



BERTIE COUNTY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BERTIE COUNTY VOTES TO IMPLEMENT NON-EMERGENCY TRANSPORT SERVICE

Bertie County to sustain a countywide EMS Paramedic system, and will take on a fully operational non-emergency transport service.

WINDSOR, NC - The Bertie County Board of Commissioners held its midyear planning session January 16th and 17th at the Roanoke Cashie River Center in Windsor to prepare for the upcoming budget process, where the Board focused primarily on the issue of sustaining the countywide EMS Paramedic system.

Ultimately, the Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to implement a comprehensive EMS Paramedic program with a fully operational non-emergency transport service, which is projected to provide additional revenue and avoid placing further tax burdens on the citizens of Bertie County.

The County's EMS consultant, Mr. David Clary, presented a two hour detailed fiscal analysis and projected that "Bertie County's operational deficit for emergency Paramedic services could range between \$813,577 and \$1,138,280 on an annual basis "without the support of a non-emergency transport component." The impact for the taxpayers would be an increase in the property tax rate ranging 7 to 10 cents per \$100 assessed valuation, according to County Manager Scott Sauer.

The County Manager clarified the impact of the County's potential operating deficit calculated by the EMS consultant, as compared with the various bids that were received from local transport companies this past spring, emphasizing that the bid proposals constituted a recurring annual appropriation, requiring a major tax increase and paid as a subsidy to the private operators who are unable to make a profit with the Emergency Paramedic Service.

Mr. Clary emphasized that "Bertie County would be well advised to augment the emergency Paramedic program with the establishment of non-emergency transport services for movement of patients between facilities."

Chairman J. Wallace Perry suggested to his fellow Commissioners, "Gentlemen, we owe it to the people of Bertie County to do whatever it takes to provide emergency Paramedic services for all of our citizens without a tax increase."

If the Board had rejected First Med's bid, and accepted one of the higher bids from a local transport company, the taxpayers would have been hit with an immediate tax rate increase ranging from 6 cents to twelve cents, according to Sauer.

Since the bids weren't reviewed until after the beginning of the new fiscal year in July 2013, the General Fund reserves would have absorbed the year-one impact, followed by a tax rate increase for FY 2014-2015. First Med's proposal was approved at the Board's July 15, 2013 meeting according to County Manager Sauer.

Sauer shared his impression that the local transport providers are already making significant profits and were looking to the County for a taxpayer subsidy, hitting Bertie citizens with a tax rate increase of at least 6 to 12 cents, a burden that would grow over time.

According to County Manager Sauer, the steps that the Board of Commissioners are taking now, and in the next few months will provide the greatest taxpayer protection for the immediate and near future, while ensuring that all residents receive uniform service and response times—at the highest quality pre-hospital level of emergency care possible through Paramedic services.

“The private providers have different motivation (profit) while the Board of Commissioners is seeking to provide fair and equal access to emergency care for 21,000 residents who are spread over a 700 square mile geographic area,” Sauer said.

County Attorney Lloyd Smith advised the Board that “you have a compelling public interest” in taking steps to provide a long term, financially sound EMS Paramedic program and non-emergency transport service for the citizens of Bertie County.

With questions coming from each of the Commissioners about how best to proceed, Mr. Clary provided a step by step series of recommendations to initiate “a full complement of Paramedic and Transport services with a business plan to sustain the operation without negatively impacting the taxpayers of Bertie County.”

Commissioner John Trent suggested that “we need to direct our County Attorney to review the existing ambulance transport ordinance, so that we can evaluate the best approach to getting up and running as recommended by our consultant, Mr. Clary.”

After much discussion with statements of support from each Commissioner, Vice Chairman Charles Smith offered a motion to proceed with the EMS Paramedic and non-emergency transport service as recommended.

The motion to proceed was seconded by Commissioner Ronald Wesson, and the Chairman called for the vote which was unanimous.

Commissioner Rick Harrell congratulated his fellow commissioners, stating “Gentlemen, this is a good decision for Bertie County.”

On December 12, 2013 following First Med's unforeseen corporate decision to shut down all operations across the country, the Board voted unanimously to maintain County operated EMS Paramedic service for the remainder of the fiscal year through June 30, 2014 and appropriated \$1.2 million to cover those

costs. Mr. Clary's initial presentation to the Board on December 18th convinced the governing body that sustaining the EMS Paramedic program would be possible with the development of a business plan to include non-emergency transport services.

Chairman J. Wallace Perry called for an emergency meeting of the Board on December 9, 2013 when the County initially learned of First Med's plans to file for Chapter 7 bankruptcy. The Board initiated an immediate contingency plan with offers of temporary employment to existing First Med personnel and seizure of the company's assets with the county attorneys' effort to seek a temporary restraining order, which was filed on December 9th and approved by Senior Resident Superior Court Judge Quentin T. Sumner the following morning. The Board of Commissioners lifted the County's State of Emergency proclamation thirty days later.

Questions and interview requests may be directed to County Manager Scott Sauer by phone at (252) 794-6112 or by email at scott.sauer@bertie.nc.gov.

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