

Meeting Minutes
Board of Commissioners
2524 Corydon Pike Suite 104
New Albany IN 47150
March 27, 2024
5:00 P.M.

Al Knable called the meeting to order and led the *Pledge of Allegiance*

Present: President, Al Knable; Vice President, John Schellenberger and Jason Sharp

Also Present: Attorney, Rick Fox; Council persons, Connie Moon, Jim Freiberger, Danny Short, Tony Toran and Denise Konkle

New Business:

- 1. Voting on the Pre-Hospital Care Emergency Medical Ambulance Services for Floyd County Not to Include the City of New Albany**

Public Comment:

- Michael Moody, Georgetown – spoke in favor of AmeriPro
- Chris Reiter – Spoke in favor of cutting ties with New Chapel
- Diana Mayfield, Floyds Knobs - Stated she is in favor of Fire-based EMS when a plan is in place but they are not ready yet.
- Corey Payne, Georgetown and President of the Georgetown Professional Firefighters Union Local 5393 – Stated Georgetown Fire would like to express their desire to become part of the solution and aid this county with its EMS needs. At this time, we would like to express our interest in an EMS program that, in our opinion, should have no less than five ambulances on duty in Floyd County 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This ambulance agency should service New Albany Township, Highlander Fire Protection, Georgetown Fire Protection, as well as Franklin Township. They understand that these types of things cannot be accomplished overnight, but we cannot continue to kick the proverbial can down the road and push it off for two more years at a time, waiting on the next contract to expire before we find our solution. They would still like to suggest that a temporary solution be put into place this evening utilizing one of the agencies that submitted a bid to provide EMS protection to at the appropriate amount of ambulances and staff members, as well as the appropriate certification level as the county has requested them, if we can put that temporary solution into place today for the next 1-2 or even three years, that should give sufficient time to establish funding, purchase equipment, hire employees, establish standard operating procedures, and provide training to the employees. At the end of this temporary solution contract, we should then be ready to step up to the plate and hit a home run for emergency medical services in this county.
- Mark Ginn, New Albany Township, - Spoke in favor of Fire based EMS

- Jim Freiburger, Floyds Knobs and member of Floyd County Council – stated he spoke to residents, specifically Lafayette Township that are in favor of Fire Based EMS. He has reviewed and discussed the Highlander Fire District proposal and feels very comfortable with them being able to implement this service. He stated, as a County Council member, he would not vote to support any funding for a new EMS service with the county if it is not fire based.
- Shawn Bostock, out of County, - he is favor of a hybrid EMS service. Utilizing AmeriPro for New Albany Township and Highlander on top of the hill.
- Nathan Ginn, Professional Firefighters Local 5426 – stated he does not want County funds leaving the County for a profit margin of a corporation. He is in favor of Fire based EMS.

Motion to reject both RFP's based upon the recommendation of the EMS Advisory Board. Moved by John Schellenberger. Motion died for lack of second.

Motion to decline the New Chapel RFP. Moved by Al Knable. Seconded by Jason Sharp. Motion passed unanimously.

Al Knable thanked New Chapel for their RFP and wished them well but they disqualified themselves by not supplying the financial material that was necessary.

Motion to continue negotiations with AmeriPro, subject to the County Council's approval of funding for the ambulance service. Moved by Jason Sharp. Seconded by Al Knable.

Discussion

Jason Sharp

There's a lot of misinformation floating around the community in regards to emergency medical services in Floyd County. As the chair of the EMS Advisory Board, I have an obligation to try and clearly convey to the citizens of Floyd County what we have been working on for over half of a year. I will break this down into three portions.

One, general information and education, two, the current RFP process and three, the future of EMS in Floyd County.

Before I dive into this issue locally, I would like to pass on some data that I think is important for everyone to know. Indiana is a state with roughly 3.8 million people. There are 92 different counties, with a multitude of different EMS models ranging from fire based, hospital based, municipal and private. According to the State of Indiana Chief EMS Director Dr. Eric Yazel, the state believes the actual number of paramedics working the streets in that capacity is all of about 1,400. Those numbers tell me two things. First, EMS in Indiana is in crisis mode. Those numbers are beyond dangerously low. Secondly, with all those different types of systems out there, the number is still 1,400. It takes a very special person to work emergency medical services and even more special person to make a career out of it. According to the National Institute of Health, the burnout rate for emergency medical services is about 60% and according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, EMS providers are 1.39 times more likely to die by suicide than the public. It's a tough job. These workers deserve our respect

no matter what type of agency that they work for. Locally, we have our own unique issues. In Floyd and Clark counties, there has been zero paramedic training courses offered since 2012, that's 12 years. It is no wonder our region is lacking in paramedics. Occasionally, you can catch a paramedic class in Harrison or Scott County, but that can be difficult for some. I can personally attest to the difficulties of traveling out of county for training. During the mid-1990s, I was working third shift on a Medi unit myself and at the end of my shift I would have to drive to Washington County for training. It was tough and I can only imagine how much tougher would be if I had a family at home. On several occasions, I have met with the staff of Ivy Tech in an attempt to restart the paramedic program at the Sellersburg campus. I have even began conversations with administrators at IUS to see if they would be interested. This process is still ongoing, but I am hopeful that it will soon bear fruit. In order to increase the paramedics in Floyd County, we have to increase training opportunities locally.

Next, I would like to address the building of our current RFP. I began by reviewing our current EMS contract and even the RFP's that were sent out in 2022. The current contract signed in 2017 and later amended in 2019 to add an additional ambulance during the hours of 8:30 AM to 6:30PM.

The original term with New Chapel EMS ran from May 31st of 2017 to June 30th of 2020. What does that mean? Our contract has auto renewed for the last four years and there hasn't been any changes to that contract since the amendment. The subsidy rate in 2019 has been \$220,000 a year, despite the contract expiring on June 30th of 2020, our current provider has not raised that subsidy rate once. However, last year, New Chapel did advise the Commissioners that they would not be able to auto renew that rate any longer. On September 20th of 2022, Commissioner Schellenberger, Caruthers and Kamer issued a new RFP for Emergency Ambulance service. There were two respondents, AMR and New Chapel EMS. The submission from AMR was for five years at a price beginning at roughly \$1.5 million and steadily rising to a price of, roughly, \$1.7 million.

The price for New Chapel EMS also offered a five year contract with the price of three ambulances for \$766,000 annually or 4 ambulances at \$988,000 annually. Despite sending out those RFP's and a recommendation from the old EMS Advisory Board, no changes were made and the contract, once again, auto renewed at the same price \$220,000.00 negotiated in the 2019 amendment. My analysis of the current contract was that it was way too loose. There was number expectation on standards of care. Strategic deployment was mentioned, yet never outlined ever in those units truly dedicated for emergency calls only. Our contract was in need of a real overhaul. So the new EMS Advisory Board went to work in July of 2023. Our process began with a simple question, what is it that Floyd County ultimately needed from its emergency medical services? Not whose name was going to be on the side of the box. Not who was going to run it. Just what is it that we need from our EMS system? The board went to work gathering data new and old, reviewing different standards, and even had doctor Eric Yazel in to discuss different EMS issues statewide. These meetings were run more like a think tank, with members gathered in a circle and not ran like a typical board meeting. Even though the meetings were very informal, they were still open to the public for all to see.

During our RFP building period, legal troubles surrounding former New Chapel CEO Jamey Noel began to emerge. Floyd County Commissioners were presented with a possibility that EMS services in Floyd County could cease if the current provider was going to be shut down by the

state. To get in front of this issue, the Commissioners immediately met with two other local service providers that could possibly help, if needed.

Only one of those services said they could take on Floyd County if needed quickly, and that was the AmeriPro EMS. Even though Floyd County had a detailed backup plan in place, the commissioners decided to increase the number of EMS board meetings until we were satisfied that RFP had met our needs. This RFP was the collaboration of all board members. This was not light at the board's feet, it was tailor made by this board. On December 5th of 2023, RFP's were sent out for bid and some of the highlights of those RFP's are three 24 hour ambulances with one 24 hour Paramedic response card dedicated for emergency calls only in Floyd County. A detailed strategic deployment plan to include ambulances in Georgetown Township, Lafayette Township and New Albany Township. The use of AVL and GPS devices capable of live feed data directly into the Floyd County 911 dispatch center.

The EMS Advisory Board reconvened on February 13th of 2024 after receiving two bids, one from the AmeriPro EMS at a price of, roughly, 1.5 million annually and New Chapel EMS with a sliding scale beginning at \$960,000.00 and up to a little over \$1 million annually. After the meeting, points of clarification were made to both respondents with guidance from our County Attorney. These points of clarification were distributed to the EMS Advisory Board and all members of Floyd County Council.

It was clear amongst the Commissioners that the EMS advisory meeting scheduled for March 12th would be for the Board to make a recommendation based off the two submissions presented. On February 20th of 2024, it came to my attention that I was scheduled to be representing Floyd County Commissioners at the Purdue University Road School and that I would miss the meeting. I immediately notified my vice chair that he would be running the meeting and the board was to make a recommendation on which of the two bids they wanted the commissioners to pursue.

On the morning of March 12th of 2024, my time at Purdue was cut short by a family emergency. Later that evening I was shocked to hear that no recommendation had been made but rather a third option introduced and a special meeting had been called to hear a presentation from Highlander Fire Protection District on March 21st of 2024. As the chairman of the Floyd County EMS Board, I was totally unaware that another option would be introduced at this meeting. During the special meeting on March 21st of 2024, Commissioner Knable informed the Board that our attorney advised the Commissioners would be unable to entertain any other option unless the commissioners rejected the current bids. However, that did not impede the EMS Advisory Board from hearing the presentation from a Highlander Fire Protection District. By the end of the meeting, the board voted to request the commissioners reject the RFPs and move forward with Highlanders. Today I have to make a choice, follow the EMS Advisory Board's recommendation for rejecting the bids or the commissioners not following the board's recommendation and move forward with a provider that submitted a bid in the appropriate manner and in the appropriate time frame.

I was not in favor of rejecting the bids, although each of our board members brings something special to the table and I respect their professional qualifications.

It does not mean I have to like how this process played out since the March 12th meeting. As the chair of the EMS Advisory Board, I was never advised by the Vice Chair or any other board member that there was a plan to introduce a whole new option into the mix at the 11th hour. I

believe several board members were not forthcoming with the public and efforts were already underway to explore a true County Fire system with an EMS element. I do not believe it was appropriate for two members that brought forward the motion and 2nd to reject the current bids voted for an option that directly benefits an organization in which they both represent. As someone who regularly conducts research, writes proposals, policies and procedures. I do not believe for one second that this operational plan, that is 23 pages long, with a fee schedule and established billing service was crafted in six days. This is a plan that has been in the works for some time. Plans submitted by Highlander did not meet the basic criteria that was outlined in our RFP. It did not cover all of Floyd County. The Highlander plan utilizes 2 1/2 ambulances, not 3. It does not meet our strategic deployment template outlined in the RFP. The department would be utilizing at least one unit that was scheduled for replacement a year ago as a primary unit. To top it all off, this morning I called the Indiana Department of Homeland Security Emergency Medical Services Division. According to Jason Smith, the District 9 representative, at the time, nothing has been submitted by Highlander Fire Protection District.

I was notified at 2:00 that that submission had now been received.

Jason Smith's watching on the video, by the way, if you wanted to know.

I felt like that was a little bit of a misrepresentation by Highlander saying that in a public meeting that an ALS certification was imminent, when it clearly was not. Is this the future system you see for Floyd County? I don't. What start as a transparent, engaging process that begin began in July of 2023 has been hijacked by behind the scene collaborators making last minute power plays. The introduction of a new system at the 11th hour, with board members voting in favor of a system that directly benefits an agency they represent that doesn't even meet the basic criteria that all the board members created.

And what I can see now is a misrepresentation that was made in a public meeting on an agency certification status. Ladies and gentlemen, this is a perfect example of the type of deals that we need to avoid. This is not honest and it is not transparent. Floyd County deserves better.

If other professionals want to stake their personal integrity and professional reputation on a plan like this, that is clearly their choice. I will not.

So what does the future EMS look like in Floyd County? To be honest, at this point, I am really unsure. I could have told you what it was looking like 2 weeks ago. After the RPS were sent out, I spoke out to reach out to Chief Manta, Chief Klein and New Albany Township Board President Darrell Mills. Out of courtesy, I notified them I would be working with Georgetown and Highlander unions seeking to conduct a GIS study. As a 24 year member of the International Association of Firefighters, I knew that one of the benefits of being in the IAFF was they were able to conduct GIS studies at no cost, saving taxpayers. Thousands of dollars in giving us real, actionable data to either support or deny the creation of a true County Fire department with an EMS base, a plan that would have been collaborative in nature, generating the data we needed to either move forward with the fire based system or having to change course and examine the standalone county EMS system.

Unfortunately, a lot of things have happened since the meeting on the 21st. On the morning of March 22nd, New Albany Township Board President Darrell Mills was notified by Mayor Gahan that the City of New Albany is unable to assist them with fire coverage at this time.

Blowing a massive hole in the Highlander plan in less than 24 hours.

Was the conversation about the county not covering that area with EMS during our meeting a contributing factor in that decision?

I don't know, but I could imagine it didn't help efforts much.

On March 25th, I spoke to Georgetown Professional Firefighters Local 5393 President Corey Payne, during the conversation, I was advised they no longer wish to move forward with Highlander on the GIS study.

What was meant to be a collaborative effort was being beginning to look more like a hostile takeover.

In closing, I have no interest of playing who is the biggest subject matter expert in the room. But I will close with these remarks.

1. A Professional department should never offer to provide services in another professional department's jurisdiction without the courtesy of at least a phone call. I do not know of any department that would tolerate this kind of behavior.
2. While it is true that Indiana is not an NFPA state. It is an OSHA state. And if there's a catastrophe on your fire ground, I can assure you that NFPA standards are what will be used during the course of their investigation. If you do not know that, I would highly recommend that you avoid giving any expert fire service advice. Thank you.

John Schellenberger

John Schellenberger stated he wished Jason Sharp would have shared the information about New Albany before this meeting. Mr. Sharp said he had been dealing with the death of a family member.

Mr. Schellenberger commented that Mr. Sharp could have sent a text.

He asked why they need three years. They received an e-mail from Chief Banta and the gentleman that runs Scott County, Nick Oleck. They said we do not need three years, one year would be sufficient to get the equipment and staff. He said they could run in parallel to provide and take care of overrun.

The specs of the RFP for contract was for a three-year contract. If the majority of the commissioner decide to go with Ameripro, we will have to renegotiate that contract from three years down to one year. So, if you're doing that then that opens it up to negotiate with other parties as well because the specs were for three years. Why give that privilege to that provider, but not reach out to other ones that they want to provide that service.

Also, right now, if we have a medical emergency in any of the townships, ambulances are dispatched from the fire houses or in Georgetown case, a brush truck.

When you look at the response times, they're far less than with the with our current provider. So, we've already got that in place, we've got the locations and the County Council providing funding in order for them to staff up.

We heard Captain Ginn talk tonight. They had 17 or 18 people that are interested. Several times we have talked about this and Jason, you made the comment that it gets to a point where it just gets too heavy. They need to have a conversation with the Commissioners and the Fire Departments so they can work this out.

His fear is if the majority of the commissioners vote for AmeriPro for a three-year contract, it's going to go to the County Council. From listening to two joint meetings, he doesn't believe they're going to approve.

When he was on the County Council for 10 years and if someone came to me and said, you give us a stipend for one year and you won't see us or we'll come back to you for three more years at 1.4 million. The County Council is already in a \$1,000,000 deficit and you want to add another \$1.4 million or \$1.2 million on top of that. It's not going to happen. This is a way that we can migrate to a Fire-based EMS.

The first year they would be doing the billing and then that would be put into a non-reverting fund. So, the second year you have that money available. I reached out to Jim Freeman with ambulance billing service, he works with 15 or 20 different counties in Indiana so they have a lot of credibility. He said back in 2019, medical reimbursement increases and services utilized by 6.5% of the population annually. A net revenue is established at \$1.5 billion. We had over 3000 calls. He anticipates \$1.5 million, and that's conservative. So, if the County Council will provide the stipend for that first year and they do the billing the second year they were fully funded. The worst case is if we need \$100,000. They're coming to the County Council for \$100,000 instead of \$1.2 million.

If we go with a contract provider, at the end of the year, all we have to show for it is a receipt. But if we go with our own fire-based EMS, you've got equipment, dedicated staff, that they're not going to want to move someplace else, they're going to want to stay in these communities because this is where they live. This is where their kids go to school. This is where their families are involved. You have a commitment from those people. But if you go with a provider, you know you're going to have constant turnover. But if you pay them well. You're going to retain the people and you're going to invest in the assets in Floyd County, in the fire departments, in the people, in the employees and on top of that, we have mutual aid agreements with surrounding counties.

If a county has a great EMS service, it only benefits, it helps to benefit the other ones around them. So, we need to get Floyd County to that level. So that way we can all be a partnership together in Southern Indiana.

Public safety has three legs. You've got police, you got fire and you have EMS. Right now, EMS we only fund \$230,000 a year for EMS. In Fire I think is around 4 to \$6 million and police is about \$8 million I believe. Less than 1/4 of \$1,000,000 is what we fund for EMS for the County.

We can do better than that. And at the end of the day, we go to fire-based EMS. We go away from the provider. I've heard we've had 11 providers here in Floyd County over the many years. But if you keep doing the same thing, you're going to get the same results. We need to go with something different. We need to go with a fire-based EMS. We need to invest in in the county, in in the fire departments.

EMS is one leg and fire department is another. You strengthen those legs as well whenever you do that.

He stated Al Knable reached out and asked Highlander to provide their operation plan. So, it wasn't like it was totally out of the blue. We asked them to do that within a week. And then then then we decided we needed by Tuesday because the meeting was on a Thursday. They presented it as we had asked them to do at the previous meeting.

Al Knable

Before we come to vote on this, I want to begin by just acknowledging that, unlike a lot of my critics, I don't have all the answers. This is a really difficult problem. Is probably the biggest issue before us, certainly since I've been a Commissioner and I really can conceive a few that would be more important than this and I've tried to apply logic to what has, at times, been a very emotional subject.

We did undergo an RFP process. We followed our EMS Advisory Board in creating RFPs to meet the needs of the entire County excluding the citizens of New Albany proper. We received one incomplete RFP that lacked financials and that was turned away tonight. We did receive one that satisfied all of our conditions during what I believed was an information gathering time. I really refrained from comment at our EMS Advisory Board meetings, as did John and as did Jason, because we really were in listening mode. But I called upon a lot of connections I made during my seven years with the New Albany City Council. I spoke with several elected officials in New Albany, personnel, fire personnel and dispatch personnel. All spoke very, favorably, without exception, of the service that they've received and are receiving from Ameripro. These discussions all took place, by the way, in a backdrop, with several fire personnel who've been around for decades, who told me of the 2013 vote from their union to remove fire-based EMS from their contract, for various reasons, that I won't get into tonight. But they have never revisited that since 2013. In the midst of these considerations of discussion of fire-based EMS did come to the surface. We did ask for information during that, as we said.

I'm not sure how long those discussions have been taking place prior to that information being brought forward. But we started to receive information on that concretely in mid-March. With regards to fire based EMS, I think that everyone involved in this process is very, very well-intentioned. We have incredible people in all of our individual departments and I believe that fire based EMS holds much potential promise but I do not believe that we can bring everything together that we need to bring together in 65 days.

You might be able to hire 12/14/16 individuals in that amount of time. You might be able to train them. You might be able to certify them. But if you can pull that off, I don't think you're going to have seasoned professional veterans out there on the making those run on day one. We don't have a funding source in place.

In short on that, I think the public has had an opportunity to speak up and will continue to have input on that. Certainly, the firefighters have, at least the ones that kind of put the proposal together for Highlander.

Even though I was told by Darryl Mills and by Georgetown representatives that they weren't brought to the table for this.

Who we haven't heard from and that we need to make this happen, whether we want to admit it or not are the attorneys and the accountants and the actuaries who are going to be responsible for putting policies in place to help us with the increased liabilities that we're going to accrue with all this.

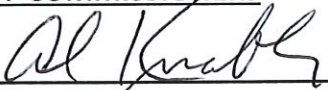
The largest issue that I have with that process is that when that plan was presented, it excluded coverage for New Albany Township and parts of Franklin Township, leaving them unprotected. So even if we could get all that together in 65 days, now we have to scramble to get for the largest percentage of our population.

To conclude, I'm personally committed to the process of fully vetting a fire-based EMS option, but only if all of our county departments come to the table in the spirit of mutual agreement, and that we can consider a countywide EMS director at the end of the day to manage that system. That EMS Director would be answerable to the commissioners, we're answerable to the voters. So, as was stated earlier tonight, I don't consider my actions political suicide. I've always worried more about being worthy of reelection rather than getting reelected. So that's where I am on that. So to that end, you know, I would propose that we put a task force together to begin the work in earnest on fire-based EMS to see if it's actually feasible financially. I know that the numbers on a balance sheet look good, but the ultimate source for all of this money is the taxpayer. So even if it's out of that, the County Council and commissioners' purview those districts are going to see an increase in their levy to pay for those services. So in the interim, which I would hope would be one to two years, I support entering negotiations with the Ameripro for one to two year contract. It's not the cheapest solution, but I think it's a very reasonable price to pay to restore public trust and confidence in a service that has been rocked the last several months by all of these issues that have gone on with former Sheriff Jamey Noel, unfortunately that has tainted New Chapel and again, I applaud their efforts to try to separate themselves from that and again hope they do well in the future. So I'm hopeful and I ask that our County Council faithfully considered this option as soon as possible. I believe it is absolutely the best solution at hand to ensure service and safety to all the people of Floyd County in the near term.

Motion to continue negotiations with AmeriPro subject to the County Council's approval of funding the ambulance service. Moved by Jason Sharp. Seconded by Al Knable. Motion passed 2-1. John Schellenberger opposed.

Motion to adjourn. Seconded by Al Knable. Motion passed 2-1. John Schellenberger opposed.


BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



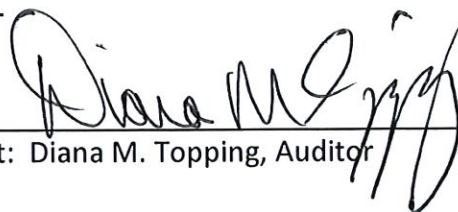
Al Knable, President



John Schellenberger, Vice President



Jason Sharp, Commissioner



Attest: Diana M. Topping, Auditor