



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE AMBULANCE FEE

The County Commission has received many concerns and questions about the recently enacted ambulance fee. This letter addresses many of the inquiries we have received.

WHY DO WE NEED THIS FEE?

Jefferson County Emergency Services Agency (JCESA) and the individual fire companies work in collaboration to provide ambulance services. Unfortunately, volunteers to support this effort are at an all time low. Between lack of volunteers and our small pool of career staff, adequate County coverage for medical emergency service is not always available. THEREFORE, ALL THE MONIES RECEIVED FROM THE AMBULANCE FEE WILL GO TOWARD HIRING ADDITIONAL CAREER STAFF. To reflect current trends, all new hires will be firefighter EMTs or firefighter paramedics. This means all new hires will be certified to provide both services. The fee will provide more strategically placed career individuals throughout the County to assist with the increase in emergency service requests, as a majority of medical requests require a paramedic to be on board.

Second, the County can no longer support emergency services solely from the general budget. Due to declining revenues resulting in budget deficits, the Jefferson County Commission reduced overall budget expenses by \$2.7 million dollars for this fiscal year. One of our largest expenditures is emergency services with Jefferson County funding the JCESA at \$1,447,562 per year, (89% salaries/benefits; 9% operational costs i.e. vehicle fuel, insurance, purchases, maintenance; 2% building maintenance/utilities, state audit and office expenses). The seven fire companies are funded at \$373,625 per year, for a total annual funding for emergency services of \$1,821,187.

The ambulance fee is expected to generate approximately \$600,000 in additional revenue for this fiscal year. The estimated breakdown of the \$600,000 is as follows: 60% or \$360,000 for salaries; 35% or \$210,000 for benefits; 5% or \$30,000 for training.

This Ambulance Fee is not being assessed because you have used the ambulance in the past; instead, it is being implemented to respond to our citizens' requests to better serve you and your family should you need emergency medical services now or in the future. Once the fee is collected, the hiring process will begin and we expect new career folks to be on board by the end of the first quarter of 2015.

HOW WAS THIS FEE ENACTED?

The implementation of this fee has been discussed for several years at numerous County Commission meetings. An Ambulance Fee Ordinance was drafted and discussed in detail during the County Commission meeting held March 27, 2014. There was notice of a public hearing in local papers for two weeks announcing a Public Hearing regarding the Ambulance Fee Ordinance, which was held May 22, 2014 at 7:00 p.m. **with no comments from the public.** Written

public comment was accepted until the Commission discussed and approved the final Ambulance Fee Ordinance on June 5, 2014. A link will be placed on our website under the "Ambulance Fee" tab to view these documents.

If you would like to obtain a copy of the County Commission's meeting agenda and public hearing notices in advance, you are encouraged to sign up for Jefferson County Alerts which will provide you with an electronic copy in advance of the meetings, via the email you provide. Your email remains confidential. You can sign up by sending an email request to info@jeffersoncountywv.org. If you don't have email and wish to see the agenda, please visit our Court House bulletin board. Comments are always welcome through our website too. If you wish to express public comment, the County Commissioners meet the first and third Thursday of each month, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

WHERE CAN I REVIEW THE ORDINANCE ESTABLISHING THE FEE?

For specific and/or additional information regarding this Ordinance, please visit our website at www.jeffersoncountywv.org. Please see the "Ambulance Fee" tab. To review the County's financial budget please visit the same website. On the front page of the website click on "Budget Information". When the page loads, scroll down to the bottom of the page and click on "FY15 Budget Summary and Narrative".

HOW ARE FEES BEING ASSESSED?

The fee is \$40 per residential unit, and \$85 per commercial unit per fiscal year. The fee can be reduced to \$20 per year with an approved homestead exemption through the Assessor's office for those at or above age 65 and meeting financial requirements. **The Fee deadline has been extended until October 31, 2014, even though your bill reflects a September 30, 2014 deadline.**

WHAT DO I DO IF I FEEL AN ERROR APPEARS IN THE BILLING?

The fee is assessed based on the property owner effective July 1, 2014. If you owned the property on or before that date, you owe the fee. If you sold the property prior to July 1, 2014, the new owners owe the fee. Therefore, please go to our website, www.jeffersoncountywv.org and complete an Exoneration Form, provide proof of sale, and submit the completed form prior to the Oct. 31 deadline.

If you were billed for property that is uninhabitable, no physical structure, one single business in multiple units, etc., you will need to visit our website and complete an Assessor's Property Review Form. Please provide all the detailed information available and submit for consideration and review by the Assessor.

Your completed forms should be brought into our office to the Ambulance Fee Payment desk or emailed to cswiger@jeffersoncountywv.org. In some instances, your request may need to go before the Commission for their consideration. Documents submitted prior to the deadline will not be assessed a late fee regardless of the timing of the Commission's review.