

EMS JOINT WORK SESSION HELD



Shown above is the work session hosted by the Upton Town Council on October 12. (l-r): Shane Kirsch, Chris Beltz with Campbell County Health, Upton Councilman Rick Rothleutner, Mayor Nicholas Trandahl, Upton Councilman Justin Norman, Newcastle Councilman Ty Owens, Weston County Commissioners Garrett Borton and Don Taylor. Below, Councilman Owens and Commissioner Taylor discuss putting an EMS District on the ballot.



By Gazette Reporter
Brittany Trandahl

On Thursday, October 12, Upton initiated a joint meeting between multiple governmental bodies within Weston County. Upton Mayor Nicholas Trandahl stated "In conversations I've had with mayors and council members across the state, I discovered that it was common for local government entities to have combined work sessions at least a couple times a year. If any Wyoming county needs that open dialogue, its Weston County."

The discussion this time was that of the looming emergency services issue in Weston County and especially Upton. As of January 1, 2024, there will potentially be only one EMT remaining for Upton. Many ideas were tossed around, including the establishment of an EMS district in Weston County.

Since Campbell County Health (CCH) purchased Newcastle Ambulance Service in 2021, Weston County and especially Upton has seen a drastic drop in ambulance and emergency service availability.

As was discussed during this work session, the main issue facing CCH and all medical

facilities is the lack of staff. "The real question is, how do we get people to help?" asked CCH Director of Urgent and Emergent Services Chris Beltz. "There is such a shortage of people willing to help, it's a real struggle."

As Upton and Newcastle have seen first hand, the lack of volunteers is certainly an issue for a small rural town in which a majority of the workforce is employed out of town and thus unavailable to be on call. "I received a lot of pushback from the Newcastle Volunteer Fire Department when mentioning EMS," commented Newcastle Councilman Ty Owens, referring to cross-training firemen as EMTs.

The primary benefit of an EMS district would be the funding mechanism that the increased taxes would offer. This funding could help CCH and/or the district itself to employ more staff as opposed to relying on volunteers. The drawback being the need for a tax increase. It is projected that the cost of establishing a new EMS district would be around 4 mils, equaling \$817,080.00.

"What are the options if not raising taxes?" asked Upton EMS Supervisor Tiffany Riehemann. "Are we willing to lose those services?"

"This needs to go on a ballot," added Councilman Owens. "It's the citizens' choice to vote for this or not. There are constituents that are concerned and have identified the need for these services."

"Looking at the budget, I think it would be a tough sell on the ballot," stated Weston County Commissioner Don Taylor. "I would much rather see an increase towards assisting CCH until our budget allows otherwise. We need to improve what we have."

Following the continued discussions on a possible district, volunteers, CCH's routes and availabilities, a member of the

public, Melaynee Trandahl, Acute Care Manager for Crook County Medical Services District (CCMSD) spoke up; stating that CCMSD is also available for calls in Weston County. "We want Upton and Weston County to be aware that we're here," stated Director Trandahl. "We do a lot of other interceptions with other local towns and transports to Weston County often." She added that CCMSD currently staffs one EMS crew with one rig as well as a back-up crew.

"I would like to see Sundance's services utilized, we're available and more than willing," added Director Trandahl. "We want to have each other's backs." Almost all the members of the work session were pleasantly surprised with Trandahl's comments as they were unaware of CCMSD's EMS capabilities. "I think it would be in our best

interests to cast a wider net and take advantage of what Sundance has to offer," stated Mayor Trandahl.

"I agree, we need to work with the communities around us," added Commissioner Taylor.

In conclusion, Upton Police Chief Susan Bridge and board member of the newly established Joint Powers Board for Weston County Dispatch assured those present that she will be taking this information to the JPB and will be implementing it into their protocol. Adding Sundance to the Dispatch roster could certainly take some of the pressure off of CCH and Newcastle.

The EMS discussion having commenced, the work session ended on a high note with those involved praising this open dialogue and making plans for another work session involving all county governments willing to join.