

Greene County Ambulance Review Study Meeting No. 6

Minutes Summary

Wednesday, May 14, 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, Mark Evans, Sean Hotaling, Jim DiPerna, Shaun S. Groden, Patrick S. Linger, Matthew Luvera, Harry Lennon, Charles Martinez, Patricia Handel, James Thorington, Greg Davis, Richard E. Tompkins, Patrick McCulloch, John Bensen, Sean Mahoney, Greg Cross, Thomas Hoyt, Laney Bruck, Michael Bulich, Jay Lucas, Daryl Legg, Sherry B. True, James O'Connell, Michael D. Lanuto, Jr., Michael Pirrone, Richard Hanse, Shawn Marriot, JoEllen Schermerhorn, John P. Farrell, Jr., Dolph Semenza, Paul Macko, Raymond Ward, Travis Whitbeck, Ariel Woolheater, Jennifer Moore-Warren, Brian Tumey, Aidan S. O'Connor, Jr., Philip Myers, Barbara Pforte, Patrick Pugsley, Jr., Tami Bone, LilyAnn Orszulak, Kevin Forbes, Tanya Ernst

Synopsis:

Chairman Linger opened the meeting at 6:05 p.m. and thanked everyone for their continued attendance and cautioned about commenting on social media posts as nothing has been decided and the discussion is ongoing. Chairman Linger then turned the meeting over to Mr. Groden.

Mr. Groden reviewed the meeting handouts and stated that the County has identified the cost of the current system to be \$10,900,000 when all things are considered between the Towns, County, and the receipts from invoicing insurance companies (Medicaid, Medicare, etc.). The estimated cost of a consolidated system would be \$15 million. The \$4.1 million increase would be more than what has been adopted in the respective budgets. What can't be determined is if a centralized system would have additional revenue coming from insurance companies and what the annual savings would be from bulk purchasing. Mr. Groden thanked Mr. Ward and Mr. Forbes for their work on the charts. Mr. Groden explained that the changes shown on the charts represent increased wages and increased personnel. He then said that short-term rental sales tax, which may be in the range of \$1.5 million in fiscal year 2026, may be dedicated to help compensate for the impact of a countywide ambulance service. The fourth chart is with the County paying for Town levies, expanded payroll, and short-term rental reduction for a total impact of 29 percent, presuming that Town budgets will be offset. Mr. Groden referred to the college chargebacks that the County took over which occurred over the course of five years. The ambulance system would also start at twenty percent. He explained that the average home currently pays \$277 per year for the combined EMS ambulatory system that includes flycars. The increase in personnel would add \$125 for the average home value which would include operating expenses, payroll, healthcare, retirement, and routine repairs. Every Town is different and will result in fourteen different equations due to the varying levels of assessment and apportionment. A countywide levy would then be applied across fourteen different towns each with different assessed valuations and different compositions of residential, commercial, industrial, and farm. Mr. Groden asked Mr. Ward to provide further details.

Mr. Ward then reviewed and explained each of the charts in detail. Chart 1 is current EMS tax funding which totals \$7.442 million. Chart 2 is the actual funding with the revenue added; the system operates on \$10.9 million. The countywide system would go from an \$11 million to a \$15 million operation with the added personnel. Chart 3 is the current Town EMS tax funding with the added personnel increase. Chart 4 shows the Town levy converted to a County levy, which is consistent at 100 percent. Chart 5 is the same information that is in all the other charts but broken down across the fourteen towns. Chart 6 is the redistribution of 20 percent of each of the Town levies. Chart 7 is if the Towns were still funding their EMS services and represents where the County would be with the personnel increases. Chart 8 is if the County took over all of the Town levies. Chart 9 is the number for single-family residences and is where the disparity is across the Towns. The chart from last month shows you what the average family home is worth in each Town and the tax on that single family home.

Mr. Groden explained that the County tax going up a dollar and the Town tax going down a dollar doesn't work because the County will raise more money on some Towns than what those Towns currently raise; the expense would be transferred to the County and then divided across the fourteen towns. Mr. Groden acknowledged that it can be confusing. The \$27 million levy is divided across fourteen different towns. The assumption is that a consolidated system will have expanded personnel with increased payroll. If the Towns are going to transfer some of the money to another department, the numbers would change.

A number of people expressed concern that the newspapers and social media have made it seem as if the current ambulance system is broken.

A number of Legislators responded that nobody said the system is broken but that it is in danger and needs improvement. Chairman Linger stated that the County is trying to avoid having a broken system and that it's necessary to have a plan.

Sean Mahoney would like to get ahead of future issues; he feels that the Mountaintop is in good shape at this time. He then mentioned that there was discussion at the first meeting about things that could be done to get the ball rolling and to get every EMS unit on the CAD system.

Sean Hotaling said that the only organizations that are on the CAD system are Greene EMS, Windham Ambulance, Ashland Ambulance, and Hunter is in the process. He also stated that there is an EMS Council that meets every month which is comprised of the administration of every ambulance service and that they could be having these discussions on a monthly/weekly basis.

Members of the EMS Council stated that they were never consulted regarding the issues and what could be done to fix them. They said that nobody came to ask the people who know the system and work in it every day.

Mr. Groden stated that he met with staff who informed him as to what was working and what was not working. He also wanted to know why the EMS Council didn't do anything and then asked what the job of the Council is and what they do.

The EMS Council said that they are primarily responsible for EMT training and interoperability between agencies like the mutual aid program that moves ambulances all around the County.

There was discussion regarding piggybacking on County bid pricing. Mr. Groden stated that piggybacking for fuel, gas, stone, and pipe is easy because the County normally buys these things. The purchase of medical supplies, equipment, and stretchers is not such an easy lift as the County does not order ambulance supplies. A couple of businesses were suggested for purchasing including Sourcewell.

Mr. Groden stated that one of the options that was mentioned is that the Towns stay in business while the County contributes more money to the system. Mr. Groden asked the Towns to make a decision.

Mark Evans commented that everyone knows what the problems are. Greene EMS has the problems nailed down. He believes that everyone feels that some form of a consolidated system is what the County needs, but nobody knows how to get there. He feels that the first step is to hire an EMS Director and let that person set the purchasing standards for the County.

Mr. Groden stated that when he met with staff, it was determined that the County ambulance will require 210,000 work hours each year. When paid time off was added in, it increased the number of work hours to between 230,000 and 240,000 hours. Currently, existing EMS staff fill 176,000 hours based upon the data received from the survey. For these models, pay scales were increased, employees were added, and additional staff was also included for back of the house operations, which led to increased ambulance costs.

Mr. Groden stated that Mark Evans doesn't have a recruitment problem because of the wage scale and benefits package Greene EMS offers and because of his recruitment methods.

Legislator Bulich stated that he would vote for County taxes being spent to get the payroll parity first as the the system improves.

Legislator Handel stated that there is no way that is going to happen overnight even though there are things that can be started now to get to that point.

Legislator True agreed that there are things that the Towns can do on their end and that they should inform the County because they understand the ambulance business.

Legislator Luvera mentioned that he spoke with Columbia-Greene Community College and was informed that they can get a certificate program in place fairly quickly. Chairman Linger responded that the college doesn't need SUNY approval for certificate programs.

Mark Evans stated that he respected what was being said about taking baby steps but thinks the County should just 'bite the bullet'. He advised going into high schools with a coordinated plan where there may be three or four students in each school who the County could put through EMT training and guarantee a job to. In a short period of time, those students would be working as EMT's on County ambulances. The second thing to do would be to pay better than the competition. The Greene EMS formula is: Provide the best vehicles, the best equipment, and stay to the highest level of care. The plan requires full commitment as opposed to taking baby steps where there will be little visible improvement. The County also needs to have somebody coordinating it.

Mr. Groden asked what everybody wanted to discuss at the June meeting. He said that EMS Council meetings can be attended, and a purchasing agreement can be considered.

Legislator Bulich would like to entertain allocating some money towards scholarships and things like that. Mr. Groden stated that the County has provided \$15,000 each year over the last couple of years to the EMS Council to get interested individuals the necessary education to become certified. Legislator Bulich asked if we have numbers on how that's helped. A member of the EMS Council stated that the scholarship has been used a handful of times for the EMT class but the Council has not used the full \$15,000 any of the years that it's been offered as there have been no qualifying people who want to work in the County after they've graduated. Only a couple of people have made that commitment.

Legislator Lennon pointed out that the County is in the same spot as it was ten years ago which is what he was afraid would happen. He felt that much time was wasted and that it appears to be happening again.

Chairman Linger asked if the County should be looking at doing a resolution declaring EMS an essential service that would be provided by the County since the State has not done so. He stated that emergency medical service is not currently required.

Legislator Handel stated, "We should absolutely do that."

The Town Supervisors were asked to move to reserved training rooms upstairs if they wanted to continue their discussions so that EMS employees could meet with the Greene County Legislature to voice their concerns or offer suggestions.

The meeting ended at 7:42 p.m.