

**MINUTES OF MECKLENBURG COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

The Board of Commissioners of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, met in a special meeting in Charlotte Fire Department Firefighter’s Hall 500 Dalton Avenue, Charlotte, North Carolina at 3:05 p.m. on Thursday, June 26, 2025.

ATTENDANCE

Present: Chair Mark Jerrell, Vice-Chair Leigh Altman
and Commissioners Arthur Griffin,
Elaine Powell, Susan Rodriguez-McDowell,
and Yvette Townsend-Ingram
Deputy Clerk to the Board Arlissa Eason

Absent: Commissioners Vilma D. Leake, Laura J. Meier, and George Dunlap

Also in attendance: Huntersville Fire Chief Jim Dotoli, Pineville Fire Chief Michael Gerin, Davidson Fire Chief J. Ryan Monteith, Charlotte Fire Chief Reginald T. Johnson, Mint Hill Deputy Fire Chief John Phillips, Cornelius Fire Chief Guerry Barbee, Matthews Fire Chief Rob Kinniburgh, and Director of Medic John Peterson

In attendance, not seated at the dais: Town of Huntersville Commissioner Nick Walsh, Cornelius Town Manager Andrew Grant, and Huntersville Deputy Town Manager Jackie Huffman

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair Mark Jerrell, followed by introductions and the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

25-0397 Board of County Commissioners and Fire Chiefs Discussion

The Board received information in a forum for the Fire Chiefs to share their thoughts about Medic and other concerns

Background: This meeting is being held with the Fire Chiefs of the Towns of Huntersville, Mint Hill, Matthews, Cornelius, Davidson, Pineville, the City of Charlotte, Director of Medic, and the Board of County Commissioners to share their thoughts about Medic and other concerns.

Agenda

- Introductions
- Opening Statement (BOCC CHAIR)
- Commissioners
- Each Chief will be provided 3-5 minutes to make a statement and address issues
- Medic/JP Response
- Follow Up Questions (Chiefs & Commissioners)
- Reinforce Concerns & Action Items
- Closing Statement

Introductions

All of those in attendance made their introductions.

Opening Statement

Chair Jerrell provided a brief recap and history of the topic of discussion and an overview of the meeting agenda.

Commissioners

Commissioner Altman said she deeply respected everyone, the work they did, and the time they took to meet with her.

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell said she knew they all wanted to put their community members first and that it was everyone's intent to do so.

Commissioner Powell said they could not solve problems if they did not listen to each other.

Commissioner Griffin said that, as an elected official, his first priority was public safety, and he hoped they would come out of the meeting with a solution.

Commissioner Townsend-Ingram said she was there to listen and learn.

Chief statements and address to issues

Chief Kinniburgh said it was his privilege to meet with the BOCC. He said his colleagues considered him to be the headliner at the meeting due to his experience and having the most tenure as a first responder, aside from Fire Chief Phillips. He provided a brief history of the relationship between the fire departments and EMS services.

Chief Kinniburgh said their concerns involved the safety of their citizens and their level of care. He said, although it was not about the money, quality service required it. He said in the 1990's it was evident EMS services were understaffed and underperforming, so the County developed a study that established a background for Medic in 1996. He said the current contract format went back to that date and reported only compliance data for priority 1 patients with little to no information regarding priority 2 and priority 3 responses. He said numerous EMS system enhancements occurred over the years that improved patient outcomes.

Chief Kinniburgh said they had changes in fire services, which could be seen by their explosive growth and additional service demands, of which they were at the forefront. He said they switched from volunteers to paid professional staff and implemented standards for deployment and staffing. He said fire services attempted several times over a long period of time to get work started on updating the contract, and they had issues communicating and working with Medic.

Chief Phillips said they had to allocate their assets to the best of their ability. He said they were seeking balance and didn't want to overload their assets with any one task, as doing so would affect the rest of their services.

Chief Dotoli said first responders were the backbone of America, and when Fire, Police, and Medic came together, they worked well together. He said they wanted to change certain things and not depreciate or decline fire services. He said if they were not present for all calls, they couldn't do their jobs.

Chief Dotoli said they came up with their budget by building a matrix and determining their expenses, including fire apparatus, fuel, medical supplies, and maintenance costs. He said they gave that information to every fire chief and requested that they determine what it had cost them to run EMS calls in comparison to the subsidy they were receiving.

Chief Dotoli said Huntersville ran 2,000 calls, with 1,000 of them being medical; therefore, the cost for EMS calls would include half of their fuel and maintenance costs and 100% of their

medical supplies' costs. He said they were also riding with 3-4 EMTs, but they would only calculate one at Medic's rate of \$20 per hour. He said it cost Huntersville \$1.6 million to run EMS calls and Charlotte roughly \$10,000,000 while only receiving a \$500,000 supplement. He said it opened people's eyes to see what it would cost to put a fire truck on medical calls. He said the bottom line was to make sure they were available to protect, rescue, and they'd always be there for the public, but they needed to ensure they would be available when they were needed.

Chief Johnson said they were all experiencing the same struggles, but as of May 12th, they had a 32% reduction of EMS-only calls, but they were not real reductions, as they were just moved to a different EMS department. He said, as of 36 days before and after May 12th, there was a seven-second reduction in response times, which was good, due to the City having invested in the fire department by adding additional stations and companies. He said they understood how long it took things to be done in government, but they didn't have time to wait for the study as it would likely take 12-24+ months to see the changes be implemented.

Chief Barbee said it was true that no other County in the State paid its first responders to respond to calls, but no other County was using its first responders the same way Mecklenburg County was. He said the fire departments needed to do numerous things, and they wouldn't respond every time when only Medic was needed.

Chief Barbee said they spent a great deal of their time in Lake Norman training and preparing for drowning events, receiving calls for changing smoke detectors, attending community events, etc. He said most times, when 911 was called, the fire department responded, and the growth in the County was amazing, but Medic hadn't added any staffing or improvements since 2015.

Chief Barbee said the fire departments had adapted to the growth and made changes while Medic was playing catch-up. He said whether they felt it was an emergency or not, the fire departments were contractually obligated to go to calls. He said there were standards they had to meet, but couldn't because their trucks and units were tied up.

Chief Barbee said they started receiving complaints regarding their response times post-COVID at Medic's attempt to help. He said he had asked for data from Medic but hadn't received it because they said they were not contractually obligated to provide that information. He said he wanted to make sure his citizens were receiving equitable care, but Medic only met their response time goals 68% of the time. He said they could not fix the system if they did not know how badly the system was broken.

Chief Monteith said the relationship between Medic and the fire department was misrepresented from an outside perspective, as their tension was a slow buildup over a long period of time, but their relationship had improved since Mr. Peterson became director of Medic.

Chief Monteith said fire services had grown, and they evaluated the difference in how they collected their data with compliance and raw data. He said Davidson was averaging a 4-minute and 20-second response time, but they needed to look further into the data. He said they needed to see what the true numbers looked like and find the deficiencies to determine how to address them. He said Mr. Peterson was responsible for providing EMS service delivery to all residents in the County, but Chief Monteith's responsibility was to the citizens in Davidson.

Chief Gerin said he had been taxed with a statement made by Mr. Peterson at their previous joint meeting in that there was a total of 300 fire apparatuses, which was a misrepresentation because they could not get to that number, even with their reserves. He said they had 68 manned apparatuses ready to respond to calls within Charlotte each day and 91 in the entirety of Mecklenburg County, which included the ETJ and those accounted for in Charlotte. He said there were only 80 in the towns and in the City of Charlotte without fluctuation at any time.

Chief Gerin said they were responsible for so many things, but there were only so many people who could do them. He said the issues were the direct responsibilities of the fire services, and those 80 apparatuses needed to be available every day. He said they discussed quick response vehicles that couldn't be injected into the system because they were non-billable.

The Deputy Chief of the Carolina Fire Department said the towns were representing the ETJ well.

Follow Up Questions (Chiefs & Commissioners)

Commissioner Powell said she was getting many complaints about 911 not answering calls. She said there was an explosive growth that seemed out of balance, and it was the #1 priority in her district. She said the community wanted them to respond in the fastest way possible and asked how they could make it better. She said the raw data was important to them too and asked for clarification regarding their number of manned apparatuses. *Chief Gerin said there were 91 apparatuses in the entire County and included the ETJ. He said there were 80 in just the City and towns.*

Commissioner Powell said explosive growth had unintended consequences, and many people were upset that the fire was stuck on medical calls. She said she was hearing similar things about the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD).

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell said the asset allocations and the attempt to find balance there was loud and clear. She said someone had mentioned they wanted to change what calls the fire departments responded to, and requested more information regarding that. She said the idea of the QRVs (Quick Response Vehicles) resonated with her, and the idea that it was not a billable service stuck with her. She said they had to figure out a way to make it work and come up with a creative way to fund it. *Chief Monteith said he gave credit to Mr. Peterson for mentioning providing relief to the first responders, considering the budget and the angst of response times. He said fire units were given the ability to ask the patient if they were needed while they waited for Medic and although they found that about 80% of the time, the patient requested them to stay, it gave their staff the ability to assess the situation in the event they were needed to respond to a different emergency.*

Chief Monteith said he had eight staff members per day between two fire stations, and they battled response times. He said his concurrent call volume (2 calls at one time) was between 18% and 20%, which wasn't sustainable when they already had limited resources. He said they were governed by standards that if they were meeting a 10% concurrent call volume, they needed to add a fire station or additional staffed apparatuses.

Chief Johnson said Chief Monteith's calls were on the lower end of the call volumes, and they were more focused on the life-threatening calls. He said they had to meet somewhere in the middle to reduce the number of low-acuity calls fire responded to. He said it would take time for Mr. Peterson to hire additional people, and it wouldn't happen by July 1. He said they were reaching almost a million people in the City, and they had to figure something out quickly.

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell asked if they had been able to determine whether the call was life-threatening before arriving on the scene. Chief Johnson said they could typically determine that based on the information received from the caller. He said it was not Medic's fault, *but they had to find another way to address it.*

Chief Dotoli provided examples of what would differentiate the necessity of sending a Medic from sending the fire department. He said there were emergency calls, non-emergency calls, and first responder-only calls.

Chief Phillips said in a lot of cases, if fire got on the scene with a low acuity patient and Medic labeled it as a non-emergent response, the Medic truck assigned to it would often not be sent until fire reported back whether an ambulance was required. He said if the truck was not required

and Medic received a higher acuity call, it would be rerouted to the higher acuity call, so the fire department would be further delayed from departing the scene.

Chief Barbee said EMS was Medics' sole responsibility.

Chair Jerrell said he wanted to get them moving towards a solution.

Chief Kinniburgh said it was a roll of the dice when taking people off the truck and putting them into the QRV to respond to a scene because they would not have the same resources as they would if they were in the fire trucks. He said there were two funding models, one for the ETJ departments and one for the town departments. He said the County divorced itself from funding the town departments in the 1990s.

Chief Kinniburgh said the sole burden of providing fire protection was on the towns and their tax bases, but they had very little data on half the services they provided because they did not know how Medic was performing. He said if they wanted to solve the problems, Medic first needed to unlock their data.

Chief Kinniburgh said that when they had the three zones under compliance reporting, the south zone, including Matthews, Mint Hill, and Pineville, had a 98% success rate for Medic arriving to the scenes in under 11 minutes. He said the raw data for district seven, which included Matthews and Mint Hill, was rolled out in the Board's March meeting at 65%.

Commissioner Altman said issues were dealt with by the Board when they did not seem to be getting resolved internally. She said she agreed with transparency, and it was the first step to solving the problem. She said she was glad to be getting an independent party involved to create solutions with the study, but they could not wait 18 months to resolve things. She requested that they speak more about the idea of reducing the number of low-acuity calls that the fire responded to. *Mr. Peterson said the 32% reduction in calls mentioned by Chief Johnson didn't mean they didn't go on those calls; it meant an ambulance went to the call. He said they looked at ways to turn that, and it went into effect on May 12th, but he did not know if there was a full opportunity to see the impact yet. He said there was a 7% reduction in the number of calls Fire was having to take on due to the change, though the impact had yet to be felt, but they were seeing an improvement in their response times on Medic's end. He said first responder-only responses resulted in about 7000 calls per year that Medic never responded to.*

Mr. Peterson said if they made a change, the study would be a way forward, and if they looked at it presently, they didn't have the capacity to take on all those calls. He said the fire department had the same concerns about knowing if they needed to respond to certain calls, but reducing the response calls by 32% was a solution. He said it was going to take time, and they needed to consider more immediate solutions.

Commissioner Altman said building trust with each other was something they could do immediately. *Mr. Peterson said he had a good conversation with the town managers, and they agreed that any data that was needed would be provided as long as it was under the scope of the discussion and did not violate HIPAA.*

Commissioner Griffin asked why there was not a framework to compare the quality and quantity of service versus costs in 1996 to keep up with the county's growth. He said the county would continue to grow, and they had to fix it. He said they needed to find long-term and short-term solutions and establish a framework.

Commissioner Griffin said he wanted to know how other counties operated differently in terms of triage. He said they would not be able to create a framework with quantity and quality of service unless Medic unlocked the data. He said they had to determine what their goals were for 2025 and 2030 as the population continued to grow. He said no one created that metric in 1996.

Commissioner Townsend-Ingram said they needed to expand to take on the extra capacity, and

they couldn't expect the fire department or Medic to handle all of the things they did as the County continued to grow. She said they needed another agency to coordinate their first responder services and asked if those changes were something they would have to present to the North Carolina general assembly, and, if so, they should get started on that soon due to time constraints.

Commissioner Townsend-Ingram said the funding model was obsolete, and they could not tax their way into making the model better. She said the funding had to have several prongs that were not strictly taxation, and they had had several non-profit groups that could assist as well. She said, in reference to a short-term solution, she requested that the Board receive a list from both Medic and the fire departments, including their recommendations for temporary solutions. *Mr. Peterson said they had the data and the primary reason he presented that particular information on their April 15th meeting showing some of the data referenced by the Chiefs, information of which represented the north zone/south zone compliance, and raw data versus contractual compliance data, was because there was an issue in the fact that the goals, as they were written in their contract for Medic, didn't work anymore. He said that as the system was built, Medic had to be accountable for response times, which showed them at 98% compliance when in reality they were closer to about 60%.*

Commissioner Townsend-Ingram said she understood, but that was specifically why people should be provided with both sets of data. She said they were withholding vital information and making their own judgment about what was needed. She said if another agency was responsible for it, Mr. Peterson would no longer be responsible for that information, which would be a relief for him, but they had to determine a way to fund the agency. *Chief Dotoli said he agreed with Mr. Peterson, and the Commissioners should look at the contract from 1996.*

Chief Phillips said it was sufficient for the time the framework was built. He said they were asset-depleted.

Chief Barbee said he'd never been told how many Medic trucks were staffed and in service.

Commissioner Powell said everyone would benefit from QRV's and it would be interesting to know how much it would cost. She said they could get the corporate community involved, and assurance was needed in North Mecklenburg that Medic could get there in a timely manner. She said the response times were not acceptable and had to improve. She requested that Chief Kinniburgh explain what he meant when discussing HIPAA.

Chief Kinniburgh said he was told that HIPAA was the reason they couldn't receive the data they needed. He said the fire departments were not asking for names; they just wanted incident numbers and times from Medic. He said that because hospitals had control over the agency and the direction Mr. Peterson had been given, the fire departments could not be given that information. He said the first responders were considered a part of the system in all other NC counties and had access to the data.

Commissioner Powell asked if they could put the freedom to that information into the contract for the fire department. *Mr. Peterson said there were already business associate agreements that were updated roughly one year prior. He said he could not speak for the past, but he believed that if anyone asked for information in more recent years and they were denied due to HIPAA, it was because there was some aspect of that information that, for Medic to provide it, would be a HIPAA violation. He said it was not a blanket excuse, and Medic wanted to be transparent with their data. He said he hoped that when the whole process was complete and they had a clear goal for Medic, they would be able to make the data as public as possible, but they currently did not have the goal.*

Chief Barbee disagreed because the agency already had response times. He said if they removed the compliance portion and only had the raw data, that would be their goal.

Mr. Peterson said he was referring to the agreed-upon goals to which Medic was officially held

accountable.

Commissioner Griffin said they were all working together for the same causes, and he hoped they could solve for a short-term goal, but really plan for a framework to deal with the growth. He said they had to figure out the future. *Chief Johnson said some of them had contract renewals coming up, and they had to meet in the middle. He said Mr. Peterson said there were about 7,000 first responder-only calls in the previous year, with firetrucks going out; it should be clear that Medic had a contract with the County. He said in the short term, they had to have a tiered process for what Mr. Peterson said on reducing those first responder-only calls.*

Chair Jerrell said the clock was ticking against the community, and he believed that County Manager Bryant had the intellect to navigate the issue. He said his big takeaway was that they had to solve the data issue. He said that with the extent to which the Board had to lean in, it became their responsibility.

Chair Jerrell said he was committed to helping Mr. Peterson solve the problem. He said the funding all boiled down to them, and they would have to figure out how to deploy more resources. He said they had to set realistic expectations and targets to help with the resources. He said it was an accomplishment that they were moving forward with the study.

Chair Jerrell said there was a concern about whether there was a working group between them all, and they shouldn't get to a point where the community was in a crisis. He asked if they could establish a working group with stakeholders involved to discuss response times and data. He said there should be someone to clearly tell the fire departments to leave certain information out of their requests for data.

Closing Statements

Chief Kinniburgh said things had to be broken before they could be fixed. He said he was optimistic that they could solve the problem. He said there were other demands on the BOCC budget which ultimately influenced the fire departments and Medic to delay the discussion, but he was thankful the Board was willing to hear them out.

Chief Phillips thanked the Board for the platform and opportunity to discuss the topic.

Chief Dotoli said he hoped the new study would change a lot of things and thanked the Board.

Chief Johnson said they had faith in one another and thanked the Board. He said they could make it happen.

Chief Barbee said, once they could admit their problems, they could begin to rebuild. He said that Mr. Peterson and Deputy Director Gonzales were trying to fix the problem and hoped they could continue the dialogue.

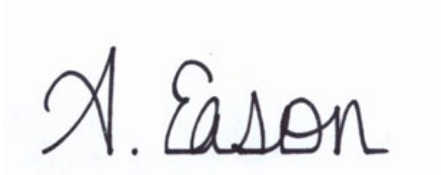
Chief Monteith said it was important for Mr. Peterson to deliver the information and for them to give different perspectives. He said he was thankful for the opportunity to meet.

Chief Gerin said the people in the room would continue to take calls and wouldn't let the services they provided fail.

Mr. Peterson thanked them for the opportunity to participate and said the most important thing they had was patience.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to come before the Board, Chair Jerrell declared the meeting adjourned at 5:08 p.m.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "A. Eason". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "A".

Arlissa Eason, Deputy Clerk to the Board

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Mark Jerrell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "M".

Mark Jerrell, Chair