



**Office of the
County Clerk**

Donna Trudell, County Clerk

**Florence County
Board of Supervisors**

Finding a Solution Together: Sustainable EMS for the future of Florence County

Florence County has a long history of volunteers providing emergency medical services to our communities. Decades of volunteers spanning multiple generations have provided quality pre-hospital care in response to our emergencies. The culture of volunteers continuing to take on these roles has dwindled over the past several years and we have found that we can no longer maintain the volunteer services that had thrived in the early years of EMS.

Recently there has been a heightened awareness of the national staffing crisis and EMS is no exception. When we look at the commitments required for training and on-call hours from our local EMS providers, in addition to the increased regulations and liability risk, it is understandable why there are not people standing in line to volunteer their time to serve in these roles on top of their career positions.

In late 2020 rescue squads serving several communities in Florence County notified municipal leaders that they could no longer maintain adequate staffing levels to provide around the clock coverage and as a result would be closing their doors. That communication brought about action by local government leaders and the EMS departments to begin working toward a resolution. Collaboration between municipal and county leaders in conjunction with local and state public safety personnel at ad hoc committee meetings over the course of the next year and a half brought us to a proposed solution to provide a sustainable EMS structure that can be carried forward into the future.

As a result of the sustainability study completed and proposals reviewed it was unanimously decided by all eight municipalities and the Florence County Board to move ahead with a consolidated county-wide EMS system owned and operated by Florence County. In 2023 Florence County will initiate a County-wide EMS Service, Florence County EMS, which will operate from a separate fund as indicated in the budget proposal. The 2023 Florence County budget proposal includes establishing and staffing three station sites across the county with a minimum of Basic Life Support (BLS) level transporting ambulances 24 hours a day/7 days a week/365 days a year. The transition to county-wide EMS has begun and is anticipated to be complete and fully functional during the 2023 calendar year. Included in the EMS budget proposal are the EMS specific dispatch center staffing and related operations expenses. This transition is being done in the best interest of safety for the residents of Florence County to ensure reliable pre-hospital medical care when emergencies arise that is sustainable for the future.

County-wide EMS in Wisconsin is a service for which a special levy may be assessed on the county apportionment of taxes. It will take some time to fine tune, but great efforts were made to adopt an EMS budget based off of a professional proposal sought to ensure the drafting of a responsible operation and capital expense plan for this system. Municipalities will enter in to a memorandum of agreement with the county for the provision of EMS services and will pay a \$25.00 per capita rate as part of that agreement. That per capita has been deducted from the total levy to reduce the amount passed on to tax payers directly. Property owners can anticipate this special levy to increase taxes approximately \$208.00 per \$100,000 of property value. Twenty-one percent of this increase will fund operations costs for the EMS related expenses of the Florence County 911 Dispatch Center and seventy-nine percent will fund EMS operations and capital expenses. Public safety is a resource that comes with great expense and EMS is no exception but with it comes peace of mind knowing that when our residents and visitors dial 9-1-1 there is no question that they will receive a rapid response from right here in Florence County.

As the county-wide EMS system moves ahead, we will be releasing additional information to keep community members informed on the progress being made. In the meantime, we wish to express our appreciation to those volunteers who have continued to find ways to balance work/life schedules so that they can pick up shifts at the EMS stations in the county. We also extend our sincere thanks and gratitude to our intercepting partner agencies, Integrity Care EMS and Aspirus MedEvac, who have continued to fill in the many coverage gaps to provide first in response when our volunteer agencies must be out of service. We look forward to building a thriving future of EMS in Florence County where we continue to collaborate with these partner agencies to ensure the quality pre-hospital care rural communities like ours can depend on in times of emergency.