

# **Greene County Ambulance Review Study Meeting No. 5**

## **Minutes Summary**

Wednesday, April 9, 2025, 6:00 P.M.

Greene County 911 Center, 25 Volunteer Drive, Cairo, NY

### **Greene County EMS Evaluation Committee Membership, Ambulance Policy Group, EMT's, Paramedics, Greene County Legislature, Media, Staff, Members of the Public:**

Steven Near, Beau Dushane, Gerard Laird, Davia Montie, George June, Nadine Myrdycz, Mark Evans, Sean Hotaling, Jim DiPerna, Neil Kellegher, Shaun S. Groden, Patrick S. Linger, Matthew Luvera, Harry Lennon, Charles Martinez, Patricia Handel, James Thorington, Greg Davis, John Bensen, Sean Mahoney, Thomas Hoyt, Dr. Craig Stanger, Laney Bruck, Michael Bulich, Daryl Legg, Sherry B. True, James O'Connell, Michael D. Lanuto, Jr., Michael Pirrone, JoEllen Schermerhorn, Michael Ryan, Dolph Semenza, Paul Macko, Patricia McAneny, Pete Kusminsky, Raymond Ward, Ariel Woolheater, Jennifer Moore-Warren, Brian Turley, Aiden S. O'Connor, Jr., Philip Myers, Barbara Pforte, Ericka Benjamin, Stephen Tuomey, William VonAtzingen, Spencer Hotaling, Kevin Forbes, Tanya Ernst

### **Synopsis:**

Chairman Linger opened Ambulance Review Study Meeting No. 5 at 6:04 p.m. and turned the meeting over to Mr. Groden who began by reviewing the handouts contained in the binder packet. Mr. Groden discussed cost projections which included payroll increases for running a ten-car shift which would amount to 210,000 hours of work per year; when augmented to include paid time-off, it came to 230,000 to run a ten-car system. A 7/3/5 car system is seven EMT transport rigs, three ambulances staffed with paramedics, which would be minimum baseline coverage for the call volume that the County consistently has, and five fly cars. He then applied market hourly rates, which increased wages by \$1.5 million plus \$1.7 million for additional personnel, which increases the overall expense of the system to \$3.2 million. Two possible scenarios are: maintaining the existing system as independently run with the County contributing additional funding in some ratio or inducing a private company from Albany to run the operations with a base minimum of standard. Mr. Groden explained each of the possible scenarios relating to the graphs that were distributed and the impact. The wage and personnel increase's impact are based upon salary and benefit estimates only and did not factor in equipment, fleet, or facility information. If the towns were to stay in business and the County contributed additional funds, there would be uniformity. The County would ask the towns to enter into intermunicipal agreements that included wage parity and standardization of equipment, training, etc. Otherwise, the current problems that exist within the system would remain. Currently, we have a ten-rig system depending upon an a.m. or p.m. shift, but, due to staffing shortages, we don't have enough people to fill a full ratio. There are always times when we're relying on mutual aid from other areas.

Jim DiPerna confirmed this and stated that this is a regular occurrence and can change within minutes; it's driven by the day and hour and what calls are coming in. Every day, ambulances move to create coverage.

Mr. Groden stated that the flycar system is working and that it is the BLS system that needs to improve to get us to a consistent baseline. Mr. Groden asked the following questions: What happens with the existing contributions the towns currently pay, which are approximately \$4.5 million? Does everything come to Greene County? Do the towns eliminate the \$4.5 million from their respective levies?

George June stated that the problem is staff and that pay parity across the workforce is not a recruitment tool but a retention tool. Bringing everyone up to the same pay scale may keep some people working in the system a little bit longer before they jump ship; it will retain some of the existing workforce but will not be enough to recruit more people.

Mark Evans spoke about how we can't recruit, can't retain, and can't pay enough, which is the problem in the towns along with not having a hospital in the County. Trying to attract people to come to this County is difficult because they look at the schools and the hospital. If you don't have a hospital, at least you should have a great EMS system. We need to get the full cost, evaluate, and then decide. Doing pockets of consolidation will not solve the problem. If the money is there to do a complete consolidation, do it. People don't care what the name on the side of the ambulance is. They just want an ambulance there when it's needed; we don't have enough.

Charmain Linger said that standardization is going to be key with everybody on the same page and working toward the same goals. Some of the resources that we would need to get this off the ground may come from within existing County departments like the Sheriff's Department or Human Resources. Chairman Linger believes that waiting is probably one of the worst things we can do because there will come a day when an ambulance gets called and nobody shows up. The system needs to be built with more full-time and part-time employees by growing our own and giving them a career path and a quality system. Chairman Linger agreed that the flycar system that is in place works and that it's BLS that needs adjustment.

Legislator True asked if anyone has spoken with any of the other counties to see where they are in the process. Mr. Groden responded that, according to the studies, most other counties are facing similar issues to Greene County.

Legislator Lanuto added that a few existing ambulances contract with towns that don't have an ambulance.

Tom Hoyt mentioned that five mountaintop towns would consolidate in order to be eligible for the NYS SSI Consolidation Grant. Mr. Groden and Chairman Linger had a call with the state which would match the savings. Sean Mahoney and Tom Hoyt agreed that their towns are ready to do this and would be willing to become the prototype for the County. Sean Mahoney believes that it's an attainable goal and that it isn't that large of an additional burden if the system is structured in such a way as to become much better.

Mr. Groden explained that the pay rate he factored in would be to have trainees at \$20, \$24, \$28, \$36; he then applied social security, pension, and balanced it between full-time and part-time for healthcare benefits. \$7.1 million is just the levy amount and not the total expense of all

operations. The invoicing, which is between \$1.5 and \$2.0 million, may pick up the operating expenses of gasoline, bandages, equipment, etc.

Ray Ward explained the charts that were part of the binder packet and stated that there is a 1.1 variable; using 2025 taxes, the towns are levying \$4.6 million. (Greene EMS being aside.) If the \$4.6 million that the towns are levying, to get to the \$10.5 million, we would be out \$3.5 million which will cost the average single-family homeowner an additional \$100.

Sean Mahoney spoke about the positive effects of a countywide system including that it will be more efficient and will have the ability to recruit and move employees through the career ranks. It would also have buying power. Chairman Linger added that in-house, standardized training would be another benefit. Chairman Linger agreed that increasing pay rates is not going to pull people from Albany County or Columbia County. The potential for doing so lies in providing a career path and advancement.

Mr. Groden stated that the common response among town supervisors is that paying more money is a short-term solution because some towns don't want to be in business anymore due to the workload and the staff shortages.

Mark Evans spoke about the idea of growing your own and the importance of having the best EMS possible. He spoke about catching the bug as the reason for getting into EMS which is a calling and a passion. He said that if you're going to grow your own, you would have a system where you go into the schools and get them on one call and, chances are, you'll hook them in a similar way as the fire department. If they go on one call, they get hooked, and they join. They may be there for a couple years and go to college, or they become forty-year members. There are ways to attract these people. It's a different and great breed of people. Is it money? Yes. Is it a career path? Yes. A lot of it is just getting these people onto an ambulance or a medic truck and have them go on a call; that's part of why Greene EMS is successful because we get these students down here and they ride, and they do a couple calls and they're like the system.

Sean Mahoney asked if the existing system can be augmented with a private contractor for one or two rigs.

Steve Near didn't feel that was a good idea and referenced that Delaware County pays \$2.5 million for AMR and have two BLS ambulances and a flycar for the entire County. He stated that if you open the door and bring one in just to stabilize, they'll never go.

Mr. Groden stated that no matter which solution is chosen, there are questions that need to be answered as to who will be seeking and losing the CON designation; what will happen with the existing town levy of \$4.6 million dollars; do we extend the Fitch contract to have them do an asset management evaluation; what's the status of fleet and equipment; what are the protocols on training? Mr. Groden also gave an update regarding the special taxing jurisdiction with the State and explained that it appears that it will not pass the Legislature because there is no agreement between the Assembly and the Senate. Moving forward, it will be necessary to present to the public at a number of public forums to provide information regarding the situation, the options, and the impact. Regarding the special taxing jurisdiction, it appears that it will no longer be an

option, therefore, if a town wanted to stay independent, they can't be cut out by a special taxing jurisdiction.

The question was asked about the Town of Halcott's agreement with the County. Mr. Groden responded that the rate for Halcott is factored into their assessed valuation and that Greene County cuts a check to Halcott depending on what their property value is. Halcott then contracts with Delaware County; Greene County doesn't provide any services to Halcott. A follow-up question was asked about what happens if another town wants the same treatment that Halcott gets. Mr. Groden stated that it would be a decision that would have to be made but believed that if Halcott receives it then any other town would be eligible.

Chairman Linger asked if the County got the CON, would we be able to contract with Catskill, Windham, or Durham to provide services and leave some of the existing ambulance services in place while the County transitions to a countywide system. The response received was that, if the County goes for a CON, the County could contract with anybody they wanted. Mark Evans said that whatever town participates would have to turn in their CON. Someone responded that it's possible that the Department of Health would make the towns that become part of the countywide system turn their CONs in. There was further discussion regarding CONs and ambulance coverage in more remote areas of the County. Chairman Linger stated that he reviewed the State grant funding and is not sure how the County would fit under it. The State seems to think that there's money which is positive. If the County can pull another 1.25 million into this as a start-up, it might take care of a lot of the costs. Mr. Groden stated that it is a competitive grant, but that the people they spoke with knew enough about the County's situation and thought that we would be a good candidate. He cautioned that it would be a single grant and not permanent financing but could breach some start-up costs. Without a taxing jurisdiction, the only way to raise the money would be to extend the cost across the entire County. Chairman Linger stated that he was all for the County applying for a CON right away and figuring out the details in the first fiscal year. Therefore, the County would apply for a CON and then contract with individual towns and incorporate them in over the next year.

A number of Legislators stated that it's important to get a total of everything, not just the personnel, but that the total should include the fleet and the building. Mr. Groden agreed that we can't walk into this blind.

Legislator Handel believes that it is ambitious to think that on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026, we'll be going to a new system.

Chairman Linger and Mr. Groden thanked everyone for their regular attendance. The meeting was adjourned at 7:42 p.m.