

Jasper County EMS Advisory Committee Recommendation

Purpose

The purpose of the Jasper County EMS Advisory Committee will be to evaluate the current condition of emergency medical services throughout Jasper County, identify service and funding challenges, assess future needs, and develop recommendations for consideration by the Jasper County Board of Supervisors.

The committee will serve in an advisory capacity. It will not have independent authority to impose a tax, establish a levy rate, appropriate county funds, or obligate the county or any participating EMS agency. Any final funding proposal must be approved by the Board of Supervisors for placement on the ballot and ultimately approved by Jasper County voters.

Recommended Committee Membership

I recommend establishing a nine-member committee consisting of:

- Jamey A. Robinson, Jasper County Emergency Management Director
- Brandon Talsma, Jasper County Board of Supervisors
- Chief Jarrod Wellik, Newton Fire Department
- John Halferty, AEMT, Colfax Fire/EMS
- Corey Van Kooten, EMT, Sully Fire/EMS
- Gerald Malone, Paramedic, Monroe Fire/EMS
- Dr. Patrick Edwards, Mayor of Lambs Grove
- Todd VanMaren, Kellogg Township Trustee
- One at-large Jasper County citizen

The original committee structure included two representatives from the county's rural or smaller EMS agencies. I recommend increasing that representation to three while retaining the at-large citizen position. This expands the committee to nine members, providing an odd number for voting purposes while preserving an independent public perspective.

The three rural EMS representatives were selected to provide representation from different areas of the county and from each major EMS certification level:

- Corey Van Kooten represents the EMT level.
- John Halferty represents the AEMT level.
- Gerald Malone represents the paramedic level.

EMTs, AEMTs, and paramedics have different scopes of practice, responsibilities, staffing challenges, and experiences within the EMS system. Including a provider from each level will

give the committee a more complete understanding of how proposed changes could affect Jasper County's individual services and the countywide EMS system.

Chief Jarrod Wellik will provide the perspective of Newton Fire Department, the county's largest EMS provider. Dr. Patrick Edwards will represent municipal government as Mayor of Lambs Grove, and Todd VanMaren will represent township government as a Kellogg Township Trustee. Supervisor Brandon Talsma is recommended because he has been involved in the countywide EMS discussion from its beginning and understands the history, concerns, and decisions that brought the county to this point.

Together, the proposed membership provides representation from county government, municipal government, township government, Newton Fire Department, rural and smaller EMS agencies, multiple provider certification levels, and the general public.

At-Large Public Member

The at-large position should be filled by a Jasper County resident who can provide an independent public perspective. Preference should be given to someone with experience in medicine, healthcare, finance, accounting, business, public administration, or another background that would benefit the committee's work.

Jasper County Emergency Management will develop a one-page application for interested residents to complete. The application will request basic information about the applicant's background, qualifications, interest in serving, and ability to participate in committee meetings.

Completed applications will be submitted to Jasper County Emergency Management. EMA will compile and present all eligible applications to the Board of Supervisors for review and consideration. The Board of Supervisors will make the final appointment to the at-large position.

This process will provide a consistent and accessible way for Jasper County residents to express interest in serving. It will also ensure that the public position is not selected by any one individual and that the Board can consider the qualifications and perspectives of all applicants through an open and transparent process.

Transparency and Committee Balance

I have heard concerns that the committee could be "stacked" with individuals who already support an EMS funding proposal. Those concerns should be acknowledged and addressed directly.

It is appropriate for an EMS advisory committee to include people who understand EMS operations and the challenges facing the system. The committee will be asked to evaluate staffing, response coverage, call volume, finances, mutual aid, equipment, governance, and long-term sustainability. Meaningful evaluation of those issues requires members who understand how the system currently operates.

However, operational knowledge cannot be the committee's only consideration. The committee must also be transparent, fiscally responsible, and willing to ask difficult questions. Its responsibility is not to begin with a predetermined tax amount and develop a justification for it. Its responsibility is to identify the actual needs of the county, evaluate the available options, determine what can be supported by existing resources, and recommend only what can be factually and financially justified.

The committee's work should include:

- Reviewing consistent operational data for every EMS agency
- Examining agency revenues, expenses, staffing, equipment, and projected needs
- Identifying service gaps and areas of duplication
- Considering alternatives to additional taxation
- Determining how any proposed funding would be distributed and monitored
- Establishing measurable performance and accountability requirements
- Providing regular public reporting on the use of any EMS funding
- Ensuring that taxpayers understand what they would receive in return for their investment

The committee should conduct its work openly, document the basis for its recommendations, and provide the public with information that is understandable and verifiable.

Most importantly, the committee does not have the final say. The Board of Supervisors does not have the final say. Jasper County's EMS agencies do not have the final say. The voters do.

Under Iowa Code chapter 422D, an EMS tax can only be imposed if at least 60 percent of those voting on the question approve it. That is a supermajority requirement. It is not 20 percent. It is not a simple majority. It is not 59.9 percent. It requires 60 percent voter approval.

No matter how anyone characterizes the committee's membership, the committee cannot force a proposal upon the taxpayers. It must develop a recommendation that can withstand public scrutiny and earn the support of three out of every five voters. If the committee cannot clearly demonstrate the need, explain the cost, establish accountability, and show taxpayers how the proposal will improve EMS service throughout Jasper County, the measure will not pass.

That 60 percent requirement is the ultimate safeguard against a "stacked" committee. It also places a significant responsibility on the committee to perform a fair, thorough, transparent, and fiscally responsible evaluation before making any recommendation to the Board of Supervisors.