

HIGHLAND COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

MINUTES

MEETING DATE – April 11, 2024

The Highland County Board of Supervisors held a Public Hearing on April 11, 2024, at the Highland County Courthouse, 165 W. Main Street, Monterey, Virginia, at 7:30pm.

PRESENT:	ABSENT:	STAFF / GUESTS:
Henry A. Budzinski, Jr.		Jerri Botkin, Interim County Admin.
Harry B. Sponaugle		Melissa A. Dowd, County Attorney
Paul S. Triple		
		115 members of the public
		40 online participants

Chairman Budzinski called the meeting to order.

Public Hearing Enterprise Fee-The first item on the Board's agenda was a Public Hearing on the Enterprise Fee, Chairman Budzinski opened the Public Hearing and asked Mrs. Botkin to provide the staff report.

Mrs. Botkin provided the following information:

The Enterprise fund budget operates the county's solid waste collection and disposal system, this Ordinance was enacted on July 1, 1993, in order to generate revenue to cover the costs of trash collection and disposal, In 2006 the following rates were adopted

CLASSIFICATION	ANNUAL FEE
Residential	\$ 150.00
Business Low Density	\$ 75.00
Business Low-Medium Density	\$ 150.00
Business Medium Density	\$ 225.00
Business High Density	\$ 300.00

With the current fee the estimated revenues generated would be \$342,905

FY 25 proposed expenditures have increased to \$464,160 this would create a deficit of \$121,255.

In order to meet proposed expenditures, the Enterprise fee would need to increase by \$50 for each classification and be set at the following rates:

CLASSIFICATION	ANNUAL FEE
Residential	\$ 200.00
Business Low Density	\$ 125.00
Business Low-Medium Density	\$ 200.00
Business Medium Density	\$ 275.00
Business High Density	\$ 350.00

This would create a balanced budget with no deficit and no need for a transfer from the General Fund

Mrs. Botkin asked the Commissioner of the Revenue, the Treasurer and County Attorney Dowd if they had anything to add, there were no additional comments.

Chairman Budzinski asked for Public Comments on the Enterprise Fee.

John Montgomery-the least amount of government is the best, young families are struggling in our community. Citizens should not be hammered by taxes in order to meet the needs of the ever-increasing budget. Please do not raise taxes.

Being no additional public comments on the Enterprise Fee, Chairman Budzinski then asked the Board for comments.

Vice-Chairman Sponaugle- I agree that young families are having a difficult time and with tax increases this may cause more struggles, but if we don't raise taxes incrementally there will come a time that there will need to be a significant increase that would be more damaging to our citizens.

Supervisor Tribble-Asked Mrs. Botkin to provide Highland County's current available cash balance. Mrs. Botkin advised Supervisor Tribble she did not have this amount right off hand but was able to confirm that the County currently has a net position of approximately 80% totaling in the millions of dollars. Supervisor Tribble asked Mrs. Botkin to prepare information for the Board to review on lowering the Counties Net position and what the assessed fees or taxes could look like by doing this.

Vice Chairman Sponaugle- agreed that the County may have too much in holding at this time but does not feel comfortable depleting the County's Net position too much.

Supervisor Tribble made the Motion to table the setting the Enterprise Fee to the April 23, 2024, Public Hearing. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Sponaugle with the following vote:

PRESENT

Henry A. Budzinski, Jr.
Harry B. Sponaugle

VOTE

Yes
Yes

Paul S. Tribble

Yes

Chairman Budzinski then closed the Public Meeting for the Enterprise Fee.

Public Hearing Emergency Services Fee-Chairman Budzinski opened the Public Hearing for the Emergency Medical Services Fee and asked Mrs. Botkin to provide the Staff Report.

Mrs. Botkin provided the following information:

The Emergency Medical Services Fund budget provides funding for the salaries and related costs for county career staff who provide Emergency Medical Services.

In 2018, the General Assembly adopted legislation codified as 15.2-922.2 that states – Any county with a population of less than 3,000 may by ordinance, and after public hearing and subject to such terms and conditions as set forth in the ordinance, levy a fee to fund the provision of emergency medical services in the county, not to exceed the actual cost incurred by the county in providing such service. On April 12th2021, the Board amended the EMS Fee Ordinance to set the annual fee at \$180.00.

With the Current EMS fee, the estimated revenues generated would be \$358,875.00

FY 25 proposed expenditures have increased to \$826,889. This would create a deficit of \$468,014.

In order to meet the proposed expenditures, the Emergency Medical Services fee would need to increase to \$415 annually.

This would create a balanced budget with no deficit and no need for a transfer from the General Fund.

Mrs. Botkin asked the Commissioner of the Revenue and the Treasurer and if they had anything to add, there were no comments.

County Attorney Dowd advised that even though there have been concerns on the EMS fee they County was currently seeing a higher-than-expected collection rate.

Public Comment regarding the EMS fee

John Montgomery-the EMS Comprehensive Plan committee has presented a proposal to the Board and the Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad presented an alternative plan to the Board of Supervisors that would greatly reduce the proposed EMS budget. I do not feel that the Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad has done anything wrong to warrant making it illegal for the Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad to continue to operate. Do not increase the EMS Fee. Get some common sense and be productive for the citizens.

Brenda Allamong- I am from Monterey and feel that the EMS fee is ridiculous. I do agree we need some paid staff to help but we all need to chip in and help I have not seen anyone work together on this and the entire process needs to be reevaluated.

Betty Mitchell- what do you expect the EMS budget to look like in 3-5 years? Do you expect the fee of \$350 to remain stable or do you expect it to increase annually? It certainly seems that you are trying to squelch volunteerism in the county. This is very disappointing. I would like to think that would be able to come together and be able to come to a compromise.

Jamie Collins- I have lived in Highland County for 18 years I am concerned we keep talking about fees and taxes increasing. With fees increasing to \$500 annually those fees are not deductible like taxes are.

Paul Armstrong- not everyone is paying the EMS fee. What are you doing about that? Vice Chairman Sponaugle stated this will be worked on beginning July 1, 2024. This will capture the individuals that are not currently paying the fee due to being renters or owning multiple residences within the county. Due to the way things work within the current tax system that we use this is a time-consuming process and we want to make sure it is right before we proceed.

Leo Swartz told a story about volunteers raising over \$100,000 to assist Leona Botkin when she had cancer. Without volunteers there would not be an EMS systems

Chris Wayne- I do not support any new taxes, we need to better review the budget and trim the "fat" and promote fundraising for volunteer services.

Judy Ralston- several years ago before the county had paid EMS my husband fell—multiple tones were dispatched, and no one came. I was unable to get Jim up and take him myself, Deerfield ended up having to come and take him to the hospital. Thank God there is paid staff now to send help when I fell last week. The EMS Chief came and helped me up and Bolar Volunteer Rescue Squad members came to assist. If there hadn't been paid staff, what would I have done?

Scott Wells- How much do new ambulances cost? Supervisor Tribble stated about \$300,000 give or take. My point is the ability to replace items with HCVRS having a 501c3 to obtain grants meaning at no cost to the citizens and you want to make them null and void? The paid and career staff can work together so we don't need to cut them out. We need to act like adults in the matter and do the citizens a favor.

Kim Rexrode- I live in Warm Springs but do own property in Highland County. Hopefully I will never need EMS here in Highland, but I remember when Deerfield and Hot Springs were answering almost every call for Highland County. I personally know of 2 individuals that applied for membership to HCVRS that worked as career staff at other places and their applications were not even acknowledged by HCVRS. Some have tried to work together yet others have not, which has made this process impossible.

Being no additional comments Chairman Budzinski asked the Board Members is there were any comments.

Supervisor Tribble-made a motion to table the EMS Fee until the Public Hearing on 4/23/2024. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Sponaugle, the motion carried with the following vote:

PRESENT

Henry A. Budzinski, Jr.
Harry B. Sponaugle
Paul S. Tribble

VOTE

Yes
Yes
Yes

Chairman Budzinski closed the Public Hearing.

New Business

Clerk of the Board appointment- Mrs. Botkin advised the Board that they needed to make an appointment for the Clerk of the Board. Vice-Chairman Sponaugle made the motion to appoint Mrs. Botkin as Clerk of the Board and Purchasing Agent for the County of Highland and set a surety bond in the amount of \$10,000. The motion was seconded by Supervisor Tribble and the motion carried with the following vote.

PRESENT

Chairman Budzinski
Harry B. Sponaugle
Paul S. Tribble

VOTE

Yes
Yes
Yes

Old Business

Chairman Budzinski stated that the HCVRs presented a EMS plan to the Board on April 2, 2024, that would allow the Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad to operate and save the county tax dollars, but after the meeting I spoke with several volunteers and no one would commit to pulling 12 or 24 shifts as stated in the meeting earlier. We got to this point over the years because the Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad could not answer calls 9-10 years ago—I believe this plan will not work and would put our citizens at risk.

Supervisor Tribble-stated Harry Sponaugle and I have been going back and forth with this for years. I am sorry about Judy's situation in the past, but we have not missed a call in the last few years. My wife and Brenda Allamong had this situation dropped in their lap was brand new EMTs.

Harry Sponaugle—I am in my ninth year of working these issues as a new supervisor in my first year I received lots of questions from citizens that I did not know the answers to, and I was misled by many citizens several times. During this time of the Board of Supervisors working with the volunteers we have been through four chiefs and only one that the volunteers got along with, from what I understand that chief left because he couldn't take the drama any longer. The Board put an Ordinance in place in 2020 and an additional Ordinance in 2022, that everyone agreed to at that time. We

have been working with the same group for years and there have been a lot of incidents behind the scenes that you don't necessarily know. At the last meeting I was torn with what to do should we give the Volunteers another chance to show the Board and career staff that they can work together? I felt like we were making progress until last week when a volunteer reported an ambulance stolen, I will not put up with these shenanigans any longer. Something has got to change.

Supervisor Tribble-I would like to explain the situation—701 responded to a call and Captain Tribble went by the station to drop some items off and called dispatch to inquire if one of the volunteer units responded to the call and dispatched advised 701 marked up. Captain Tribble then radioed the Sheriff's office that one of our units is not at the bays.

Harry Sponaugle-Either way they knew where the squad was due to a paid staff vehicle being at the building.

Vice Chairman Sponaugle-made the motion to deny Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squads EMS proposal presented on April 2, 2024. The motion was seconded by Chairman Budzinski and the motion carried with the following vote:

Present	Vote
Chairman Budzinski	Yes
Vice Chairman Sponaugle	Yes
Supervisor Tribble	No

EMS Plan of Action-Chairman Budzinski moved to the next item on the agenda the EMS Plan of Action

Vice Chairman Sponaugle-I would like to make some changes prior to you reading this plan. In #8 both Monterey and McDowell Volunteer Fire departments would like to be removed from the incentive program., on #9 please add EMS in front of volunteer agency.

EMS PLAN OF ACTION – April 11, 2024

1. Follow the Highland County Emergency Medical Services Ordinance, which was adopted on October 12, 2022, with the exception of revenue recovery, and the Highland County Emergency Medical Services Policy adopted on January 7, 2020. This means that the EMS Chief hired by the County shall establish policies, subject to the EMS Advisory Board input, for the operation of one County system, under the Department license, called the Coordinated Emergency Medical Services System for Highland County (CEMS).
2. Maintain the current building owned by the County as the Highland County Department of Emergency Medical Services primary location.
3. Create the EMS Advisory Board, pursuant to the Ordinance.

4. The current EMS Ordinance shall be changed in "Article 4. Revenue Recovery, Sec. 4-1 Revenue Recovery" so that all revenue recovery obtained by every agency authorized to operate in Highland County shall be deposited in one County-controlled account. The EMS Advisory Board shall recommend the expenditure of funds to the Board of Supervisors after considering the needs of each authorized agency in the County.
5. The Highland County Department of Emergency Medical Services shall be the ONLY Designated Emergency Response Agency (DERA) in Highland County. Bolar Volunteer Rescue Squad shall be a non-DERA agency. The Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad (HCVRS) is no longer authorized to operate in the County. Any liability protection HCVRS and its members may have had while answering calls as an agency in the County, as an instrumentality of the County, is revoked.
6. The EMS Chief shall work with the Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad (HCVRS) to properly allocate all revenue recovery funds collected in accordance with the Highland County EMS Ordinance since its adoption on October 12, 2022.
7. Increase the EMS fee to \$350 per year to meet the budget timeline for the FY24-25 budget. The Board of Supervisors shall work with the County Treasurer and County Commissioner of the Revenue, beginning July 1, 2024, to establish a new assessment method for the EMS fee for the second half of 2024 taxes. The EMS fee shall be based on the new assessment method.
8. Create a volunteer incentive program for both EMS and fire personnel. This work will begin July 1, 2024.
9. Establish stability among employees of the Highland County Department of Emergency Medical Services and (EMS) volunteer agencies authorized to operate in the County.
10. Encourage volunteer support of any kind for the County Department of EMS, as well as among authorized volunteer agencies. Any volunteer with the Department of EMS or Bolar Volunteer Rescue Squad shall be considered an instrumentality of the County for liability purposes.
11. Respect all who are contributing to EMS calls being answered promptly.
12. Work with the Highland County Sheriff's Office to establish appropriate guidelines for the information provided by CEMS to dispatchers on EMS calls.
13. The EMS Plan Review Board will be put on hold for the immediate future.
14. Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad Members are more than welcome to be part of the volunteer system under the Highland Department of Emergency Services.

Supervisor Tribble-This nonsense started when paid staff began marking up all units as paid staff couldn't stand to use the numbers on the side of the unit being utilized.

Jed Thomas- I have been involved with Highland County Rescue Squad since 2005 and I am also a career fire fighter for Augusta County. I have been in the career staffs shoes and not welcomed into a station that is considered your home for 24 hours at a time. I have had toilet paper locked up and there are no supplies available for career staff. I understand the heartache and suffering that comes with trying to blend a system in an environment that you are not welcome. This is not somewhere you want to

work. If we continue this foolishness, we will no longer have any paid staff and the volunteers disappear because there has been such hostility. There must be some type of compromise. We all went through hours of training to become certified, and we must remember that we did not do this for us, but for our community. Career staff is held to a higher standard and with regulation changes and pharmaceutical requirements everything is going to have to be under one umbrella and one license. A career member serves the county just as much if not more than any volunteer ever does.

Deborah Hodges-I moved to Highland County in 1981 to teach I love Highland County and I am disappointed in this entire situation. For years there has been a love and appreciation towards volunteers within this community and I am fed up with what is going on. It is time for a change. I have a petition here to begin the recall process for Supervisor Sponaugle and Supervisor Budzinski, I need 315 signatures to be able to present this to the courts.

Floyd Maxey-I live in Headwaters, and I find it hard to believe that dismantling volunteers will help this situation. There is no county besides Highland that does not have volunteer staff. Volunteers are essential to Highland County due to the size of the county. I believe there are people in the audience who have had their lives saved by volunteers. Paid staff are working for a check if you stop paying them, they will not show up. Paid EMS Staff are being paid higher than the average EMS Salaries in the state of Virginia and several of the paid staff live outside of this county. So, what does that mean for residents if there was a major disaster paid staff may not be able to get here but volunteers are already here. The taxes you are proposing are outrageously high.

Sharon Harper- I just want to say that the volunteers saved my husband, and we are very thankful for them.

Brenda Pullin-Question about the EMS fee I know to you it doesn't sound like a lot of money, but this is a community living on fixed incomes a lot of us will not be able to afford this fee. I would like the board to reconsider the proposed amount for the EMS fee.

Dr. Asher Brand-OMD for Highland County for the last 30 years and have volunteered right along with them. I have friends and individuals I respect on both sides of this issue, and this has been a heck of a tightrope to walk. There are two facts that are absolutely true we cannot have an EMS system without the Career staff. I am telling you that because it is an absolute fact, the second fact is we cannot have an EMS system in Highland County without volunteers.

We set up something that was destined to fail, we added Highland EMS as a secondary agency, and we had two separate command structures in this small mountain town. It was like putting two siblings in a room and then being surprised that they don't get along. It has not been reflected in the discussions tonight on how serious and ongoing this issue has been. Career staff were introduced because the volunteers were not able to consistently answer the calls and asked for assistance from the county. Ever since the Career staff was introduced, I have worked very hard as the medical director to set up a system that will work for this community. I do not care if it is paid or a

volunteer system if the EMS system can provide adequate care for the community, but we have not been able to compromise. I have served on many boards trying to make this work, but the sides are entrenched in their ways and will not budge on aspects that need to be changed. It is better to have one agency than to continue like this, it is interfering with the ability to care for patients, and I feel it is causing less volunteers to come out and volunteer due to the controversy. It is much harder to hire career staff because of this controversy. We have tried to do it by changing the HCVRS governance and that did not work. I feel like this is the second-best thing. I know a lot of you all don't want to hear that and I get it I have been a volunteer and have a lot of Volunteer agencies but EMS is not what it was 5 years ago or ten years ago, we are using vents I am trying to bring blood into the field when we build this system there has to be one agency with one leadership structure to ensure the best care for the community or we will be in this purgatory forever. This is not the solution that I wanted but I don't feel that we can get to the first solution I have great respect for both sides of leadership and it this situation, and it is very sad to see the discord, but is really because of the structure that was originally set up. That is all I have to say if anyone has any questions for me and it is appropriate I will be happy to answer them.

An unknown speaker-asked Dr. Brand for clarification. Are you in favor or complete governance by Highland County.

Dr. Brand- I am afraid at this point yes, this is the only solution. My ideal system would be keeping the HCVRS with the 501c3 and an external governing board with a career Paramedic (Chief) in charge of the entire system. We tried really hard and could not do it. I feel like the next best thing is this. This doesn't mean we don't want volunteers we cannot have an EMS system without volunteers. I am sure there will be some volunteers who come out to volunteer under this structure.

Valentina Meehan-So what you're saying is it is kind of like a PTA we have to have a PTA to help with extra school stuff and we have to have volunteers to help with paid staff?

Dr. Brand—essentially yes. I would like to work on a community response program, an EMT class is months of a major commitment. We must always have one paramedic in the county just like a sheriff, if we don't have that we are going to be losing lives.

Unknown speaker-How many additional paid staff will be needed to be put onto the payroll?

Dr. Brand-I can easily envision reducing payroll by building out a volunteer system. Volunteers are more available at night and weekends when they are not working you can imagine there would have to be some custom structuring to that but I don't want to get into the weeds of all that tonight.

Unknown speaker-When all this started did anyone look at hiring individuals from the county instead of outsourcing all the Labor and training the community members to fill these roles?

Dr. Brand-We could potentially do that for EMT's but with all of the requirements advanced and Paramedic level individuals would have to acquire their hours elsewhere due to lower call volumes for Highland County.

Unknown speaker-When this all started the County was only supposed to get two paid staff what has happened to that deal?

Dr. Brand-The need has increased.

Unknown speaker-How many EMS calls are there per year and of those how many are critical calls?

Dr. Brand- on average 1per day and about 1/3 of calls need advanced care. The thing is you must be able to administer advanced care when it is needed. This system cannot continue the way it is it will need to continue with both Career and volunteer staff. The bickering and disagreement between paid and volunteers has to stop.

Brenda Allamong- I am asking for transparency when we first started this. There has been no transparency through this entire process. I do not appreciate how this has happened. I have been lied to if you don't have transparency, you have nothing, This community needs the respect to make this process work properly. We can be one agency without an attitude adjustment on both sides, we won't be able to work together. If you pass this proposal and make it illegal for the volunteers to run, think about where this is going, you are going to lose volunteers. I think that each group should be adult enough to come up with a decent compromise.

Bobby Pryor-I live in doe hill I have been her about 60 years I have a lot of respect for the volunteers if they hadn't started this years ago we wouldn't even has a rescue squad. Why can't the volunteers get a little money to run calls. I haven't heard that proposal at all.

Vice Chairman Sponaugle- At one time we had an incentive program we did drop it. We are going to work on adding an incentive program back to the volunteer programs.

Leo Swartz- Supervisor Sponaugle should be ashamed of himself and Chairmans Budzinski, you are just another big government bureaucrat. Mr. Swartz then asked Supervisor Budzinski and Supervisor Sponaugle to resign.

Bryan Obaugh- Questioned how the Board came to this new proposal when the last anyone else had heard was the board had asked the EMS Comprehensive

Committee to get together and form another proposal to bring back to the Board. Mr. Obaugh made accusations on behalf of Board members and County Attorney Dowd.

Brenda Allamong-Expressed her disgust with the current proposal presented by Chairman Budzinski and the lack of transparency. I am all for a single agency if you do it properly. It is your job as the Board to find a way to bring together the EMS agencies.

Matthew Ratcliffe-Expressed how much work it takes to become a volunteer or a career EMT, and that he did not want to see the volunteers disbanded, but if that is what it takes to make this process work and everyone to be under one leadership structure it seems there is no choice. In order to build the volunteer recruitment leadership will have to change.

Don Williams-I have lived here for 25 years. A 33% increase in one year for the EMS budget is too much, it will not be long until the budget is over 2 million dollars. I agree that EMS needs to occur under one system, but I think that it needs to be volunteers not paid. Stated that he feels any supervisor that supports eliminating the volunteers be removed from their office.

David Kiser-Expressed his concerns on eliminating the volunteer rescue squad. This will eliminate tradition within the county and that the county should keep the volunteer rescue squad along with a career program if necessary.

Lynn Stocks-Expressed his concerns that the Board has been elected to do a job that he knows that it is a difficult job, understand that this has been quite a challenge, but feels that the Board needs to look at this EMS Budget as a 49% increase is uncalled for.

Harley Gardner-Emergency Coordinator for Highland County. Explained that he had 22 years of experience working within paid and volunteer systems, expressed understanding of how difficult this process can be but also recognized that in order to have a team that will work together there will need to be on unified command structure that will coordinate Volunteers and paid staff together as one team not two separate teams.

Jed Thomas-Expressed his concerns on the community thinking that paid staff do not care about a community, just because these individuals are being paid does not mean they do not care about those they take care of. The career staff care deeply about their profession and for the people they are caring for no matter where they are. Also wanted the community to know that he is willing to help set up a volunteer system

Jamie Collins- Feels like both the Board and the Volunteers have drawn a line in the sand and that there has been some communication issues and that this process should continue through June 1 and allow the EMS Comprehensive committee to come up with a better plan. Take both plans back and if there is no compromise there is going

to major friction within the volunteers and the paid staff. Please table this decision tonight and allow the committee to present a new plan.

Linwood Stocks- Explained he has 30 years of Hospital Administration experience. Would like to know if there has been a 3-5 year plan drawn up for EMS as the Board is proposing a \$300 fee without knowing what this will cost the community in the future. Stated he feels this should be tabled as of tonight that this is a leadership issue not a volunteer issue.

Jim Collins-Representing Little Switzerland Strutters concerned that revoking the volunteer's ability to run that they will not be able to attend their event on the 27th, this event provides community members an opportunity to interact with the volunteers, see the equipment and potentially recruit new volunteers.

Leo Swartz-Is there any Virginia statutes that require the Board to have rescue squad services? Stated the county does not need the board to be interfering in this process.

Margret Ralston-Expressed her gratitude to paid and volunteers staff her family has needed both, paid and volunteers are here because they have the heart to help other people not because of the paycheck, EMS is all about heart.

Carol Furr- does not understand how adults are not able to cooperate and work together, paid and volunteers are both needed in Highland County. Appalled that there is no compromise and willingness to work together.

Joan Casey-Since this is such a hot button issue expressed concern that needs to be tabled and allow the EMS Comprehensive Committee the time to work out a plan that will work for the people of this community.

James Colaw-What were the consequences to the paid staff marking up as the incorrect number. Since the confusion of paid staff marking up as 701 no matter what unit they are in you're telling me these are the same people that are responsible.

Harry Sponaule- we are under the impression that it is acceptable to mark up as a crew that it does not have the be the number on the unit.

Scott Wells-Expressed that the volunteers had asked at the last board meeting for paid staff to markup units by their given number not as a crew running the call.

David Neil- Expressed his concerns on the issues over the years and does not want to see the county regress to where we were in the past and calls not being answered. As an individual that has had experience of this he would rather pay for a service knowing that someone would come when they are needed.

Malorie Brower-Does not understand how the Board went from the proposal set forth on April 2 to the proposal presented tonight. Expressed that this is not what the constituents want.

Mary Schooler-Stated first of all not seeing respect from either side. Yes, the volunteers asked for help several years ago but not for a full takeover.

Chris Wayne-stated his concerns on the finances of the Career EMS system, stated that the plan to disband the volunteers and take their apparatus and allow them to be part of the county but that is taking away from the free will of volunteerism.

Constance-If you disband the volunteers who do I call if I have a medical emergency?

Iris Hooke-Oppose this plan as this is too expensive for community members to afford.

David Dykes-Sooner or later community members are not going to be able to afford to live here due to taxes and fees.

Being no additional comments Chairman Budzinski closed the public comment period.

Board Comments

Supervisor Tribble- Touched by each of your support and coming out to this meeting, I feel there have been a lot of miscommunications and misunderstandings through the last several years when it relates to EMS. Stated that there have been innocent mistakes made throughout the years and feels this has caused the majority of the issues within the paid and volunteer community.

Apologized to the community for appointing Henry Budzinski as the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors stated he feels this is the biggest mistake of his adult life.

Lastly Supervisor Tribble stated he has had good and bad interactions with County Attorney Dowd and would like to publicly ask for her resignation as County Attorney to take this action without a board vote.

Ultimately what specific action by the volunteer squad justifies shutting the organization down. Are there documented examples of gross negligence? Are there documented failures to provide adequate patient care? Is there an ongoing lack of call response or a contractual violation of the MOU between HCVRS and the county? Has HCVRS engaged in documented pattern of non-compliance with Virginia Office of Emergency Management Service regulations? What specific problem exists? Because to my knowledge I've seen no evidence of a single written complaint filed by the county against any member of HCVRS. None of the above are currently occurring. Calls are answered, equipment worth hundreds of thousands of dollars is being shared. What ongoing action by the rescue squad is so heinous, so out of line, that the county has a legitimate justification to shut it down. My view, only a failure to respond, gross

negligence, inadequate patient care, or intentional non-compliance with regulations justifies such an action. Nothing that's occurred between HCVRS and the county rises anywhere near a level necessary to shut down the agency.

Essentially this is nothing more than a policy dispute between Henry Budzinski and the HCVRS on equipment and infrastructure...how/when it's used, by whom, and where it's located. It's also a dispute about 43 seconds.... The time difference it takes to go from the car wash to the HCVRS vs. responding directly from the car wash....and yes, I did the time trials earlier this week. That's all that's here folks.

Let me ask everyone the following. Should the well-being of Highland residents be placed in great jeopardy because of a policy dispute between HCVRS and Henry Budzinski and 43 additional seconds at the front end of a 911 call?

The basic question I keep coming back to is this. Why is it so hard for this board and previous boards to accept the hundreds of thousands of dollars of equipment and other infrastructure the HCVRS willingly wants to provide county residents. What is so hard about saying "yes" to less taxpayer funding and "no" to additional government bloat? I am not fighting for myself I am fighting for my community.

Chairman Budzinski-Stated that he felt sitting up the review board initially was the best course of action, but with the proposal that they brought to the Board along with the proposal that the Volunteers brought to the board independently were both unattainable proposals. Stated he feels that the EMS Advisory Committee should be established per the current Ordinance that is in place and continue to recruit volunteers under the Highland EMS System.

Supervisor Sponaugle-I understand that there are a lot of feelings and emotions with this ongoing issue, and we are also aware there are several individuals within the community that support the Board when it comes to this decision.

Chairman Budzinski made the following motion to adopt the EMS Action plan dated April 11, 2024, with the recommended changes with the following changes:

In #8 both Monterey and McDowel Volunteer Fire departments would like to be removed from the incentive program., on

#9 please add EMS in front of volunteer agency.

7. Increase the EMS fee to \$350 per year to meet the budget timeline for the FY24-25 budget Change the fee amount to: to be determined

14. The members of the Highland County Volunteer Rescue squad are more than welcome to join HEMS as a volunteer.

Supervisor Tribble would like to amend the motion to allow the EMS Comprehensive committee to continue their work and bring a new recommendation to the Board by June 1 and table Chairman Budzinski's current plan.

Vice-Chairman Sponaugle- Asked Dr. Asher Brand if he felt there was any chance of the Volunteers and the Career staff of working it out at this point?

Dr Brand- It really seems we are at an impasse that has to do with the external governing board. If the squad is willing to make some major concessions, an agreement

may be able to be made, but until then I do not think that an agreement can be reached.

Mrs. Botkin repeated the following: Chairman Budzinski made a motion to Approve the EMS Action plan dated April 11, 2024, with the following changes EMS FEE To be determined, Removing Fire completely adding EMS and adding number 14 to the document. **Vice-Chairman Sponaugle** seconded the motion made by Chairman Budzinski with the following changes either struck through or *italicized in bold*.

EMS PLAN OF ACTION – April 11, 2024

1. Follow the Highland County Emergency Medical Services Ordinance, which was adopted on October 12, 2022, with the exception of revenue recovery, and the Highland County Emergency Medical Services Policy adopted on January 7, 2020. This means that the EMS Chief hired by the County shall establish policies, subject to the EMS Advisory Board input, for the operation of one County system, under the Department license, called the Coordinated Emergency Medical Services System for Highland County (CEMS).
2. Maintain the current building owned by the County as the Highland County Department of Emergency Medical Services primary location.
3. Create the EMS Advisory Board, pursuant to the Ordinance.
4. The current EMS Ordinance shall be changed in "Article 4. Revenue Recovery, Sec. 4-1 Revenue Recovery" so that all revenue recovery obtained by every agency authorized to operate in Highland County shall be deposited in one County-controlled account. The EMS Advisory Board shall recommend the expenditure of funds to the Board of Supervisors after considering the needs of each authorized agency in the County.
5. The Highland County Department of Emergency Medical Services shall be the ONLY Designated Emergency Response Agency (DERA) in Highland County. Bolar Volunteer Rescue Squad shall be a non-DERA agency. The Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad (HCVRS) is no longer authorized to operate in the County. Any liability protection HCVRS and its members may have had while answering calls as an agency in the County, as an instrumentality of the County, is revoked.
6. The EMS Chief shall work with the Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad (HCVRS) to properly allocate all revenue recovery funds collected in accordance with the Highland County EMS Ordinance since its adoption on October 12, 2022.

7. Increase the EMS fee to ~~\$350~~ ***an amount to be determined*** per year to meet the budget timeline for the FY24-25 budget. The Board of Supervisors shall work with the County Treasurer and County Commissioner of the Revenue, beginning July 1, 2024, to establish a new assessment method for the EMS fee for the second half of 2024 taxes. The EMS fee shall be based on the new assessment method.
8. Create a volunteer incentive program for ~~both EMS and fire personnel~~. This work will begin July 1, 2024.
9. Establish stability among employees of the Highland County Department of Emergency Medical Services and ***EMS*** volunteer agencies authorized to operate in the County.
10. Encourage volunteer support of any kind for the County Department of EMS, as well as among authorized volunteer agencies. Any volunteer with the Department of EMS or Bolar Volunteer Rescue Squad shall be considered an instrumentality of the County for liability purposes.
11. Respect all who are contributing to EMS calls being answered promptly.
12. Work with the Highland County Sheriff's Office to establish appropriate guidelines for the information provided by CEMS to dispatchers on EMS calls.
13. The EMS Plan Review Board will be put on hold for the immediate future.
- 14. The members of the Highland County Volunteer Rescue squad are more than welcome to join HEMS as a volunteer.***

The motion carried with the following vote:

<u>PRESENT</u>	<u>VOTE</u>
Chairman Budzinski	Yes
Vice-Chairman Sponaugle	Yes
Supervisor Tribble	No

Chairman Budzinski made the motion that the Board continue to their April 23, 2024, meeting at 7:30pm at the Highland Modular Conference center. Vice Chairman Sponaugle seconded the motion and the motion carried with the following vote:

Present	Vote
Chairman Budzinski	Yes
Vice Chairman Sponaugle	Yes
Supervisor Tribble	**unable to hear vote

Respectfully submitted:



Jerri Botkin, Interim County Administrator

Minutes of the April 11, 2024, meeting are approved:

5/7/2024
Date



Chairman Henry A. Budzinski, Jr.