

# Frequently Asked Questions

11/3/22

## Overview

### **Q: Why is this change happening?**

A: The fire and emergency response capacity in Jefferson County has been built over the past two hundred years by a dedicated group of volunteers who have provided both emergency medical services and firefighting.

But as the County has grown and our economy shifted away from locally based jobs, the volunteer model has been pressed to meet the growing demand, particularly for emergency medical services which made up more than 79% of calls in 2020.

With 58,000 residents and tens of thousands of visitors who power our economy, we can't continue to rely on a diminishing corps of volunteers to provide an ever-increasing amount of service.

### **Q: How did the County Commission reach this decision?**

A: In 2021, the County Commission hired Fitch and Associates, a national EMS consulting firm, to examine three to five years of data provided to them by the County to develop four potential scenarios that would enable the County to meet the increasing need for EMS services.

Fitch analyzed types of calls, time of day and day of week, location, our existing stations, apparatus and staffing as well as our financial model to develop these alternatives.

After consultation with the seven fire chiefs and with the JCESA, the County Commission adopted a hybrid of one of the alternatives.

### **Q: How big a change is this?**

A: The vast amount of emergency services is already provided by professional ESA employees. In FY21, a JCESA provider filled the role of driver and/or primary attendant on 96% of all EMS incidents. Through the changes we're making, the County Commission will increase coverage from the current level of five professionally staffed ambulances during the day and four in the evening, to six during the day and five during the evening.

## **What Does This Change Mean for Jefferson County Residents and Visitors**

### **Q: What will the changes be at my local fire station?**

A: The chart below outlines the current placement of professional JCESA staff, and the placement once additional employees are hired:

		Current	Enhanced
Station 1	Friendship	1 Daytime	1 24/7
Station 2	Citizens	1 24/7	2 24/7 + 1 Daytime
Station 3	Shepherdstown	1 24/7	1 24/7
Station 4	Independent	1 24/7	1 24/7
Station 5	Blue Ridge	1 24/7	0
Station 6	Middleway	0	0
Station 7	Bakerton	0	0
Total		One Daytime Four 24/7	One Daytime Five 24/7

### **Q: How will the area currently served by the Blue Ridge stations be managed under the new system?**

A: Currently neither Blue Ridge station is staffed because they lack appropriate living quarters. JCESA EMTs are positioned in the Public Service building located on Lowery Road which is 2.9 miles from the main fire house located on Keys Gap Road or the 1 mile from the substation located on Mission Road. In the event of a call, the EMT must travel from the Public Service building to the closest station before they can respond to the citizen who made the call.

Under the new arrangement Blue Ridge will be served by staffed stations that can immediately respond: either Friendship in Harpers Ferry (5.4 miles to Blue Ridge Station 5) or from Citizens in Charlestown (7.1 miles to Blue Ridge Station 5-1)

### **Q. Has there been a study of where calls come from and how quickly equipment can get there?**

A. Yes. The Fitch study examined exactly this question. In addition, the County has invested in a GIS based dispatch system called QuickestRoute, which uses GPS and routing data to provide turn-by-turn directions. Quickest route uses local jurisdiction rules such as speed limits, one-ways, and the road network to determine recommended units for calls for service.

**Q. Will these additional employees also be able to fight fires if required?**

A: These additional ESA professionals will be dual trained – as both EMTs and as firefighters. And while their primary responsibility will be to staff the ambulances, they will be available for fire calls.

**Q: What are the response volumes and response times within Jefferson County WV?**

A: In 2020, there were 6,601 unique requests for EMS service within Jefferson County, WV. Of those requests ambulances were requested on 5,220 EMS responses and 1,185 Fire Responses, and 196 mutual aid responses.

In 2021, the average dispatch time was 2.1 minutes, the average turnout and travel time was 8.2 minutes, the average response total time was 10.4 minutes, and the 90th percentile response time was 16.2 minutes.

N.B: the 90th percentile response time is determined at the point where 90% of all values are lower and 10% of the values are higher. Thus, if a score is in the 90th percentile, this means nine (9) out of 10 times an ambulance arrives within this timeframe.

**Finances**

**Q: Will this transition to a department cost the taxpayers any more money?**

A: No, there will be no increase to the taxpayers, nor will there be an increase next year to the ambulance fee. In fact, the staff compliment will increase by 12 employees and that will be funded out of the current ambulance billing monies. Neither the ambulance fee nor the amount we bill per call will increase this year or next.

**Q: How will these additional EMS employees be paid for?**

A: Given the current EMS funding level from the general fund (\$3.15 million), the revenue from the ambulance fee (\$1.1 million) and the revenue from ambulance billing (approximately \$1.4 million) the additional 12 employees and on-going operations will be fully funded. We have used Federal ARPA funds to cover one-time costs, such as

purchasing the ambulances from the volunteers. Regular maintenance and vehicle replacement has been built into the operations budget.

**Q: What is the typical cost that a citizen will pay for ambulance runs once county agency moves to “hard billing”?**

A: Typical costs vary based on your insurance policy and your deductibles. Private health insurance generally covers the cost of medically necessary ambulance calls, although a deductible may apply. Medicare covers the cost of ambulance service with a 20% co-pay once you’ve satisfied the deductible.

### **Future of the Volunteer Fire Companies**

**Q: What will be the effect on the fire companies losing ambulance fees?**

A: While the fire companies will no longer receive the ambulance fees, the County has used ARPA Recovery funds to buy the ambulances from the fire companies and will pay them to lease space for equipment and staff in the stations. Additionally, the County will continue to provide each company with an annual payment to support their firefighting operations.

**Q: Who will own the firehouses and how will their maintenance be covered financially?**

A: Ownership of the firehouses and the fire apparatus will not change – they will continue to be owned, operated, and maintained by the volunteer companies.

**Q: What will be the role of the volunteers in the future?**

A: We hope to sustain the volunteer tradition in Jefferson County for as long as possible. The volunteer fire companies have provided training and opportunities to young people interested in fire fighting and emergency medical services, two professions that are in demand in Jefferson County and the counties around us. In addition, the volunteer fire companies provide outreach and education, raise funds for new apparatus, and play a key role in our overall emergency response.

### **Operation of ESA**

**Q: What are the advantages of ESA becoming a County department?**

A: Over the past decade, ESA has been structured and restructured several times. We believe becoming a County department at this time provides the greatest benefits to:

- **ESA employees** by providing unified benefits and HR support, greater career opportunities within other County departments, and greater ability to attract and retain ESA employees.
- **ESA leadership**, by providing back-office functions – insurance billing, payroll, accounting, HR, etc. – so that ESA leadership can focus on emergency services instead of administrative functions.
- **Jefferson County Residents** through
  - Accountability to elected officials instead of appointed board
  - Increased transparency through integrated financial systems including monthly reporting of expenses and approval of invoices by the Commission, annual audit, etc.
  - Stronger negotiating position for insurance and other benefits - a single larger pool of employees instead of two smaller pools; and
  - Consolidated reporting of revenue and expenses including ambulance fee, County appropriation and ambulance billing all reflected in financial reports.

**Q. Will the deployment model adopted by the Commission be the initial rollout model, then be evaluated for response – or will there be a further modeling before rolling out?**

A: We will closely monitor (and publicly report) response time data and then make adjustments to the deployment of personnel and equipment accordingly. We will continually evolve the system as the Jefferson County population grows and shifts.