City of Delavan is providing ambulance on a county-wide basis and the stress on their paramedics is greater.

Vander Veen questioned contract prices in regards to having a more captive ambulance in the City. Pieroni mentioned that there is more flexibility in terms of a second ambulance. If the 24/7 ambulance is available, then there is more flexibility in terms of or use of the second ambulance. If only one ambulance is available, it cannot leave the city (other than to respond to a call in Richmond) unless it is an ALS that no one else can handle. MacNeal stated the call volume is not subsidizing the City of Delavan and he does not think the City's price goes down based on call volumes, so they are getting less service for the same price. Pieroni replied that the agreement was that the day car had more flexibility, but the 24-hour vehicle was designed to stay in Delavan. MacNeal stated that when that day car is not there, they are not allowed under DHS 110 to respond to a paramedic intercept call because they are leaving their primary area uncovered; however, they can respond to a mutual aid request for an ambulance.

Wilson stated that according to the survey, there seems to be a staffing issue and questioned if there was a staffing issue with the private company that works with the City. O'Neill stated there is a staffing issue. He thinks the staffing level is because it's a greater area and there is a general shortage in ambulances in Walworth County. MacNeal commented that the Chief Executive Officer of Medix, Jim Baker, was at the 911 committee meeting and stated that they typically recruited a lot of their staff from the volunteer departments, but those people are basically no longer available. MacNeal suggested focusing on recruitment and getting into the high schools and encourage people to do cadet programs. Nelson referred back to MacNeal's comment on looking at how ALS is utilized and how many of times are due to protocol and policies versus how many times it is truly needed. He stated that it's hard to create more people and the way those people are utilized needs to be looked at closer. O'Neill stated that those departments that have some levels of service are willing to help, but they have to have that capability of the county-wide system of several ambulances. Vander Veen commented that within the last month fifty percent of their calls were from other communities. O'Neill stated that this gives the committee a good barometer of the amount of services needed in the county.

- Discussion regarding next steps

Wilson mentioned the committee has already discussed drafting of the letter to update departments and officials, deferring the citizen survey to the next meeting and reviewing the budget. Also, to conduct the next meeting at Sheriff's Office Dispatch Center and obtaining a report from them. Pieroni stated she would like the next meeting to be held at the Rock County Dispatch Center. Nelson thinks that the letter Wilson and Peters will be drafting is a great step because there are a lot of municipalities that attend these meetings and the committee needs to keep in contact with them so they feel like they have a chance to provide input. Pieroni commented on a short survey for the private companies and medical directors in regards to how difficult it is to staff and what their challenges are. MacNeal commented that he would like someone to take a look at the legal side of a county-wide EMS system. His understand is that it's not affected by referendum limits and that Door County has a county-wide EMS system and may be a good example. If the municipalities cannot pass referendums and still have problems, we need to determine how to structure a system that will outlive the arbitrary referendum caps that were put in place.

Vander Veen stated he attended "EMS Day" in Madison and one of the things they discussed was levy limits for EMS services and that county-wide EMS is exempt from levy limits. He stated that one issue with that is that the county may not want to be in EMS business but a larger municipality in the county might be willing to provide the service to the entire county or just a portion of the county; however, the cost for providing such services offered to part-time or paid EMS providers is not eligible to make use of the county-wide levy limits. Another ineligible situation is if several small towns or villages that rely on volunteer EMS want to form a joint service and have a small full-time EMS service. Vander Veen suggested that perhaps through county taxes the money could be distributed out. The survey shows that not everyone is on board with the county-wide system, but maybe there's a way to levy a tax that can provide the service. He stated that another area the committee needs to look at is "Community EMS." It's a program where EMTs and paramedics go out and meet with the frequent fliers and try to reduce the amount of frequent flier calls. The main thing he learned from "EMS Day" is that a lot of the

problems that the county is trying to solve cannot be solved as they are not active enough in trying to change things; however, he thinks there is some kind of an avenue through county-wide taxing authority to possibly solve some of the issues.

Vander Veen stated that referendums do not do much good because you are limited in your shared revenue and your people could be paying a higher part of the bill so it is counterproductive. Bretl commented on Fontana's recent referendum which was recently passed, and suggested having someone from Fontana attend a future meeting to discuss it. Pieroni said it might be a responsibility of the committee to identify changes or support for changes at the State level to allow more flexibility on some of these things. MacNeal discussed the EMS system of Lucas County, Ohio and which has a county-wide EMS system. Vander Veen questioned Walworth County's ability to contract for services. Bretl asked what the survey results were in regards to a county-wide system because one of the fears he had was if people thought the county was trying to take control of things. Wilson stated that the survey results revealed that the option to have a county-wide system received a "yes" from 11 departments and a "no" from two. Bretl suggested that it might be worth discussing in more detail with the chiefs because there are different levels of county-wide EMS services. Vander Veen stated this could be augmented into a tiered system.

MacNeal stated perhaps they are looking for a county-subsidized EMS as a term to convey that the county is not attempting to take over departments but instead finding different ways to make sure resources are provided for the entire county. Andrews added that Milwaukee County started off as a municipally-provided, county-supported service and though the county has backed out from a lot of their funding obligations, there is still a fair amount of Milwaukee County money going to support the EMS services in the county. Bretl suggested looking at the library system because their tax levys are non-uniform. He stated the county is exempt from non-uniform levys. MacNeal stated the problem with that is if a municipality wants to be exempt from it, they are still going to get one of the county paramedic units when no one shows up in their local community. It is different from the library system because EMS is mobile and allows people to opt out of it. Wilson questioned if it could be fee-based if a municipality decided to opt out. MacNeal stated some may opt out have their own resources and now they can bill at the ALS level. He stated that talking to Chief Nitsch from Fontana will be interesting because their referendum passed by a very wide margin.

Vander Veen stated that the State cannot bill for the "Community EMS," but maybe once it can be, it may be helpful and the county should not pass it up. MacNeal stated there are several different models such as staff doing community care visits between shifts or have staff that is only assigned to those tasks. A couple issues with this is that it's hard for the hospitals to want to pay for that when they have their own staff for services to pay for and the ambulance reimbursement is not good right now; it has not increased in years. Bretl questioned the difficulty of calls that are not true emergencies. Vander Veen replied that it is difficult because it kills volunteerism. MacNeal stated that the problem with the "Community EMS" is that if the patient is not transported, the paramedic does not get paid for the response. In his opinion, the question is: reducing the call volume to promote volunteerism versus continuing to run the calls and take care of patients at the conventional model; however, the insurance industry and the subsidies

coming to “Community EMS” has not caught up to make the difference for not transporting those patients. Andrews stated currently there is no way to pay for “Community EMS” and until it can be funded, it would be too difficult. Bretl suggested having some members of Health and Human Services (HHS) attend a meeting to discuss if there is a way for the department to intervene with patients before picking up the phone to call for emergency services. MacNeal stated that a big problem is that a lot of these people should not be in their homes and the advantage to “Community EMS” is staff being able to go and see these people on their own time rather than wait until the patients contact the ambulance and then no one is available. Bretl stated the demographics of seniors are going through the roof; maybe there are grant opportunities through HHS worth exploring. Vander Veen stated he was at the Paul Ryan Advisory Committee meeting and they discussed some of the problems that are going to occur such that about 70% of the working population is going to retire in the next ten years and only 22% coming in to replace them.

Wilson circled back to the investigation of the county-wide tax. Bretl suggested researching Door County’s system and bringing that information back for the February meeting as well as having Liz Aldred, Director of HHS, attend the February meeting to discuss strategies for non-emergency calls.

**Public comment period-** O’Neill spoke on behalf of the 911 Committee and he encouraged the tours, and suggested the committee tour Waukesha because they have a lot of similarities to Walworth County. He stated the 911 Committee has toured some Illinois operations. Twenty-five years ago, Illinois went through what the county is currently going through. Now Illinois is going to a regional dispatch center; they already did the county-wide dispatch center. He suggested to committee members to keep an open mind, tour PSAPs, and that it would be time well spent. Bretl mentioned exploring the idea of skipping a step since there is already an existing independent dispatch center. Bretl asked O’Neill if he could speak about the 911 Committee at the December meeting when the committee meets at the Sheriff’s Office. O’Neill stated he would be willing to do so. He also mentioned that another topic that was discussed at the 911 Committee meeting is that their PSAPs are sharing resources with the county. Whitewater has a bridge to the county PSAP which is almost fully operational; Delavan is doing a ProPhoenix computer dispatch with the county in which they will be relying on the county for mobile data in squad cars and relying on county dispatch. He stated that there are good things already taking place in the area even with local PSAPs, and the more it can be investigated, better service can be provided to citizens.

**Confirmation of next meeting date and time:** Walworth County Sheriff’s Office or Rock County Dispatch Center, Friday, December 15, 2017 at 9:00 a.m.

## **Adjournment**

**On motion by Vander Veen, seconded by Pieroni, Chair Wilson adjourned the meeting at 2:54 p.m.**