



SHEPHERDSTOWN FIRE DEPARTMENT, INC.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 28, 2022

The Shepherdstown Fire Department is opposed to the proposals for a reduction and centralization of EMS services in Jefferson County. On February 17th, the County Commission was presented a report from Fitch and Associates that included three proposals for implementing a separated county organization to solely provide EMS services, thus removing them from the volunteer fire stations that currently provide the service in partnership with county career staffing. As the oldest fire department in the state of West Virginia, with over 225 years of service to Jefferson County, we are saddened by the proposals; all of which sacrifice our citizens and visitors' life and well-being due to significant shortcomings:

- **A dangerous reduction in available EMS resources will cost lives.** Each of the proposals reduce the available EMS resources. Depending on the proposal, 5 to 9 ambulances will be taken out of service. These ambulances currently serve you and your families, and your Commission's proposals would strike these unit from service drastically reducing the resources available to you in an emergency and extending the time it takes to get to you. In addition to removing ambulances, the county will be turning away highly trained volunteers that provide lifesaving services to the residents. These existing resources cost the county government and taxpayer nothing, and reduction of this magnitude is careless and dangerous.
- **When the Commission says "efficient," what they mean is "cheapest." In an effort to reduce costs and generate revenue, they will cut service.** The Jefferson County Commission will attempt to sell these proposals as "efficient." When our County Commission uses "efficient," what they really mean is "cheapest" with no regard to true "operational efficiency." Imagine with us that Jefferson County is a building; in the Commissioner's view, the most "efficient" way to air condition the building is by a small window AC unit on only the top and bottom floors. We know the most efficient way is to create zones and a system of air handlers linked together to handle the demand at the lowest price. The latter is what our current combination system of EMS reflects with operational efficiencies, whereas **the window unit approach to EMS will result in decreased resources, longer wait times, and lower survivability.**
- **The Commission's proposals will separate Fire from EMS and drive a wedge between career and volunteer partners.** The volunteer responders and the Jefferson County Emergency Services Agency (JCESA) career staffing have created a partnership that provides effective response to you in your time of need. This Commission will be, eventually, creating two paid agencies instead of using the existing combination system that works for you already. Paid EMS staff separated from paid Fire staff is a duplicity in service, waste of resources, and essentially moving the county backwards by 15 years. Jefferson County fought all the way to the state legislator to combine our "Ambulance Authority" and "Fire Board" into one agency (JCESA) because we recognized the most competent model is a combination system with paid cross-trained fire/EMS staff and volunteers working together on emergencies, utilizing the existing infrastructure provided by the volunteer corporations. These proposals destroy this hard-fought partnership.
- **The unnecessary growth of government duplicates existing infrastructure and reduces overall service to the community.** The Commission wants to buy EMS equipment, wasting valuable taxpayer funds. Commissioners want to buy with taxpayer money ambulances that have already been paid for by the fire departments and are currently being used in service to this community. The Commissioners want to buy using taxpayer money – your money – or lease buildings that are already paid for and already used for emergency services in strategic locations. This is a waste of tax dollars, and an unnecessary effort of government to increase in size and duplicate expensive infrastructure that has already been paid for by the hard work and dedication of volunteers throughout the community. This money can instead provide necessary critical staffing, while embracing the combination system that works.

The combination system that the Jefferson County Commission has rightfully invested in – a partnership between volunteer and career – where the county provides staffing, and the volunteer organizations provide the necessary infrastructure is the most financially responsible, efficient, and safest for the citizens and visitors of Jefferson County. We have more work to do; as our county grows, additional staffing (both volunteer and career) will be needed, requiring additional investment from the Commission. Every day this system works for you. Last night it worked. Today it will work. The leadership and members of the Shepherdstown Fire Department will continue to serve our community day and night and continue to fight against government mismanagement in the best interest of our community. These proposals are bad for you, bad for Jefferson County, and bad for your dedicated volunteer organizations.

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— Over 225 Years of Service by Trained Volunteers —



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About the Shepherdstown Fire Department, Inc.

The Shepherdstown Fire Department, Inc. was founded in 1792 and has continuously served the community of Jefferson County, and surrounding areas, since that time. Located just outside of the city limits of Shepherdstown, Station 3 is home to the departments nine apparatus: Advanced Life Support Ambulances (2), Fire Engines (2), brush fire capabilities, a Ladder Truck, Tanker, and support vehicles (2). The executive leadership of the department is Fire Chief Ross Morgan, EMS Chief Marshall DeMeritt and President Craig Simpson. This leadership team is supported by an additional team of nine operational officers, administrative leadership, and a volunteer response cadre of ~50 members. For more information, please reach out to EMS Chief DeMeritt at (540)742-8190.