

Meeting Minutes
April 23, 2025

MINUTES OF MECKLENBURG COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

The Board of Commissioners of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, met in Special Session in Conference Center Room 267 on the 2nd floor of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center located at 600 East Fourth Street, Charlotte, North Carolina at 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday, April 23, 2025.

ATTENDANCE

Present: Chair Mark Jerrell, Vice-Chair Leigh Altman
and Commissioners Elaine Powell,
Susan Rodriguez-McDowell, Arthur Griffin,
Yvette Townsend-Ingram, and Laura J. Meier
County Manager Dena R. Diorio
County Attorney Tyrone C. Wade
Clerk to the Board Kristine M. Smith

Absent: Commissioners George Dunlap and Vilma D. Leake

Also in attendance: City of Charlotte Assistant City Manager Shawn Heath, Matthews
Town Manager Becky Hawke, Town of Matthews Mayor Gina Hoover,
Mayor of Cornelius Woody Washam, Cornelius Town Manager Andrew
Grant, Davidson Town Manager James Justice, Mayor of Davidson Rusty
Knox, Huntersville Deputy Manager Jackie Huffman, Huntersville
Commissioner Nick Walsh (on behalf of Huntersville Mayor Christy
Underwood Clark), Executive Director at Mecklenburg EMS Agency
(MEDIC) John (J.P.) Peterson, MEDIC Board Chair Dr. Sidney Marc Fletcher,
Incoming Mecklenburg County Manager and MEDIC Board Member Mike
Bryant, Deputy County Manager of Mecklenburg and Chief of Staff Derrick
Ramos, Mint Hill Town Manager Brian Welch, Pineville Town Manager
Ryan Spitzer, Mayor of Pineville David Phillips, and City of Charlotte
Councilman Malcom Graham

CALL TO ORDER

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

25-0261 MEDIC and First Responder Discussion

The Board discussed MEDIC and First Responder Services in Mecklenburg County.

Background: This meeting was held with County Leaders including the Town Mayors and the City and County Managers in attendance.

Comments

City of Charlotte Assistant City Manager, Shawn Heath said the City of Charlotte was focused on finding a solution to the challenge, they were on board with the third-party study, and it would be a medium-to-long term path forward, but it did not alleviate their issue associated with the

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July expiration date relating to their contract. He said they had a flat subsidy in their contract that was approximately \$499,000 per year whereas the towns had a per-call rate that was roughly \$21 per call. He said in Charlotte's FY2024 data regarding the City of Charlotte Fire Department (CFD) they had 84,000 MEDIC related calls which equated to a little less than \$6 per call.

Mr. Heath said the fire chief emphasized the non-financial considerations related to the EMS service delivery model itself, particularly the dispatch protocols and the resource utilization. He said the calls the CFD was involved in included a high percentage that were low acuity and some that were first responder only calls. He said those calls put stress and strain on their resources and they were looking to find an operational model that met the needs of both MEDIC and CFD's needs.

Matthews Town Manager Becky Hawke said Matthews was interested in discussing the existing service delivery model and the way the reporting was being provided with the contract being divided into only the three different service areas for MEDIC did not provide a clear picture of what the actual service levels were in many of their individual communities.

Ms. Hawke said they were supportive of additional funding for MEDIC so they could increase the existing service levels to ensure there was equitable service delivery across the entire County, regardless of the way the reports might require the data to be shown. She said Matthews had been requesting the more detailed data for a few years but had not been successful and they supported a study to determine the desired service delivery model and level of service for the entire County.

Ms. Hawke said Matthews had to increase the fire and EMS budget by 50% over the previous two years to meet the level of response required in their community but their funding level stayed at \$60,000 through the agreement so they had to pass the cost along to the residents. She said the existing model was not working.

Mayor of Cornelius Woody Washam said public safety was one of their top-ranked priorities in the community and MEDIC was just as critical as police and fire. He said the three north Mecklenburg towns were all aligned in their concerns.

Mayor of Davidson Rusty Knox said once MEDIC arrived on scene to a call, they never received complaints in the quality of service provided. He quoted an article from July 2018 that included "The 5 hallmarks of a good EMS agency" and a brief recount of the quality of EMS services. He said they received about \$34,000 from the County but 42% of their budget was spent on EMS calls and that should equate to over \$1 million. He said it was important for the funding to stay in place temporarily until they came to a new agreement. He said the third-party study was important and would be advantageous to the towns, the County, and to MEDIC.

Mayor Washam said his town needed the study and believed there were many solutions available. He said 39% of their calls were first responder type calls and it would equate to roughly \$800,000. He said their performance was roughly 68% versus a goal of 85% and that was not good enough for their area.

Huntersville Commissioner Nick Walsh said it was not practical to send a million-dollar fire truck with four people on it to wait for MEDIC to show up. He said their fire chief looked at a \$1.6 million impact to provide that first responder service, of which they were required to do per the contract while only receiving \$100,000 in compensation. He suggested building out the MEDIC system, so that they were permanently stationed in the fire stations and not have fire respond to every call.

Mayor of Pineville David Phillips said when the contract was first put in place, their department had several volunteers, many of which were certified EMTs, but volunteer participation decreased greatly over the years so many of their staff consisted of Charlotte or Rockhill fire and officers who were serving for the fire department on their days off. He said MEDIC needed

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additional members in place and to increase the number of districts from three to six and they should follow through with the third-party study.

Mint Hill Town Manager Brian Welch said they supported the study as the data was a big issue for him and it would help if he had a better grasp on when and where the calls were happening. He said Mint Hill previously provided an ambulance service, of which changed from a volunteer service into a municipal service. He said they made no overtures to get out of the contract and they were dedicated to continuing to go on the calls.

Commissioner Altman said she was interested in finding ways to improve service. She said when Executive Director at Mecklenburg EMS Agency (MEDIC) John (J.P.) Peterson attended the previous Board meeting, he provided information regarding the improvements and responsive measures being taken and she had been made aware of SUV's that could be utilized in place of fire engines. She said addressing a fire emergency should never be delayed because they were on hold for a low emergency medical problem, and she agreed they needed more districts.

Commissioner Altman said she was informed from their previous meeting that the municipalities were levying a tax for fire service but, about 65% of the time, fire departments were not responding to fires, therefore if they were to only respond to fires, they would not be engaged for a large portion of their time. She said it seemed like double taxation for the municipalities to tax the residents but then request a subsidy.

Commissioner Altman said Mecklenburg County was the only county in North Carolina where the County was sending a subsidy to the municipalities. She said the practice arose before the municipalities levied a local tax, and they just never went back to reevaluate it.

County Manager Diorio said the subsidy started at a time when the Towns did not have municipal fire departments and did not have taxing authority, so the County provided a subsidy. She said things had changed since then and the role of the municipal fire departments was to provide EMS first responder services.

County Manager Diorio said there were no other counties in North Carolina that provided a financial subsidy to a municipal fire department for EMS services. She said they were taxing their residents for a service and then proceeding to request the County to tax them again so they could provide the same service. She said the County was basically writing them a check for a service they were already providing. She said she believed that was the fundamental disagreement they had regarding the subsidy.

Mayor Washam said they did not have a fire tax in Cornelius but there was one in the ETJ. He said they had a property tax just like the County, out of which they funded the fire department. He said it was his understanding that it was the responsibility, per state statute, that the County provide the MEDIC services. Mr. Peterson said he believed the provision within the state statute was to provide ambulatory services, but it was not all encompassing.

MEDIC's Lawyer Patrick Kelly said North Carolina statute said the County was ultimately responsible for overseeing ambulatory services to the County, but it was up to the County to determine what that looked like, but that statute would not address the fundamental question of the fire department's role versus MEDIC's role.

Commissioner Altman asked if it would be fair to deduce that it would not be violating the law for nonpayment of a subsidy if the statute was not clear and 99 out of 100 counties were not sending a subsidy. *Mr. Kelly said he was unaware of any requirement of subsidizing the fire departments as part of the EMS systems and in their discussions with the NCOEMS, they confirmed that it was not a requirement.*

Mayor Washam said it appeared the per capita funding for some areas of the State was larger than in Mecklenburg County, so the question was how they compared in the per capita funding

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for MEDIC medical services. He said he presumed that it was low in comparison to the major metropolitan areas.

Mayor Knox said if the statute was that vague, then it provided validity into the reasoning to do the third-party study to determine what the deliverables should be and for statute to not give any benchmarks on response times or any other factors, that in and of itself should be enough validity to say they needed the study to make solid determinations.

Ms. Hawke said it was up to the County to determine what kind of service they would like provided within their County. She said they were doing research to see if there were other municipalities that received funding across the State and their request was to look at the other models to see how they worked holistically. She said the fire department continued to grow and filled the role of responding to low acuity calls and triaging because no one else had the responsibility. She said if that responsibility were to go away because another model was adopted, she would support her department to continue to exist as it did because, even if they were not answering calls back-to-back, they needed PT, training, and calls were getting stacked which delayed response times.

Ms. Hawke said their revenue did not cover everything but, as far as double taxation, they funded the fire and EMS department out of property taxes. She said if the model changed and they got additional funding, they could roll their tax right back or that revenue would be available for other needs in the community.

Cornelius Town Manager Andrew Grant said they had inherited medical responses, and they had to subsidize that with their property tax rate. He said 2/3 of their calls were low acuity which was substantial.

Commissioner Walsh said he asked the attorney as to who was responsible for EMS services and based on statute 43-517, each county was required to ensure emergency medicals services were provided to its citizens.

Ms. Huffman said, by design, the fire departments were typically the first to arrive on scene and it was critical the partnership continued. She said there were two counties in the State that suggested there were contracts between other counties and fire departments based on the reporting's in their statistical sections and there was evidence showing other counties were not expecting the fire departments to respond to every call.

Mr. Peterson said they did not send the fire department out on all medical calls. He said 40% of the calls dispatched for MEDIC did not include the fire department on the initial dispatch and they tried to use the fire department to respond to medical calls only when they really needed them. He said every EMS system was different but the model they had was put together in the 90's.

MEDIC Board Chair Dr. Sidney Marc Fletcher said they needed lower acuity type vehicles as another option. He said MEDIC needed additional resources to do what they needed to, and they recognized that the three zones were not working.

Chair Jerrell said Mr. Peterson mentioned improvements specific to response times.

Mr. Peterson said he discouraged people from calling 911 and claiming a more serious emergency in order to get better response times.

Commissioner Rodriguez McDowell said she was confident in Mr. Peterson's recommendations and background. She said the group could discuss alternative ideas and the barriers they had because she did not understand why they felt the need for another entity to come in and speak to the subject.

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Commissioner Powell said she understood the need for better response times. She asked how they could build a better MEDIC with their limited resources if other entities were trying to pull resources from the County.

Mayor Washam said the study could validate that Mr. Peterson was correct or say there were better ways to do it.

Mayor Knox said there was a deliverable issue in the north end and asked how many more ambulances they would need. *Mr. Peterson said they asked for 10 in the most recent budget request and would likely need another 10 in the following year. He said there were several variables that needed to be considered to provide a more exact response.*

Mayor Washam said he wanted to tell his town that they were getting a good response but without the data, he could not do that.

Mr. Peterson said they were open to exploring the data and looking at how they track response times.

Dr. Fletcher cautioned that whatever data they gathered from the study would be whatever they had to follow.

Mr. Peterson said 22 zones were determined to provide the best response times but that would come with an exorbitant cost, so they were trying to find something achievable and reasonable.

Commissioner Altman said everyone wanted to be reasonable but asked if they could divide it by municipality. *Mr. Peterson said dividing by zip code would be more logical.*

Commissioner Altman said trying to measure by zip code would be expensive but being able to report town by town should be a reasonable request. *Mr. Peterson said they would be able to share the data she was requesting.*

Pineville Town Manager Ryan Spitzer asked if they only got money when they transported someone. *Mr. Peterson said yes, and they got 25% of their funding from the County and 75% from service fees.*

Mr. Peterson said they could report by zones but to report it by municipalities would be more difficult.

County Manager Diorio said reporting by zip code would also include manually evaluating the data.

Commissioner Powell said there was tension regarding the need to decrease MEDIC hold. She said the raw data was very city centric and she would like to know what short-term solutions they would have for the raw data that showed how bad the response times were.

Mayor Washam asked for a definition of MEDIC hold. *Mr. Peterson said MEDIC Hold was a term used by fire departments to describe first responder only responses.*

Mr. Peterson said MEDIC had great success in their hiring process and they were on pace to have all 50 of their new hires before the end of the calendar year. He said it took 18 months to get an ambulance, but they were working with the vendors to get the ambulances quickly and they were on track to have rapid growth. He said about 1/3 of their calls could benefit from having the ambulance respond immediately and there could be a real solution in making a reduction of first responder only calls.

Mr. Peterson said they did not get adequate information to know what the police needed from them. He said they had been making changes and already saw improvements.

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Commissioner Altman said she wanted to ensure the fire department never had delay responding to a fire call because they were obligated to respond to a MEDIC call. *Mr. Peterson said there was a protocol that allowed the fire fighters to tell the patient that they were in no life-threatening danger and possibly would wait with them until MEDIC arrived on scene.*

Mr. Peterson said if they had multiple fire structures, they wanted the ability to be able to say they could not handle the low acuity first-responder-only responses and focus on their fire calls.

Mayor Knox said Mr. Peterson had mentioned a pilot program including medics in SUV who could relieve the fire truck and, although they could not transport, they would be able to relieve the truck. *Mr. Peterson said they did small-scale testing with alternative response units, but they needed more detailed testing. He said it would be a significant ongoing cost because it would be a complete addition. He said 75% of medic's revenue was generated by fees billed for service, so if they could not transport, it would be nearly a 100% cost. He said it could be a great alternative, but they would have to determine the cost vs. benefit.*

Ms. Hawke said she implored the Board to consider the importance of data because looking further into the raw data revealed the numbers were lower. She said if they couldn't look at the before and after of the call response times in each area, it'd be hard to determine if it was successful or meeting the expectations of the County. She said the contract was so antiquated and did not provide a clear picture.

Chair Jerrell asked if the County Manager Diorio could provide any insight on what the people could expect from her budget recommendation with respect to MEDIC, the subsidy, and the funding aspect of what they were looking at.

County Manager Diorio said they did not have the bandwidth to increase the subsidy to the towns in the budget starting July 1st, but they did not plan to cut the subsidy that flowed through them to MEDIC.

Mayor Washam said he was thankful to hear that the subsidy would remain but there was a lot of new information on the way that, moving forward, would make a difference.

Mr. Grant said there was a ticking clock for those who submitted a notice of the expiring contract, and they were looking for a renegotiation of what the terms were. He said he hoped they were willing to perform a study, and they would consider an extension to the contract if there was a study coming.

County Manager Diorio said they did not get letters from every town terminating their contract so she believed it would take longer than when their contract would expire. She requested they withdraw their terminations, so all parties were all on the same playing field while they worked through changes to the contracts.

Mayor Knox said it was a negotiable process and he was glad the funding would stay in place for the time being.

Davidson Town Manager James Justice said they wanted to improve the system and felt they were teammates. He said they wanted to discuss how to improve things and he believed the study would help them make those determinations on how to work together as partners.

Mr. Heath said their view did not change and they felt they needed to have an MOU or contract in place by the first week of July. He said it was a priority for them and he knew it could be modified considering the potential for a study and longer-term conversations around the subsidy. He said he hoped if there was a study they could discuss guiding principles as it took decades for them to get to where they were.

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Commissioner Walsh said they would likely not want to operate without some kind of MOU contract therefore some changes would have to happen before the first of July. He said they wanted to be partners, but they needed to move forward, and they should have the study as quickly as possible.

Mayor Hoover said she hoped they could go forward with a study, and she thanked them for continuing the funding with the subsidy.

Mayor Washam said they knew what they would like to achieve with the study, and they had a very specific list. He said they intended to provide that list with the Board following the meeting.

Commissioner Griffin said he was leaning to the sensitivity around some type of study to be able to benchmark in terms of best practices. He asked how they would ensure the new model did not disadvantage any portion of the community and what specific data or trend prompted the recommendation to move from 3 to 8 zones. He asked what key performance indicators would be used to evaluate the new zone model going forward and how did that. He suggested they could do a dashboard in the future.

Commissioner Townsend-Ingram said she supported a study and felt they could learn something new. She said she wanted them to be able to work together and all the intentions were excellent.

Chair Jerrell said the topic was very important to the Board. He said there were takeaways but the biggest was around the study. He thanked County Manager Diorio and the County staff for her work on the budget.

Mayor Phillips said he supported the third-party study. He said Pineville did not sign off on ending the contract, but they did feel the pressure of the situation.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to come before the Board, Chair Jerrell declared the meeting adjourned at 4:39 p.m.

Kristine M. Smith, Clerk to the Board

Mark Jerrell, Chair