

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
UNION COUNTY, FLORIDA
ADJOURNED MEETING
AUGUST 17,2021

NOTE: If any person decides to appeal any decision made with respect to any matter considered at this meeting or hearing, he or she will need a record for the proceedings and may need to ensure that a verbatim record is made.

PRESIDING: James Tallman, Chair

RECORDING: Pamela H. Woodington, Finance Director, Office of Clerk of Courts & Comptroller

ATTENDING: Commissioner Lacey Cannon; Commissioner Channing Dobbs; Commissioner Ryan Perez; James Williams, County Coordinator; Dianne Hannon, Board Secretary; Russ Wade, County Attorney, Wayne Clemons, EMS Director.

MEETING RECONVENED

Chair Tallman reconvened the meeting at 5:30 pm.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES DISCUSSION

Chair Tallman began discussion with concerns of calls not being responded to by our EMS Department. He stated that he has spoken with EMS Director, Wayne Clemons on several occasions in reference to his concerns of the EMS Department. One of these discussions pertained to three calls made in just a few minutes of one another. On this particular date, no EMS personnel were available to respond, nor was support available from mutual aid. Chair Tallman stated the Board of County Commissioners is responsible for how departments are managed, and to meet the needs of the citizens. He said that something in this department has to change and he is ready for those changes to start now. He said, ultimately, that there have been situations beyond any one individual's control, due to COVID and a young work force. However, Emergency Medical Services is a department that has to be available to serve our citizens and not break the bank. Chair Tallman considers Commissioner Cannon as the expert on the Board to assist with guidance in this department. He stated that all departments are important, but the EMS Department is the most important because this department saves lives.

Commissioner Perez echoed Chair Tallman's comments about the importance of the EMS employee's concerns and included that he has received several phone calls in reference to the management of the EMS Department. Commissioner Perez, also stated that a lot of time is being spent with employee issues and they need to be addressed, so that the focus on solving other issues, such as employee shortage would then be the priority. If this was another department it would not be as disturbing, but because of it being EMS Department it is in fact, a matter of life-or-death situations. Commissioner Perez continued that he is confident that from this discussion, the Board can reach a conclusion addressing concerns in the EMS Department and have a plan on moving forward.

Commissioner Dobbs stated there is always room for improvement. He also notated another issue, the AED program. He stated the ball was definitely dropped, the machines and the training have not been implemented in a timely manner. He stated that he is aware of the current scheduled date of Thursday, August 19th at the EMS office, but this scheduled training has been a long time coming. Commissioner Dobbs also stated that he was not certain where the direction of the EMS administrative assistant position being limited to working and being paid for 40 hours a week came from. He wished Mr. Clemons, would have addressed this earlier with Mr. Williams or the Board.

Chair Tallman replied that the 40-hour week directive may have been given from the previous leadership, but Chair Tallman was not aware of that direction. He also regrets that this was not addressed earlier, he hopes the EMS Administrative Assistant does not hold a grudge toward the current Board and take legal action. Chair Tallman also stated it is not Mr. Williams' responsibility to oversee and assist in managing the EMS Department. Mr. Williams is responsible for overseeing all departments and directors but not managing the departments on a daily basis. Mr. Williams should not need to be present at the EMS Department assisting in managing the daily office operations. Mr. Clemons has been hired for that responsibility. Chair Tallman stated Mr. Clemons needs to hire employees and surplus equipment that needs to be sold. Mr. Clemons explained that he has requested to have items sold at surplus, and it just hasn't happened to date. Chair Tallman also stated that we can't continue to hemorrhage monies, that we need to find a better way. He also stated that it is the Board's responsibility to find a better way. Chair Tallman then asked how private services make things work, which he directed to Commissioner Cannon.

Commissioner Cannon responded that Century and Liberty run as a business. These companies contract for an agreed amount. Commissioner Cannon continued to explain that if the ambulance service is called for a run, in addition to the standard insurance billing, the ambulance service also charges for wait time. Commissioner Cannon added for the record, he would never vote for Union County EMS services to be privatized, that there are several ways to enhance revenue, and additional services that we can provide.

Chair Tallman questioned as to what are we going to do in the future with the rising cost of Emergency Medical Services. He also added Union County has been blessed with CARES Act and ARPA monies, but asked about the future, directing his question to Pamela Woodington, Finance Director. Mrs. Woodington answered with insurance billing, we have no control over contractual adjustments. She added that we do, however, have control over collections and who the Board decides will provide that service, The Board decides the company to provide the services of both billing and collections. Mr. Williams stated that it is the responsibility of the county to provide Emergency Medical Services, and we are limited to the revenues received from Ad Valorem Taxes, which have not increased as much as our neighboring counties, due to the amount of state-owned land in Union County which is tax exempt. Commissioner Cannon stated we are similar in size and makeup to Hamilton County, and suggested we should emulate how their EMS Department is structured. He also stated that we have begun taking action by the things we can control such as revising the fee schedule and discussions with the billing company. Commissioner Cannon suggested that we work with a debt collections agency, and that we should consider the use of an employee to begin calling on past due accounts. He also added to increase revenue we need to increase our response to the prison.

Commissioner Dobbs agreed that at the end of the day, we need less turnover and to become fully staffed. He continued with questioning of what can Union County offer to recruit new employees and build longevity.

Mr. Clemons answered that the upcoming construction of a new station and renovation of the current station should be a positive recruitment tool. Chair Tallman then asked again to sell surplus items. Chair Tallman stated we have to have some bigger ideas and plans, and we must take every opportunity to move forward. Mr. Clemons emphasized that he does not want to put the citizens of Union County at risk. Commissioner Cannon reiterated that we already have alleviated the problem of leaving citizens without available ambulances. We have guaranteed revenue from the prison, and conversations with Lake Butler Hospital, we just have to take the calls. Chair Tallman challenged Mr. Clemons to gather information to surplus any other equipment and get it sold, and to hire employees.

Commissioner Perez asked Mr. Clemons what he's doing above and beyond his normal job description. Mr. Clemons stated that he has worked a truck, worked extra 8, 12 and 24 hour shifts and listened to radio calls, he has spoken with chiefs in other counties in reference to mutual aid and availability. He expressed that he will do whatever is needed to avoid another day as the previous day of call overload. His plan is to continue recruiting from the colleges. Commissioner Cannon directed Mr. Clemons to make potential employees aware that we pay roughly the same pay, with the same medical director and run less calls. As our neighboring counties. Then Commissioner Tallman asked the board members their thoughts regarding incentive pay for new hires and seasoned employees as a potential recruiting tool for the long term. Commissioner Tallman directed Mr. Williams to have a discussion with Hamilton County Director Toby Witt, for comparisons of their department to Union County to determine what they are doing to have a positive impact. Chair Tallman also stated to immediately begin running the third truck to work the prison calls, starting with a 12-hour shift, which is the only option. Attorney Wade asked for delegation to surplus the depreciated equipment. **Commissioner Dobbs moved to surplus the Expedition, jet ski & trailer, Ambulances R-4 and R-2. Commissioner Perez seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.**

Mr. Williams made the Board aware that at this time, it is approximately 8 months out for delivery if the Board decides to purchase a new ambulance with the American Rescue Plan Funding.

Commissioner Dobbs suggested that every ambulance should be fitted with the "power lifts" to make things easier for employees and prevent injuries.

Mr. Williams stated that a debt collection agency is working on the bad debt. Mr. Clemons stated that if the debt collector collects 3%, which is the industry average, that is a good company. Chair Tallman suggested we investigate collecting our own debts. Mr. Williams reminded the Board that there are local companies who are aggressive with collections and that is their business. Attorney Wade stated that Florida is a debtor state and it is difficult to collect medical debt.

Chair Tallman challenged Mr. Clemons to begin by Friday, August 21st the implementation of the third ambulance. Commissioner Perez stated that Lake Butler Hospital would work with us, we just have to provide the service. Mr. Williams clarified the current agreement with Lake Butler Hospital states that if the patient has insurance, Liberty or Century would be called first. If the patient doesn't have insurance, then Lake Butler Hospital would call UCEMS and Lake Butler Hospital would then provide payment.

Commissioner Cannon adamantly stated that he has requested Union County EMS be the hospital's first call, and that those requests have not been made to Lake Butler Hospital to date. Mr. Williams and Mr. Clemons remarked that Lake Butler Hospital has been calling us, but Union County EMS doesn't have the proper personnel in place to respond. Commissioner Cannon stated that if Lake Butler Hospital or the prison calls and our EMS department has two or three ambulances available, then that's the job, and our department needs to respond. Mr. Williams stated that EMS does take all prison 911 calls and these calls have not taken away any services provided to our citizens. Commissioner Cannon also noted that the prison pays as billed, and we need not be concerned with collection. Mr. Clemons commented that EMS is only one position down. Commissioner Cannon offered to speak to EMS employees in reference to the decision made by the Board to offer transport services to the prison and Lake Butler Hospital. Commissioner Dobbs stated that work ethic, in general, in this time is just not the same as we he began his work career. Commissioner Cannon restated that we should pick up calls if we have availability, but of course, to not leave our citizens bare. He continued that we must move forward with the plans that have been made and the Board has agreed upon. Commissioner Cannon also directed Mr. Williams to call Warden

Edwards and Warden Palmer to have discussed plans implemented. Commissioner Cannon agreed to call Mr. Toby Witt for discussion on how revenues are generated in Hamilton County.

Appointment to the Recreation Board

Commissioner Perez stated that, with this meeting being a continuation of the Monday night Regular Meeting, he would like to add to his commissioner report. He spoke with Chelsey Dukes and she has agreed to be the Treasurer for the Recreation Board and would like approval as such, by the Board. **Commissioner Cannon moved that Chelsey Dukes be appointed as Treasurer of the Recreation Board and Commissioner Perez seconded. The motion passed unanimously.**

Other Business

Commissioner Cannon asked Mr. Williams if he had any other items to discuss. Mr. Williams stated he would make phone calls to both wardens and Hamilton County EMS Director Toby Witt. Mr. Williams also stated he would review the contract with the billing company to begin billing directly to the prisons. Mr. Clemons agreed to gather the detailed information of the equipment to sell.

Commissioner Dobbs moved to adjourn. Mr. Clemons stated he appreciates the Boards' time and suggestions into assisting him become a better director. He assured the Board that he will do whatever it takes to be successful. Chair Tallman stated he thinks Mr. Clemons is a man of his word and he will work hard. Commissioner Dobbs asked Mr. Clemons if would begin paramedic training, Mr. Clemons did not respond. Commissioner Perez suggested that in 30 days, the changes that were directed by the board by reviewed. **Chair Tallman adjourned meeting 7:35 p.m.**

Adopted by vote of the Board of County Commissioners on November 15, 2021.