

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
May 16, 2023

Present: Lisa Virkler, Chair; Andrea Moroughan, Vice-Chair; Richard Chartrand; Jessica Moser and Jeffrey Nellenback.

Others: Legislators Larry Dolhof, Josh Leviker, Phil Hathway, Thomas Osborne and Ian Gilbert; County Manager, Ryan Piche; County Treasurer, Eric Virkler; Human Resources Director, Caitlyn Smith; and County Attorney, Joan McNichol.

Chair Legislator Virkler called the meeting to order at 1:52 p.m.

Legislator Virkler moved to accept the April 18, 2023 minutes, seconded by Legislator Moroughan and carried.

EMS Ad Hoc Committee Final Report – Ryan Piche, County Manager

Ryan Piche began by inviting Robert Mackenzie up to assist, as he was a part of the Ad Hoc Committee, along with Legislators Moroughan, Nellenback, Virkler, and Dolhof. Other members of the Committee were Jennifer Maracchion, Deputy County EMS Director; Josh Levesque, Lewis County Search & Rescue Chief; Robert Mullen, Town of Lowville Supervisor; Scott Doyle, Town of Denmark Supervisor; Mary Teal, Lewis County Health System Chief Nursing Officer; Bobbi Kahl, Lewis County Health System Director of Emergency Preparedness; and James Deavers, retired Lewis County Search & Rescue member.

The Committee met four times formally, but smaller groups met outside of the Committee. The background is that Lewis County is served by six in-county EMS agencies: Harrisville Rescue Squad, Beaver Falls Ambulance, Turin Ambulance, Lyons Falls Ambulance, Constableville Ambulance, J.S. Koster Hose Company Ambulance (Port Leyden), West Leyden Ambulance, and Lewis County Search & Rescue, which has the authority to serve the entire county. Four outside agencies also cover parts of Lewis County: Carthage Area Rescue, Natural Bridge Ambulance, Boonville Ambulance, and Camden Ambulance.

These agencies respond to 2,600 EMS calls per year in Lewis County. About 1,000 calls are handled by paid EMS providers employed by Lewis County Search & Rescue. The remaining 1,500 are handled by volunteers. Last year, EMS calls outpaced fire calls in Lewis County six to one. The number of total EMS providers is down 35% since 2012. The Committee agreed that the best way to move forward in Lewis County is to support our current volunteer model.

The average time for one call is four hours, which makes it challenging for volunteers to commit to that amount of time. Training is very burdensome as the required hours has doubled and the skill level have increased significantly too. Bob stated that one call can average four hours, but some of that time is to fill out the

paperwork which is no longer able to be filled out on route to the location. Diversion of ER's can now require drivers to take patients to Utica, Syracuse, or Albany. Bob went on to explain what "wall time" means but pointed out that it was indicative of Lewis County Health System. It is the time that a patient is waiting in the ER for a bed or bay, this requires EMS volunteers to stay until the ER can take the patient in. The lack of urgent care has also increased the call volume as people now wait too long to have something checked out which then requires ER services.

The other models that were discussed were to create an EMS Department which would have been the most expensive. Due to the relatively low volume of calls and the high percentage of Medicaid/Medicare patients there aren't very many options for Lewis County. A centralized countywide district isn't feasible due to the large geographic spread. Medicaid/Medicare reimbursement would be less than cost. The volunteer model is best because of the personal care and close proximity for response times.

The first Goal of the Committee is to support volunteer EMS providers by offsetting the personal cost of serving their communities. The recommendation is to somehow reimburse EMS providers for each call they go on. It would be \$40.00 per call and \$25.00 per driver. There are many other counties out there that are experiencing the same problems Lewis County is having. Although this could be a great pilot program across the state there are issues with minimum wage requirements, etc. so as of today this recommendation can't be implemented but will continue to be worked on to see if it can be done another way.

The next recommendation is to make a one-time payment to EMS agencies for capital expenditures. It would equate to \$17,500 per ambulance, which totals \$245,000 for all Lewis County agencies combined. The third recommendation is that the County will manage a contract for a county-wide EMS Medical Director at a cost of \$5,000 per year. This will alleviate the administration burden from small volunteer agencies. Additionally, communication between LCHS and local EMS agencies can be better planned and monitored.

The fourth recommendation is to increase the real property tax exemption for volunteer firefighters and EMS providers to allow for a 10%, non-capped, reduction in assessed real property valuation for volunteer firefighters and EMS providers. This policy will go into effect in 2024. The second goal of the committee is to increase the number of EMS service providers in Lewis County. The first recommendation is for the County to assist BOCES with the implementation of a new two-year EMS program for juniors and seniors. The approximate cost to implement this course is \$60,000. The second recommendation is to support new EMS providers by providing reimbursement for classroom materials, such as textbooks, workbooks, and other study materials which would be a cost less than \$5,000 per year.

The total cost of these recommendations is \$470,000, however the \$150,000 to pay providers per call is not ready yet, which brings the total down to \$320,000. Ryan concluded by thanking the committee for their hard work and dedication to coming up with ways to support our volunteer model. Legislator Virkler felt that there were good robust discussion and even thought this is not unique to Lewis County, the committee made a great start to solving this problem. Ryan pointed out that the EMS service is not mandated like other services but is clearly a necessity.

Legislator Virkler moved to have the County Attorney Joan McNichol review this report and put together a resolution for the full board to implement these recommendations, seconded by Legislator Moroughan, and carried.

The following draft resolutions were reviewed:

1. Amending the compensation plan of County of Lewis with reference to the Community Services Department to create one (1) permanent full-time Mental Health Program Coordinator position, Grade 5 Management Exempt with a salary range of \$47,082.00 to \$59,286.00.
AYE 5 NAY 0
2. Authorizing an agreement between Lewis County Department of Public Health and Transitional Living Services of Northern New York, Inc. for the purpose of providing psychological services to qualifying children in the preschool education program for the term of July 5, 2023 through July 4, 2024 under the pre-approved NYSED rates for same.
AYE 5 NAY 0
3. Appropriating funds for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act per the Notice of Obligation Authority, PY21-2 thru 22-4 in the amount of \$145,378.54 and per the Notice of Obligation Authority, PY22-1 in the amount of \$48,688.85.
AYE 5 NAY 0
4. Authorizing purchase of 7777 N. State Street, Lowville, NY by the County of Lewis acting on behalf of the Lewis County Health System at a price of \$240,000.00.
Legislator Moser abstained.
AYE 4 NAY 0
5. Authorizing renewal agreement between Lewis County Department of Social Services and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Lewis County to provide supportive and rehabilitative parenting education services from June 1, 2023 through May 31, 2024 at a monthly flat fee of \$5,125.00, not to exceed \$61,500.00 per year.
AYE 5 NAY 0
6. Authorizing agreement with Lewis County Health System for Per Diem Nursing Services under the medication-assisted treatment (MAT) plan for incarcerated individuals suffering from substance abuse disorders for a cost of \$150.00 per hour (2-6 hours) commencing upon full execution of the agreement for a one-year term.
AYE 5 NAY 0

There being no other business to come before the committee, Legislator Nellenback moved to adjourn at 2:41 p.m., seconded by Legislator Moroughan and carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Cassandra Moser, Clerk of the Board