

**FY 2019-2020 Virginia Beach Budget
Response to Council Questions**

Question Number: FY 20 52

Question: Can you provide a summary of EMS staffing in the southern part of the city?

Date Requested: 4/16/2019

Requested By: Councilmember Henley

Department: Department of Emergency Medical Services

Response: It is the objective of the Department of EMS to find the best balance of resource deployment to provide the greatest good. Providing ambulance coverage in the Creeds/Blackwater area has always been a challenge. While the area represents only 1% of all EMS calls for service citywide, long travel distances are also an important consideration. Our approach continues to evolve, but a review of our historic efforts shows that service levels are improving.

Prior to 2004, no ambulance crew was scheduled during the daytime hours. Meanwhile, a rotation between the two Creeds and Blackwater Volunteer Rescue Squads attempted to provide one crew as often as possible during evening hours. An ambulance from another part of the city was sent when no rural crew was available. Off-duty Creeds/Blackwater volunteers sometimes assisted, but at least 60% of all rural responses were handled by one of the “uptown” rescue squad ambulances for many years. Even when staffed, Creeds/Blackwater crews were seldom dispatched to calls outside their first due area; a practice not used elsewhere in the city.

Since 2004, EMS has assigned at least one career medic to the Creeds/Blackwater area around the clock to ensure advanced life support (ALS) care is consistently available in that zone.

When no volunteer crew was available, the medic drives an ambulance to calls for service. This approach provides timely response of ALS care and gets an ambulance to the scene if immediately needed. A fire truck staffed with four personnel co-responds to assist. Meanwhile a fully staffed ambulance is also sent from another part of the City. In the event the patient is unstable, a firefighter can drive the medic’s ambulance to the hospital without having to wait for the staffed ambulance to arrive. Otherwise, everyone remains at the scene until relieved by the “uptown” transport unit.

Despite a number of efforts to recruit more rural members, the squads and EMS working together were only able to provide a staffed ambulance 52% of the time as recently as

2017. As a result, nearly half of all transports were handled by ambulances coming from elsewhere in the city in 2016-2017.

In April 2018, EMS changed the historical model by considering the Creeds/Blackwater ambulance part of the overall citywide response matrix. The around-the-clock career medic became the nucleus on which a full crew was built using career and volunteer personnel from across the organization. "Uptown" volunteers were more willing to serve on the rural ambulances because they would still be part of the larger citywide service. Likewise, it was easier to shift a career medic from a busier assignment knowing it wouldn't create a workload burden for the other medics. The change led to an 87% staffing level in Creeds/Blackwater for the year. For 2019 to date, achievement has reached 95%. While the ambulance can be sent out of its first due area to answer calls, the probability of immediate availability of a staffed ambulance in the rural area has increased significantly. Over the last year, outside ambulances were needed in just one fifth of the incidents in Creeds/Blackwater as compared to half of the cases in the previous year.

It is important to note that those few patients who wait for an ambulance are still well served by highly skilled firefighters statically deployed in the area. They can and do provide critical lifesaving interventions that would have to happen whether the ambulance was first to arrive or not.

EMS is committed to looking for better solutions to staffing in Creeds/Blackwater as well as the rest of the City. However, without funding for additional career staff (4-8 medics), EMS lacks the personnel necessary to provide an ambulance that solely serves the Creeds/Blackwater area.

Despite a number of initiatives, the two rural rescue squads will likewise be unable to provide full staffing in the foreseeable future. The future Burton Station crew should help shift some of the burden from incumbent crews, reducing the need for out of area response. We are also optimistic about a new approach to volunteer marketing/recruiting in conjunction with the Rescue Squad Foundation.

In the meantime, I will direct field supervisors to minimize the amount of time rural crews are out of their primary area to the greatest extent possible. We will also continue to explore options for increasing the depth of ALS capability in the area in conjunction with our emergency response partners. That will enhance the level of care available until an ambulance arrives.

Please let me know if you have any further questions regarding resource deployment in Creeds/Blackwater or any other area of the City of Virginia Beach.