

COUNTY OF WALLA WALLA

STATE OF WASHINGTON

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

June 4, 2018

Nabiel Shawa, City Manager
Tim Donaldson, City Attorney
City of Walla Walla
15 N. Third Avenue
Walla Walla WA 99362

Dear Mr. Shawa and Mr. Donaldson:

Thank you for your letter of May 25, 2018. As you are aware, the County and its EMS partners were concerned by the Walla Walla City Council's decision on September 19, 2017, that the City would no longer provide ambulance services outside of the City limits after January 1, 2020. (Minutes attached). This prompted the County Fire Districts to review options and make preparations to provide these services for their districts. On January 11 of this year, Emergency Medical Program Director Dr. G. Thomas Underhill requested clarification from the City. (January letter attached). In response, on January 31, the County and its partners received notice that City intended to recoup demand costs of approximately \$150,000 per year starting on January 1, 2019 (Discussion outline attached).

We appreciate the City's statement, in its May 25 letter, that the City will continue supplying ambulance services through the end of 2020, so long as the County "makes a firm commitment to the current funding formula for the duration of this EMS levy cycle." We believe such an agreement should be in the form of a revised interlocal agreement, since historically levy disbursements have been made through yearly interlocal agreements, and you are requesting a multiyear commitment by the Board of County Commissioners.

Prior to moving forward with such an extended interlocal, we think it would be productive for the City, as well as other EMS partners, to discuss this issue with the Board during an upcoming open public meeting.

Your letter provides an interesting historical background regarding the EMS levy. We understand that we are in period of rising demand, rising costs, and diminished reimbursements. We disagree, however, that each fire district should have its own EMS levy, while the City has a separate utility fee. We also disagree with the inference in your letter that possible changes to the EMS levy allocation are the result of actions taken by County Fire Districts. These discussions related to changes to the allocation are the direct result of the City of Walla Walla stating that it would change its service area to stop at the City limits, thus the County would have to find other options or write additional checks to the City of Walla Walla for EMS services.

Your letter states multiple times that the voters passed a countywide EMS levy for countywide service. Please remember, it was not the County Fire Districts that proposed changing how the countywide system is implemented. Not once did the County suggest a formula change until the City of Walla Walla proposed service area adjustments. That falls directly on the shoulders of the City of Walla Walla. Now, only after considerable conversations about how the EMS levy distribution could change due to changing service areas by the City, do you state "the City therefore stands ready to continue providing countywide service ... for the duration of the current levy cycle" (letter, pg. 7). The City of Walla Walla was not willing to continue to provide countywide service without additional dollars distributed to it from the EMS levy; but now, after planning was initiated by other districts, you are.

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JAMES K. JOHNSON

District No. 2
TODD L. KIMBALL

District No. 3
JAMES L. DUNCAN

We believe that a countywide EMS system that provides service throughout the County (to the extent feasible), as indicated by RCW 84.52.069(6), should be supported by all municipalities and fire districts. All residents and visitors benefit from the EMS levy. Ambulance utility fees are certainly a tool for cities to utilize to cover costs within their city limits, and the cities should be exploring those options. However, utility fees will not provide the same benefit as the levy. Residents of the City of Walla Walla certainly travel, recreate, and work in areas that are outside City limits. The countywide system funded by the EMS levy helps ensure that residents of the cities, residents of the unincorporated areas, and tourists and visitors to the County have a good, reliable system of ambulance service. This basic system should be available regardless of where a person is located when they need ambulance services.

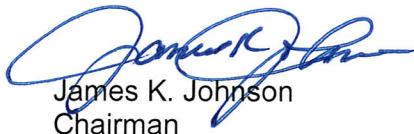
Of course, there is nothing in state law that requires that only one entity provide the countywide service. While the City has ably provided services through most of the County over the years, other options may need to be reviewed. Such options could include creating a Regional Fire Authority, or divvying up EMS funds in a different manner. Even if the City does not provide ambulance services outside of its limits, a possibility raised by the City Council in September, the City would still receive EMS levy funding for ambulance services within its City limits. We hope that the City will support the EMS levy now, and in the future, regardless of any changes as to how services are delivered.

We'd like to discuss these matters during an open public meeting in our chambers on the afternoon of June 25, if that time is available for you.

Thank you for your continued discussion on these important issues.

Sincerely,


WALLA WALLA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



James K. Johnson
Chairman



Todd L. Kimball
Member



James L. Duncan
Member

Cc: College Place City Administrator Mike Rizzitiello
College Place Fire Chief David Winter
EMS Director Heather Lee
Fire District Chiefs Brent Tompkins (District #1), Neil Henze (District. #2), Jim Ruffcorn
(Districts #3 & #7), Rocky Eastman (District. #4), Otis Garbe (District #6), and Bob Clendaniel
(Dist. #8)

WALLA WALLA CITY COUNCIL
Retreat Minutes
September 19, 2017

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Pomraning called the meeting to order at 12:05 p.m. in the Wheatland Village Board Room, 1500 Catherine Street, Walla Walla.

Present: Councilmembers Jim Barrow, Barbara Clark, Jerry Cummins, Dick Morgan, Steve Moss, Tom Scribner, and Mayor Allen Pomraning. (Councilmember Barrow arrived at 12:21 p.m.)

Absent: None

City staff in attendance: City Manager Nabel Shawwa, City Attorney Tim Donaldson, Fire Chief Bob Yancey, and City Clerk Kammy Hill.

2. AGENDA

A. High level review of current city operations and issues.

City Manager Shawwa reviewed and there was discussion on:

- Organizational improvements. Staff is working with Paul Steel to submit an application for the Performance Excellence North West award.
- Review and renewal of strategic plan.
- Citizen satisfaction survey results.
- Draft biennial strategic planning process.
- Lean training and process improvement.
- Continuity of operations planning.
- Benefits of strategic planning and organizational excellence.
- Need for organizational agility to address issues that arise outside of the strategic plan.
- Saving energy as part of efficiency goals.
- Importance of neighborhoods as an essential component for continuity of operations/emergency planning.
- Positive impacts of documenting how things are done successfully and preserving excellence.

The meeting was recessed for a break at 1:14 p.m. and reconvened at 1:18 p.m.

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Councilmember Barrow left the meeting at 2:09 p.m.

City Manager Shawa and Fire Chief Yancey reviewed and there was discussion on the ambulance cost of service financial report and lack of response to the City's request to assist with funding direct costs of ambulance services outside of the City limits. After discussion, it was the consensus of a majority of Councilmembers to consider adoption of an ambulance utility effective January 1, 2020 and develop a draft implementation plan with notice and communication to surrounding jurisdictions that the City of Walla Walla will no longer provide ambulance services outside of the City limits after that date.

4. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:03 p.m.



**WALLA WALLA COUNTY
EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES**



January 11, 2018

Bob Yancey, Chief
City of Walla Walla Fire Department
200 South 12th
Walla Walla, WA 99362

RE: Walla Walla Fire Department (WWFD) Ambulance Service Changes

Chief Yancey,

On September 19, 2017 the Walla Walla City Council discussed developing an implementation plan that would communicate to agencies surrounding the City that WWFD would no longer provide ambulance service outside the City limits effective January 1, 2020 (attachment). Since that time we've been advised the date for WWFD to discontinue providing services to the surrounding agencies has been moved up to January 1, 2019; however have not received official verification from WWFD regarding the potential date change.


At this time I would like to formally request confirmation of the City's intention to have WWFD discontinue ambulance service outside the City limits and to confirm the actual implementation date of any changes. As Medical Program Director (MPD) for Walla Walla County, I need to work with agencies to ensure our citizens continue to receive pre-hospital care and cannot do so without a timeline for potential changes.

To ensure the citizens of Walla Walla County continue to receive the highest quality pre-hospital care and that any potential ambulance service changes are seamless to our residents please respond no later than February 1, 2018. If I don't receive a response by February 1, 2018 I will need to advise impacted agencies to begin moving forward on plans as if WWFD will no longer provide ambulance service outside the City limits effective January 1, 2019.

I appreciate the time you've spent and your willingness to answer questions agencies have raised related to potential changes. Knowing we all share the ultimate goal of ensuring our citizens continue to receive excellent pre-hospital care is extremely reassuring.

Sincerely,

G. Thomas Underhill, M.D.



Title: Medical Program Director

Electronically signed 01/11/2018 @ 0805

Attachment – Walla Walla City Council Retreat Minutes, September 19, 2017

cc: EMS Advisory Committee

Ambulance Service Discussion

WW FD Station 1

January 31, 2018

1. Welcome; Introductions; Purpose for the meeting – Following up on City correspondence regarding WWFD Ambulance service and Dr. Underhill's letter seeking clarification on WWFD service continuity.
2. WWFD is in a difficult financial dilemma:
 - a. Medicare/Medicaid reimbursements have been decreasing for years with little prospect that we will see increases for services in the foreseeable future;
 - b. EMS Levies remain fairly level;
 - c. Cost for service continue to increase (equipment, supplies, wages and benefits, including State and Federal government shifting or attempting to shift more costs to local government).
 - d. As the gap between revenue and costs continue to grow the City of WW is increasingly transferring General Fund \$\$ to close the gap. In December 2017, last month, City Council was requested, and they approved, transferring \$400K from the GF to the Ambulance Fund.
 - e. Given the City's fixed costs to operate the ambulance system (personnel and number of ambulances operating) and the volume of calls, cost cutting measures cannot close the financial gap.
 - f. We see no way around this dilemma but to increase revenue and we anticipate the City will continue to increase ambulance funding to reduce the financial gap.
3. It's our belief and based on experience, that should the ambulance service in WW County continue to fragment it will ultimately, overall, become more expensive to the tax payers and likely less proficient.
 - a. WWFD Ambulance has been referred to as a Cadillac system. BLS/ALS service has mandatory training/certification/equipment/medical supplies requirements, with wages and benefits as the largest cost.
 - b. While many of you are able to rely on volunteers to keep costs down, as time passes, as calls for service increase along with more mandatory training, certifications and equipment, volunteers tend to become a less reliable option. Many rural Fire Department volunteers sign up to fight the occasional fires. They do not sign up for multiple daily aid calls and a fairly intense and mandatory training regimen.
 - c. If the shift from volunteer to paid to staff becomes inevitable you now deal with the very likely outcome that the paid department will become another IAFF union shop – after all why should they be paid less and have less benefits while doing the same work and acquiring the same certifications as those serving WWFD or Pasco?

- d. If, or more likely, when this scenario comes to pass, you too will learn that you're not really in control:
 - i. you cannot control the revenue side of the operation (Medicare, Medicaid and VA reimbursements in particular);
 - ii. You cannot really control the cost side (you run when the bell rings and you must have certain equipment, supplies, training, etc.);
 - iii. And then there's wages, benefits and working conditions – Fire/Ambulance, by State law, are subject to binding arbitration – at impasse you go before a PERC arbitrator that renders the final decision on what you will pay, level of benefits and working conditions.
 - iv. Given all this loss of control, what remains that you can control???

4. Here's what the COWW can control:

- a. It's our desire and intent to work through the ambulance financing dilemma together;
- b. Fragmenting Ambulance service in WW CO will only succeed in creating more, unnecessary duplication of services and increasing the overall cost to WW City and County taxpayers (current examples of cooperation and unification include District Court, Emergency Management and WESCOM).
- c. The COWW does not intend to leave any jurisdiction w/o ambulance coverage;
- d. Yet the COWW cannot continue to absorb 100% of the cost increases and revenue reductions and provide the service;
- e. The COWW sought and continues to seek the recovery of "demand" costs associated with serving each jurisdiction, which totaled \$149,087 in 2015 (10/16 FCS report). We are not seeking reimbursement for the identified Availability costs.
- f. Even IF each jurisdiction agreed to the demand costs, the COWW and its citizens will have to continue contributing City tax dollars, likely in excess of the requested demand dollars. For instance, take 2017, the CC authorized \$400K transfer to the Ambulance Fund from the GF. IF the COWW was receiving \$149K in Demand cost reimbursement, the CC would still have been requested to transfer \$250K to the Ambulance Fund.
- g. The COWW is seeking all jurisdictions to share this burden as fairly as possible.
- h. The COWW will stay at the table with you to work through this, and the COWW will continue to provide ambulance service to your jurisdiction beyond January 1, 2019. You will not be left hanging without ambulance service. If you choose to seek other options for ambulance service, we'll work with you to provide coverage until your alternative service is set up and running. However, beginning on January 1, 2019, at that time it is currently the intent of the COWW to recoup the demand costs associated with delivering ambulance service to each respective jurisdiction.

5. In the interim the COWW is open to discussing funding and operational options.

6. Finally, the COWW strongly suggests, instead of further fragmenting ambulance service, we join together in exploring greater unification options, specifically the formation of a Regional Fire Authority, that could conceivably merge all WW Co Fire service and Ambulance service operations into one cohesive agency serving all citizens in WW County.

We'd like to reconvene this discussion in about 90 days, allowing each jurisdiction time to mull over this information, allow for the completion of CP's FCS study, and inform the City how you would like to proceed.

Thank you for your consideration.