

**COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**Monday, July 11, 2022**

**6:00 P.M.**

The Honorable Columbus County Commissioners met on the above stated date and time at 127 West Webster Street, Whiteville, North Carolina 28472, for the purpose of conducting an EMS Workshop.

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:**

Ricky Bullard, **Chairman**  
 Jerome McMillian, **Vice Chairman**  
 Giles E. Byrd  
 Lavern Coleman  
 Brent Watts  
 Charles T. McDowell  
 Chris Smith

**APPOINTEES PRESENT:**

Eddie Madden, Jr., **County Manager**  
 Amanda B. Prince, **Staff Attorney**  
 Jay Leatherman, **Finance Director**  
 Boyd Worley, **Board Attorney**  
 LaToya Williams, **Clerk to the Board**

**COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (EXCUSED):**

Charles T. McDowell

**Agenda Item #1: MEETING CALLED to ORDER:**

At 6:00 P.M., Chairman Bullard called the EMS Workshop to order.

**Agenda Items #2 and #3: INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:**

The invocation was delivered by Commissioner Lavern Coleman. Everyone in attendance stood and pledged Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America which was led by Commissioner Brent Watts.

Assistant County Manager/EMS Director Nick West introduced Mr. Neil Emory, Outreach Associate with NCACC.

**Neil Emory, Outreach Associate with NCACC**, stated the following:

- On behalf of the Association, I want to thank the Board of Commissioners for allowing us to be a part of this process.
- Our task is to represent the interests of counties across the state of North Carolina in the General Assembly but also to provide educational learning opportunities for Commissioners as well as county departments to improve the quality of local government.
- The General Assembly provided our association funding to help local governments who were struggling with finding volunteers and providing services to their citizens during the pandemic.
- We recognized that there was a challenge to continue to care and build upon the care you provide to your citizens, and we thought this was an excellent opportunity to partner with the county in doing this study to try to address the concerns that have been raised and the challenges faced.
- Our association agreed that we would step in and fund the cost of this study and try to develop a solution to how you move forward in regards to EMS care.
- When we set about trying to find the consultants we wanted to bring in people who have actually been in the field and have done the work and know exactly what squads deal with on a day to day basis.
- That's what CrisisTEC is.
- They are professionals who have served and been a part of North Carolina counties and that's why we thought they were the right company to partner with.
- As for my background, I was a county manager for 30 years and several of the counties I served in went through significant change in EMS.
- I retired from Harnett County and few years back we were facing some of the same challenges that you are today.
- We had a lot of squads who were working very hard and were trying to hire paid staff, but at the same time were depending on volunteers; unfortunately volunteer roles dwindled as employers no longer let their employees respond at the drop of a hat.
- Also, people were working outside of the county and just weren't in place anymore to help out.
- If you couple that with advances in the level of care, an increase in the rate of care and the need for a paramedic, you may find it difficult to keep squads staffed.
- Volunteers are overwhelmed by employment responsibilities and the state's training requirements.
- The clear message from your Board was that we have great squads and we want to help build with them an EMS system for the future, and that was our goal here.
- I want to thank the Board for allowing me to be here and for the input we received from the community.

**Agenda Item #4: Emergency Services – EMS Study Presentation:**

Assistant County Manager/EMS Director Nick West introduced the EMS study presenters, Scot Brooks and Shane Seagroves from CrisisTEC.

## STRATEGIC PLANNING CYCLE



- While the focus of this plan is on the 5-year horizon, the long-term vision of the departments and the County will guide ongoing evolution and Action Plans well into the future. This document does not address performance measures which should be established during plan updates once a direction has been established.
- These details, which parallel the County's Strategic Plan, offer a higher-level view of the direction Columbus County will need to take heading into the future.
- It is the responsibility of all personnel to work toward achievement of the *2022-2027 Columbus County EMS Strategic Plan* with Command Staff charged with delineating, monitoring and reporting on achievement of the plan.

## 10A N.C. ADMIN.CODE 13P.0201

### Section 13P .0201 - EMS SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

(a) County governments shall establish EMS Systems. Each EMS System shall have:

- (1) a defined geographical service area for the EMS System. The minimum service area for an EMS System shall be one county. There may be multiple EMS Provider service areas within an EMS System. The highest level of care offered within any EMS Provider service area shall be available to the citizens within that service area 24 hours a day, seven days a week;

**E911 DISPATCH, WRITTEN POLICIES AND PROCEDURES, MEDICAL DIRECTION, PERMITTED AMBULANCES, CREDENTIALLED PERSONNEL, INFECTIOUS DISEASE CONTROL POLICY, EMS COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM TO INCLUDE ONLINE MEDICAL DIRECTION, CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAM**

## MISSION

- The mission of Emergency Medical Services is to provide quality services to the community which preserve life, reduce suffering, improve health and promote the safety of citizens and visitors who live, learn, work and play in our community.
- This mission is accomplished through a systems approach focused on providing high quality patient care services; organizational sustainment; public awareness and education; proactive safety interventions; and all-hazards readiness.

## VISION

We envision a comprehensive, accessible, and sustainable EMS delivery system, realized through collaboration, which provides clinically superior, efficient, and innovative care.

The Emergency Medical Services systems strives to be an integral part of the County's public safety and health care systems.

Our volunteer agencies are a great place to volunteer for the community.

## VALUES

- ✓ **Dignity and Respect:** We treat all people with dignity, honesty, and respect.
- ✓ **Progressive:** We are dedicated to the continuous improvement of our processes and systems based on evidence-based data, as well as best and promising practices.
- ✓ **Professional and Objective:** We treat all individuals and organizations professionally, objectively, and without prejudice or bias.
- ✓ **Leadership:** Leadership is provided through collaboration and facilitation to ensure accountability and high-quality clinical care while ensuring fiscal and operational stability.
- ✓ **Participation:** We welcome the contributions of the public, other agencies and organizations, and individuals in the development, implementation, evaluation, and improvement of the EMS system.

## STRATEGIC GOALS (2022-2027)

- **Goal #1:** Improve patient outcomes via excellent clinical care and compassionate providers
- **Goal #2:** Maximize resources and improve processes, resources and systems to meet the needs of the community
- **Goal #3:** Recruit, retain and develop an effective workforce
- **Goal #4:** Efficient, cost effective, emergency medical services safety net
- **Goal #5:** Collaborate with the Community and Healthcare partners to enhance services and improve the health and well-being of the community

## COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

- Eddie Madden, County Manager
- Nick West, Assistant Manager
- David Ransom, Emergency Manager
- Christopher Smith, Commissioner
- Dr. Peter Chambers, Medical Director
- Darren Currie, City of Whiteville Manager
- Chief Randy Guyton, Klondike-Chadbourn Fire & Rescue
- Chief Shannon Strickland, Whiteville Rescue
- Chief Darren Norris, Tabor City EMS
- Chief Stefan Jacobs, Buckhead Fire & Rescue
- Chief Steve Camlin, ADR Fire & Rescue
- Terri Veneziano, Columbus Regional Healthcare
- Dr. Sylvia Cox, Southeastern Community College

## PROCESS OVERVIEW

- Columbus County requested assistance from the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) to evaluate the EMS system and make recommendations for improvement.
- The NCACC contracted with CRISISTEC LLC, a NC based training, exercise, and consulting company who specializes in emergency services and public safety. The two entities had worked together on several similar projects in the past.



**CRISISTEC**  
TRAINING – EXERCISE – CONSULTING

## PROCESS OVERVIEW

1. We held planning meetings with the Committee, County staff, County Commissioners, the Sheriff, Whiteville City Manager, System Medical Director, Fire Chiefs, Columbus Regional Healthcare CEO, Admin staff and the Hospital Medical Director as well as the President and Vice President of Southeastern Community College.
2. We helped establish Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals for the evaluation process.
3. We visited, interviewed, and discussed agency specific details with each EMS provider agency in the County.
4. We reviewed Financial Audits, Capital Expenditure Plans and Billing/Collections processes.
5. We reviewed call data to establish quality indicators and performance measures.

## PROCESS OVERVIEW

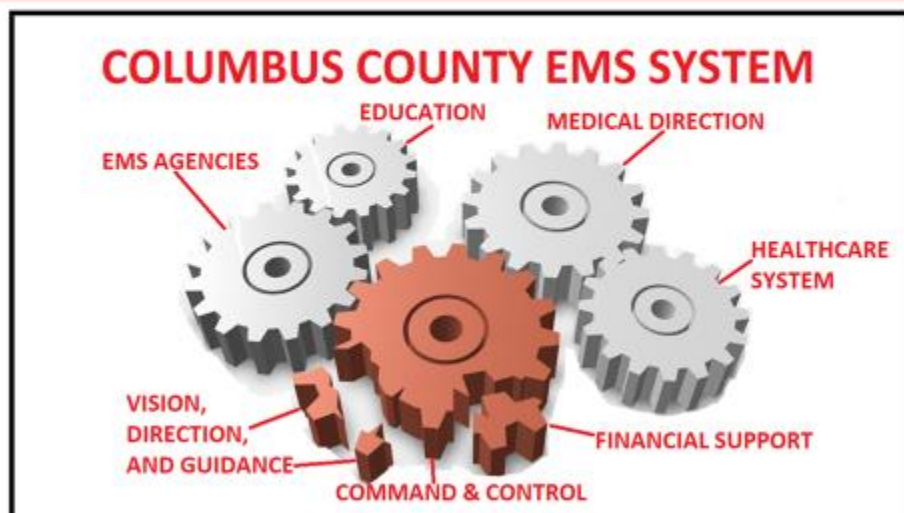
6. We reviewed Recruitment / Retention plans, Training / Education plans, and Improvement Plans.
7. We conducted an Employee/Volunteer Satisfaction Survey and a Customer Service Satisfaction Survey.
8. We solicited budget, salary, and benefits data from surrounding Counties and private providers so we could benchmark services.
9. We created Objectives to accomplish each Goal with multiple Strategies and Action Plans to accomplish each objective.
10. We compiled the entire process into a reference document called the "Columbus County Emergency Medical Services Strategic Plan 2022-2027".

## SYSTEM OVERVIEW

The current structure for providing Emergency Medical Services to the Citizens of Columbus County has served honorably for many years however it is in desperate need of Vision, Direction, Guidance, Command & Control, and additional Financial Support.

- POPULATION HAS INCREASED
- CALL VOLUME HAS INCREASED
- DEMAND ON VOLUNTEERS HAS INCREASED
- REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTIFICATION HAS INCREASED
- REQUIREMENTS FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION HAS INCREASED
- CLINICAL CARE HAS ADVANCED DRAMATICALLY
- CITIZENS DEPEND UPON THE EMS SYSTEM AS PRIMARY CARE

## SYSTEM OVERVIEW



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. The efficiency and effectiveness of the service is not performing at minimum standards in multiple locations.
2. Clinical care and overall quality indicators lack consistency which places lives at risk.
3. Higher call volume, declining volunteerism, and low volunteer / employee satisfaction scores increase the demand on an already weakened Emergency Medical Services infrastructure.

## STRENGTHS

- ✓ Caring, compassionate providers with a servant heart!!! Most are volunteers with the highest level of humanitarianism who are doing their absolute best to care for their neighbors, family, and friends.
- ✓ Board of Commissioners are supportive of the EMS System and they understand the critical need for an efficient, effective, quality Public Safety net for the citizens.
- ✓ A County Manager and administrative team have a high standard for quality customer service are committed to improving the system.
- ✓ Strong, experienced, local Medical Director who serves the community and has a vested interest in the clinical care provided in the prehospital setting.
- ✓ Valuable, committed partners such as Columbus Regional Healthcare and Southeastern Community College.

## WEAKNESSES

- ☒ The system is fragmented, it lacks design, it has holes, gaps, and unneeded redundancies which drain the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.
- ☒ Nine (9) different EMS providers operating nine (9) different EMS systems in nine (9) different jurisdictions creates a serious consistency and uniformity issue for the County and its citizens.
- ☒ Volunteerism is on the decline at a National, State, and Local level.
- ☒ Volunteer / Employee Satisfaction Scores are very low. The lack of sufficient salary, wages, and benefits creates a training ground for local talent to receive an education and experience so they can travel outside of the County for a higher paying job and/or benefit.

## WEAKNESSES

- ☒ Clinical care is not consistent across all jurisdictions. Some agencies operate at the Paramedic level while others function at the Advanced EMT level.
- ☒ Response times can be sluggish and most coverage areas are very large creating extended wait times which may be very dramatic in life threatening conditions and/or the far reaches of the community.
- ☒ EMS agencies are operating on a very thin profit margin which effects supplies, equipment, maintenance, and capital expenditures purchases.
- ☒ The lack of a system approach eliminates the ability to capitalize on bulk purchases, share resources, and eliminate waste which drives up cost for all the providers.

## WEAKNESSES

- ☒ The majority of agencies are providing an acceptable ambulance transport service for the first call in their jurisdiction however there is very little back-up or surge capacity within the services.
- ☒ The current Initial and Continuing Education system are not meeting the demands of the providers.
- ☒ The County owns no EMS resources or has no EMS employees. If a provider struggles or can't provide the service then it places a significant burden on the other providers which creates a Continuity of Operations concern for the future.

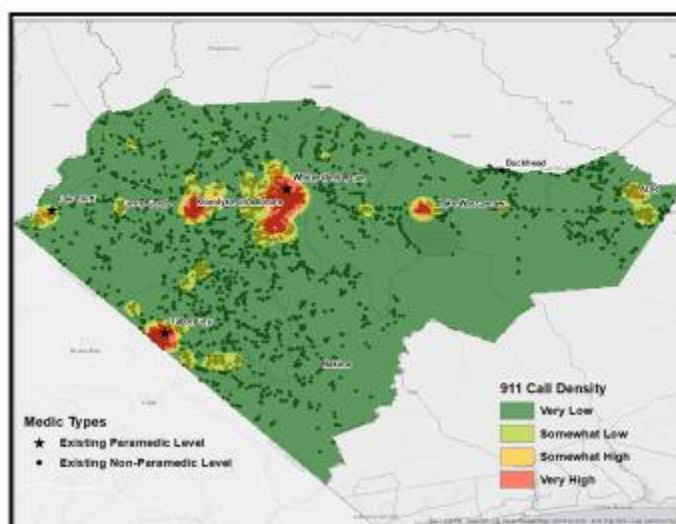
## OPPORTUNITIES

- The citizens know that the system needs to grow in order to keep up with growth, population, call volume, and clinical care needs.
- The volunteers, employees, and agencies are struggling so change may be easier to accomplish.
- The Board of Commissioners and Management staff understand that improvement is needed to appropriately serve the CRITICAL needs of the citizen's during a life threatening illness or injury.

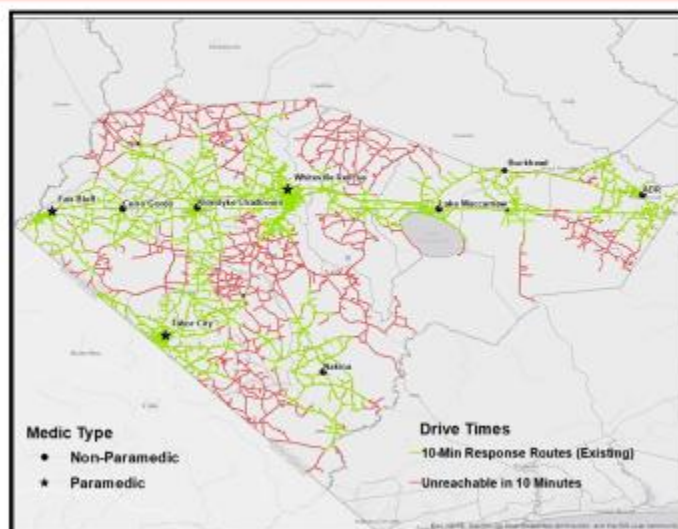
## THREATS



## CURRENT



## EXISTING 10 MIN RESPONSE DATA





# RECOMMENDATIONS

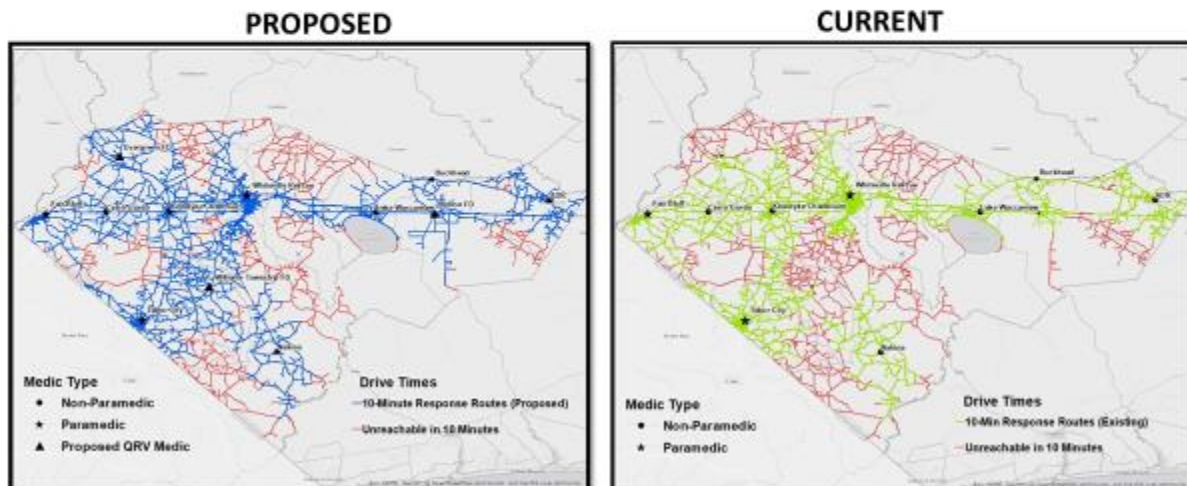
1. Phased in approach over the next two – three budget cycles.
2. Support the current volunteer/career agencies with an increased level of financial commitment to ensure that a high-quality service is provided to the citizens through the creation of Performance Based Contracts.
  - a) Continue with the Rescue Tax allocation to cover operational expenses.
  - b) Increase the Personnel contributions to \$100k each
    - i. \$60k for two-day time staff positions
    - ii. \$40k for night-time and weekend stipend pay
3. Build a county-wide First Responder System to improve response times on those most critical calls for service. (Delta & ECHO)
4. Continue a relationship with a strong Medical Director

# RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Implement a plan to provide county-wide Paramedic level coverage utilizing a tiered response system.
  - a. Transport capable, Paramedic level QRV's give you the most coverage at the best cost under current conditions.
    - i. Evergreen FD
    - ii. Bolton FD
    - iii. Williams Township FD
    - iv. Nakina FD
  - b. Response time improvement
  - c. Primary coverage improvement
  - d. Back-up coverage improvement
  - e. Dynamic response model
  - f. Phased in based on priorities and need



# RECOMMENDATIONS



## RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Employee full-time staff to manage the administrative and operational components of the system while simultaneously providing coverage in the unprotected areas of the County.
  - a. EMS Director
  - b. EMS Training / Quality Improvement Officer
  - c. Four (4) Division Supervisors / Field Training Officers
  - d. Twelve (12) experienced Paramedics
  - e. Become the "Employer of Choice" within the region
    - i. Higher Pay, Better Benefits
    - ii. 24 on / 72 off and/or 12-hour work shifts
    - iii. Career ladder to Senior Paramedic and/or Community Paramedic status
    - iv. Better working conditions and training

## RECOMMENDATIONS

7. Partner with the Community College to be active in the "Initial" certification courses.
8. Manage the "continuing education" and recertification process based upon a Continuous Quality Improvement model.
9. Volunteer/Employee Recruitment and Retention program.
  - a. Volunteer Stipend Program
  - b. Tuition Reimbursement
10. Construct a bulk purchase agreement with each agency to capitalize on higher quantity cost savings, redundancy reduction, expired medications, etc.
11. Develop and fund a county-wide Capital Improvement Plan to include ambulances, stretchers, monitor/defibrillators, computers, etc.

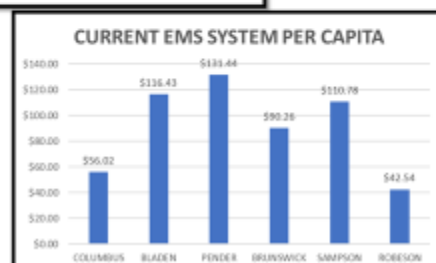
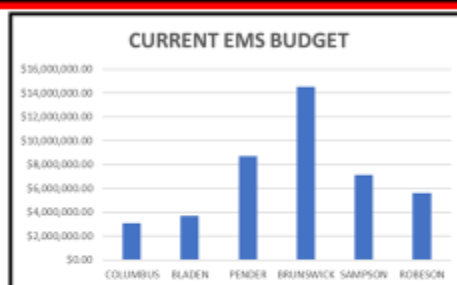
## RECOMMENDATIONS

12. Invoke change to the EMS agency billing practices to provide consistency across all jurisdictions within the County.
13. Implement county-wide Policies and Procedures to provide consistency across all jurisdictions.
14. Incorporate the latest technology to help scheduling, communications, information sharing, situational awareness, and common operating picture.
15. Partner with Columbus Regional Healthcare, Public Health, Hospice, and/or Home Healthcare agencies to offer a Community Paramedic program.

## FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

### CURRENT

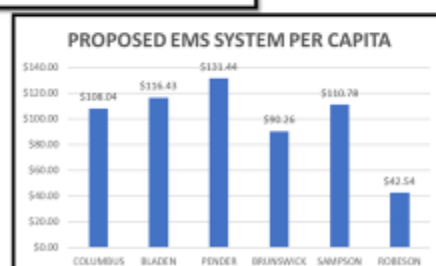
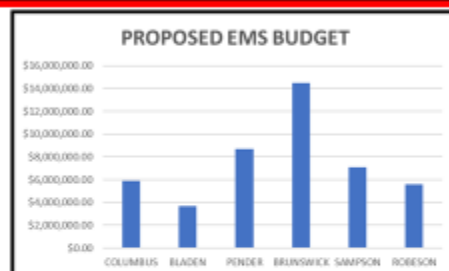
- Rescue Tax Allocation = \$666,467.00
- General Fund Allocation = \$356,793.00
- Total County Funding = \$1,023,260.00
  
- Approximate Billing Revenue = \$2,034,228.00
  
- Cost for Current EMS Services = **\$3,057,488.00**



## FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

### PROPOSED – PHASED IN OVER 3 YEARS

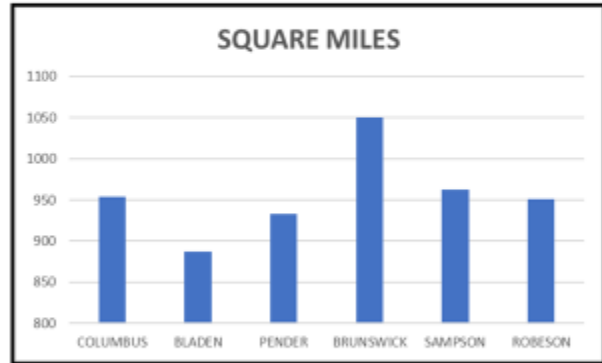
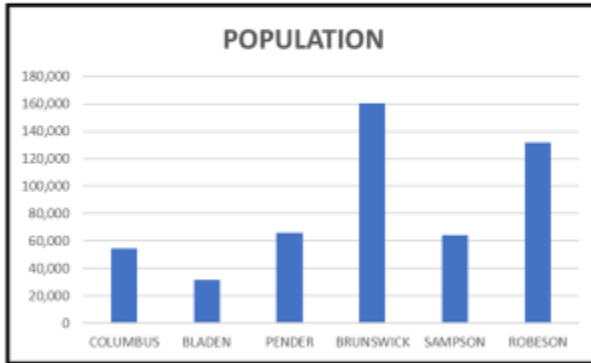
- Proposed Operations = \$3,491,467.00
- Proposed Capital = \$436,000.00
- Proposed Total County Funding = \$3,927,467.00
  
- Estimated Billing Revenue = \$2,000,000.00
  
- Cost for Proposed EMS Services = **\$5,927,467.00**
  
- Funding Increase = **+\$2,869,979.00**



## BENCHMARK MODELS

- We evaluated all the counties contiguous to Columbus County and/or considered to be in the same region based upon level of care, population, size, and EMS budget.
- New Hanover County EMS is not included in this data due to their private status and difficulties gathering data.
- Every County in the region provides "COUNTY-WIDE" Paramedic level coverage.
- We are unable to verify; however, it is believed that all of these EMS agencies employ Columbus County residents as clinical providers for their citizens.
- The following represents the number of clinical providers that reside in Columbus County per the NC Office of EMS Database:
  - Paramedics = 65
  - Advanced EMT = 38
  - Basic EMT = 110
  - Emergency Medical Responders = 22

## BENCHMARK MODELS



## EMPLOYEE/VOLUNTEER SATISFACTION SURVEY

- 48 Responses
- Just over 58% had greater than 10 years of experience
- 45% were Paramedics, 27% Advanced EMT, and 18% Basic EMT
- 52% have considered leaving their current position with a Columbus County EMS agency.
- Why?
  - Low Pay, no benefits, no opportunity for professional growth
  - Responsibilities keep growing without compensation
  - Funding, not enough help, motivation & drive

## CUSTOMER SERVICE SATISFACTION SURVEY

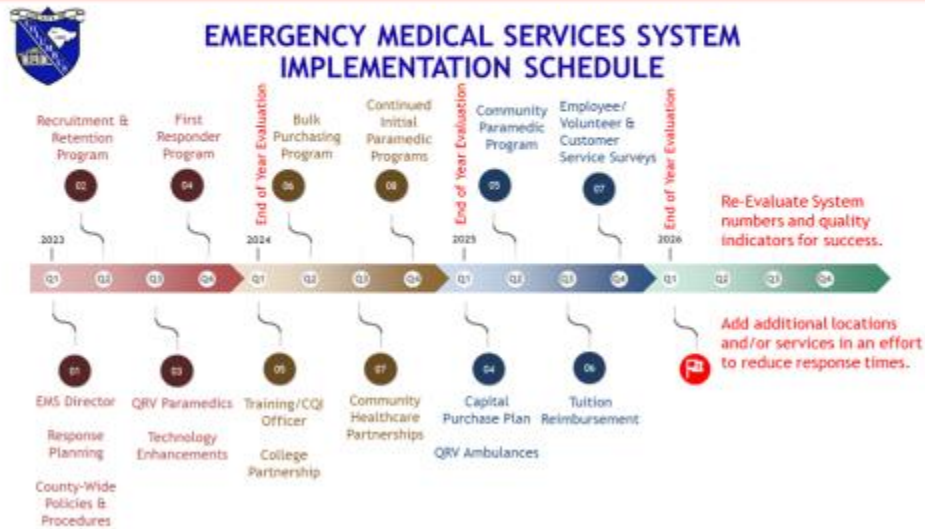
- 225 Responses
- 50% feel that the minimum level of care is Paramedic
- Acceptable Maximum Response Time
  - 4:00 minutes of less – 23.1%
  - 7:00 minutes of less – 26.2%
  - 10.00 minutes of less – 28.9%
  - 78% of responses felt that the response time should be <10 mins.
- 80% ranked the level of services above average
- 70% of responses had received services from a Columbus County provider
- Almost 60% of responses thought the billing process was below average

# GOALS, OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES & ACTION PLANS

- GOALS - FIVE (5)
- OBJECTIVES – TWENTY-TWO (22)
- STRATEGIES – THIRTY-SEVEN (37)
- ACTION PLANS – TWENTY-THREE (23)



# TIMELINE



# PROPOSED BUDGET ESTIMATIONS

	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
OPERATIONS	\$1,115,260.00	\$2,448,260.00	\$3,483,467.00	\$3,491,467.00
INCREASE (+)	\$92,000.00	\$1,333,000.00	\$1,035,207.00	\$8,000.00
SYSTEM CAPITAL	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$436,000.00	\$436,000.00
START-UP CAPITAL	\$0.00	\$162,000.00	\$822,000.00	\$0.00

# THANK YOU

- THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING US TO ASSIST WITH SUCH AN IMPORTANT FUNCTION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT!!!

- NEIL EMORY



- SCOT BROOKS

- SHANE SEAGROVES

- BRADLEY KINLAW

- RYAN JONES



**CRISISTEC**  
TRAINING – EXERCISE – CONSULTING



## Agenda Item #3: ADJOURNMENT:

At 7:20 P.M., Vice Chairman McMillian made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Smith. The motion unanimously passed. These minutes were recorded and typed by LaToya Williams.

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**LATOYA WILLIAMS, Clerk to the Board**

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**RICKY BULLARD, Chairman**