



Custer County



**From the office of
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

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1010 Main Street, Suite 22 MILES CITY, MONTANA 59301

February 18, 2025

City of Miles City Council Members and Mayor
17 South 8th Street
Miles City, MT 59301

City Council Members,

We appreciate the willingness and commitment of Council Members and ambulance staff to listen and provide information to better understand how this service is budgeted and operated. The residents of Custer County have expressed to the Board of Commissioners to find a solution that continues to provide a high quality level of emergency medical response while being fiscally responsible. The Board of Commissioners support the benefits to our community of having this service available to all residents. We agree that this needs to be a cost shared service between both local governments. The employees that have and currently do provide this service have set a high standard concerning the quality of care.

Throughout the process of gathering information and discussing the operations and budget structure of the City operated ambulance service it is apparent that the current structure is not financially sustainable. The proposed amounts requested from the County budget to subsidize the ambulance service do not address the full scope of the financial issue. While the request is substantially higher than the last agreement, it does not address how the City will be able to increase the operational budget to fund Capital Funds(vehicle replacement). This current structure also adds to the stress on the City's General Fund, which is required to budget for Law Enforcement, Parks and City Administration in addition to City Fire.

We, County and City elected officials are charged with being fiscally responsible with the taxpayers money and provide the best services we can with the limited money we receive from the taxpayers.

The Board of Commissioners are proposing the following solution to provide a high quality, 24/7 emergency medical response service as well as provide relief to the City General Fund.

1. The City Government and County Government would invite other healthcare partners to discuss a collaboration to review and discuss options for the ambulance service provided by the City of Miles City. This collaboration would review staffing requirements, operational needs, and overall structure to operate 24/7 to all emergency calls within Custer County and provide transportation

needs to facilities for a higher level of care. These transports are currently being provided by ambulance services from out of the area at the expense of the patients. Through an agreement between the three entities, there would be a significant cost savings to the taxpayers by reducing the cost to the local governments annually.

2. Of the emergency response calls dispatched, 15% are for fire response. If the City was willing to collaborate with County Rural Fire for fire, response calls there could be a substantial savings to the City General Fund to provide the statutory responsibility of fire response.

The average actual expense for the Fire Department for the last 6 fiscal years is \$1,122,270. Without operating the negative operating enterprise fund (ambulance) and collaborating fire response services with the County, there could be an estimated cost savings to the City General Fund of \$500,000 to \$700,000 per year. This would offer relief for the other services that rely on the City General Fund to operate.

Custer County commits to paying a total of \$350,000 through June 30, 2026 to subsidize the ambulance service; payable in two payments of up to \$175,000 each fiscal year.

All decisions need to be based on facts not emotions.



Jason Strouf, Commission Chair



Jeff Faycosh, Commissioner



Kevin Krausz, Commissioner

2-18-25