

# Stephenson County Fire Chiefs Association Inc.

## MABAS Division 17

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### Minutes from Special EMS Meeting July 9, 2024

The Special EMS meeting of MABAS Division 17 was called to order by Secretary Korte at 1900hrs @ the Freeport Library.

The purpose of this meeting is to facilitate discussion about the status of EMS services in Stephenson County. A similar meeting was held in 2022. Representatives of the 11 Fire Districts and 3 EMS Districts (associated with Fire Districts) were requested to attend. Dick Robinson was asked to be a Moderator for this meeting. He has over 40 years of Volunteer/Fire & EMS experience in Elizabeth & is also an EMS Instructor at UW Health SwedishAmerican.

- The meeting started off with an overview of the objectives of the meeting.
  - Change in operational status of Star Ambulance
  - Stephenson County Dispatch Directive
  - An update from each Agency of their response status
  - The Districts Long term goals and objectives
  - Hospital & non-emergency calls
  - Countywide EMS
- Introductions were held next going around the tables and the whole crowd.
- Recently Star Ambulance announced they were closing their doors. Along with their significant number of non-emergency calls and Hospital to Hospital transfers, most of the fire-based EMS was also relying on Star for day-to-day Mutual Aid. With their departure, the other Departments were left to scramble to plan for replacement Mutual Aid coverage. Since the initial announcement, Star has announced they will re-open with 1 ALS ambulance on July 11. That is good news for Star and the Division but it also highlights how short the EMS resources are in the County. Long-term solutions are needed with or without Star. Without Star, the County only has 5 fully staffed ambulances 24/7 and 2 sparsely staffed volunteer ambulances.

#### **Represented Departments**

Cedarville Fire  
Dakota Fire  
Davis Fire  
Freeport Fire

Freeport Rural Fire  
German Valley Fire  
Lena Fire

Orangeville Fire  
Pearl City Fire  
Rock City Fire  
Winslow Fire

- Stephenson County Sheriff Lieutenant Mike Backus is also in charge of the County Dispatchers. When questioned by his personnel about Mutual Aid procedures, he issued a Directive for them to follow “until it is rescinded”. The intent was to give the Dispatchers leeway to dispatch Mutual Aid ambulances quicker to fill calls that are waiting. *The previous policy was to dispatch the appropriate agency and wait for a response. If there is no response in 5 min, they should tone out the agency again and wait up to 5 more minutes before alerting a Mutual Aid ambulance, which will be coming from further away.* The new Directive removes the second 5 min interval and gives the Dispatchers directions on who to call based on geographic location in the County. This direction can be overridden by the Department if they become available or have other arrangements. The intent is to get ambulances enroute to patients quicker.
- We went around the table giving each Department a chance to give an overview of their EMS response coverage.
  - Rock City Fire: They utilize Tri-District Ambulance. They have seen this situation coming for years and have increased their amount of Taxes to allow for better coverage. They are afraid that their taxpayers may get shorted with the number of calls that Tri-District responds to outside of their District.
  - Freeport Rural Fire: They are covered by Rural Ambulance. They acknowledged the struggle their ambulance is having, and their fire personnel are being requested more to assist Mutual Aid ambulances. One of their trustees works at Titan Tire, they have an agreement with Star that they will be called first. He stated they were never informed Star closed and wanted to know what they were supposed to do.
  - Freeport Rural Ambulance: They are struggling with low numbers and no one available to take call. They currently rely heavily on Mutual Aid to cover their calls. There isn't anyone new out there interested in doing EMS and not as a volunteer. Their Trustees have recently agreed to hire a few part-time personnel to cover the weekday 6A-6P shifts. They think they have enough volunteer personnel to cover nights and weekends.
  - Tri-District: They have tried to operate with private contractors and as their own employer. They currently have paid employee coverage but are limited the number of calls they can respond to at any given time. They have one ALS staffed ambulance and a backup.
  - Pearl City Fire: They contract with Leamon's Ambulance. They are also worried about the low number of ambulances in the County and what will happen if no one is available.
  - Orangeville Fire: They run an EMR (Emergency Medical Response) system in their Department. That has worked well for them, getting to the scene earlier and starting basic treatment before the ambulance arrives. They have also utilized EMS from Monroe a few times. They think that Countywide EMS would be too expensive and would not work well.
  - Lena Fire: The contract with Leamon's. They are concerned that Leamon's covers almost ½ of the County Fire Districts and their limited resources.
  - Winslow Fire: They also contract with Leamon's. They also have EMR personnel that assist prior to the ambulance arriving.

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- Freeport Fire: They run 6,200-6,500 calls annually, 18-20 calls a day, with two ambulances. They run ALS Engines that can start treatment if an ambulance is busy or before Mutual Aid arrives. They also have challenges getting people to apply for paid jobs. They are currently testing and have 23 applicants. Usually less than half pass the test.
- Davis Fire: They are part of Tri-District. They have 1<sup>st</sup> responders that can respond before the ambulance but cannot transport.
- Cedarville Fire: They contract with Leamon's and are just getting started with their EMR program. When they built their Station, they made accommodations for an ambulance crew quarters if needed.
- German Valley Fire: They run their own ambulance with 1 Medic and 6 Basics. They normally respond to 60-75 calls annually. This year they are at 32 calls and 8 times they didn't have a crew available to respond.
- Aaron England from Leamon's was out of town. He was able to listen on Zoom but had technical difficulties and was not able to communicate with us.
- Open comments:
  - Everyone of us has challenges but we must be 100% each day. That is what our taxpayers expect.
  - Sometimes we are our own worst enemy. We cover each other's backs and keep the details from the public. Maybe we would get more support than we expected if we told them how much we are hurting for help.
  - Representative Chesney asked if a law should be passed that for profit EMS must give notice before closing? Most did not feel that was appropriate.
- Goals & Objectives, more discussion.
  - Dakota: We need to increase Recruitment but there are new increased training requirements that may keep people away.
  - Ed Koelling: Should the Division have a more formal agreement for Departments to include private members to be included on our Box cards?
  - Lt Backus asked what we want to see from Dispatch? His dispatchers sometimes are on the phone with callers for 20-30 minutes before help arrives. That is taxing on his personnel. He would like to have some type of emergency personnel on scene within 10 min.
  - Rural Fire: Can the Sheriff's Deputies become EMR's?
  - Rock City Fire: Everyone must be able to respond 24/7.
- Hospital update, Doug Toepfer:
  - 10 years ago, the Hospital did 250 transfers by ambulances a month, now they are up to 480/month. They are currently using Elite, Ridge, Metro & Northwest Rescue for these transfers. It is common for patients to have to wait 45-60 min for one of those ambulances to be available.
- Countywide EMS:
  - Some stated it would be very expensive to implement.
  - It would not be easy. JoDaviess County has been talking about it for years but can't agree to get it moving forward. Too many issues, funding, personnel, locations, direction & oversight.
  - How many staffed ambulances would be needed?

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- Final thoughts:
  - Dick Robinson: Nothing was intended to be settled that night. We need to keep the conversation going.
  - Is the County Dispatch Directive in place? Lt Backus, yes. Districts must let Dispatch know when they are not in service so delays can be minimized.

The meeting was adjourned at 2052hrs.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Tom Korte, Secretary

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