



PUBLIC SAFETY

Within Charleston County are numerous independent law enforcement agencies and fire departments with separate chiefs, administrators, rules, regulations, budgets, vehicles, and in some cases separate marine patrols and Special Weapons And Tactics (SWAT) teams. Greater cooperation between the public safety agencies will make citizens safer in their daily lives, improve homeland security, and reduce taxpayers' tax burdens through reducing unnecessary duplication of services. A savings of only one percent resulting from increased cooperation and avoiding unnecessary duplication will save taxpayers \$1,500,000 each year. The County should replace the current radio communications system and fund it so as to encourage participation by all local public safety agencies. Improvements in fire safety and to Emergency Medical Services (EMS) are suggested, including upgrading codes enforcement effectiveness and increasing emergency medical training of certain rural fire agencies' first responders to better care for citizens in outlying areas. Finally, cost-saving measures such as outsourcing EMS billing activities are discussed.

MISSION

The Public Safety Task Force's (PSTK) mission was to identify ways to make the various public safety agencies in Charleston County more *efficient* to the citizens and to *save the taxpayers' money*. By "public safety agencies," we mean: (a) all law enforcement departments whose budgets are paid primarily by taxpayers in this county (eg., the Sheriff, police agencies in Mount Pleasant, Charleston, and North Charleston); (b) fire departments; and (c) EMS providers.

The Public Safety Task Force included members from the larger public safety community. Serving on and contributing to the task force were: Harry Sewell, Mount Pleasant Police Department; Rocky Burke, St. Paul's Fire Department; Roger Pierce, North Charleston Police Department; Rhonda Jerome, North Charleston City Council; Ely Driggers, Charleston County Sheriff's Office; Kathy Hare, Charleston County Sheriff's Office; and Andy Denke, Sullivans Island Police Department.

This Task Force also met with the Government Organization and Structure Task Force. Both this Task Force and the Government Organization and Structure Task Force unanimously agreed that Charleston County's citizens will be better served if the County, the various municipalities, public service districts, and other government entities work more closely together. This will avoid multiple taxation and provide government services to taxpayers more cheaply and efficiently. (See Recommendations 3 to 6 of the Government Organization and Structure Task Force in this same MAP Commission Report.) Also, the PSTF's report is consistent with that of the Procurement, Outsourcing, and Privatization Report (also in this MAP Commission Report) which advocates, among other things, that the County move toward privatization of appropriate government services.

OVERVIEW

Public safety is a core government service. Although the goal of all County employees is to serve the citizenry, Charleston County law-enforcement and fire officers in Charleston County put their lives in peril merely by doing their jobs. Each day, EMS personnel care for injured and ailing citizens, frequently saving lives in the process. As a result, all of us owe them a special debt of gratitude.

Within Charleston County is a complex maze of entities comprising 15 municipalities and three public service districts. However, our County Council is responsible to all citizens within the borders of Charleston County, whether they live in municipalities, public service districts, or otherwise. Many citizens live in one municipality, then drive through a second municipality to work in a third municipality.

Public safety comes at a cost. Taxpayers in Charleston County are entitled to expect unnecessary duplication to be avoided to the fullest extent possible, and that public servants will do their best to save taxpayer dollars. Citizens living in the large municipalities, such as the City of Charleston, Mount Pleasant, and North Charleston, pay twice for law enforcement: first, they pay for their municipal police force; and second, they fund the sheriff's department. Although Charleston County EMS serves Mount Pleasant, the Town of Mount Pleasant has been considering creating its own EMS system, which, if adopted, will leave two independent EMS systems operating in the same area. A survey of the law-enforcement, fire, and emergency rescue budgets in Charleston County shows that each year they total approximately \$157,512,000. A savings of only one percent resulting from increased cooperation among public safety entities and avoiding unnecessary duplication will save the taxpayers \$1,500,000 each year. A savings of 10 percent would save taxpayers \$15,000,000 each year and \$150,000,000 over 10 years.

In going about its work, the PSTF drew upon several different sources of information. Over the past year, the PSTF met regularly at the Lonnie Hamilton III Public Services Building to consider ways to discover and implement the goals of the Commission. All law enforcement, fire, and EMS agencies were invited to participate. Attending most of the meetings were representatives from the Mount Pleasant Police Department, the Charleston County Sheriff's Department, and the St. Paul's Fire District. Charleston County EMS personnel also participated. The City of Charleston Police Department did not attend or participate in any meetings; it agreed to respond to questions in writing shortly before this report was issued but never did so.

The PSTF also reviewed data and comments from the MAP Commission's citizen surveys, as well as the comments from the separate survey of County employees. Research was done into empirical studies and reports of other public safety entities across the United States, including those done in the City of Indianapolis; *America Burning*, the report of the US Fire Administration together with its 1972 and 1989 Updates; statistical collections regarding health in South Carolina; and the goals and objectives of the Department of Homeland Security. Several recommendations were made to the Task Force from the Mount Pleasant Police Department, the Sheriff's Department, and the St. Paul's Fire District, as well as relevant departments in County government.

In the MAP Commission's mailed-out and on-line surveys, there were several questions and responses relating to public safety.¹ One survey question showed support for consolidation of services. The question read as follows:

Charleston County includes 15 municipalities, 3 Public Service Districts (PSDs) and other agencies that provide services, such as law enforcement or garbage/recycling collection. The County and cities/PSDs should consider consolidating these services.

The largest group of respondents (47 percent) strongly agreed or agreed that the County and cities/PSDs should consider consolidating these services. Another 25 percent either strongly disagreed or disagreed. Approximately 22 percent of the respondents had no position one way or the other on this issue. Of the people responding to the question on consolidation, most, by a large majority (75 percent), lived in a municipality or in a public service district.

The Task Force is not recommending consolidation of all law enforcement agencies or fire departments at this time. Rather, it recommends cooperation between local, state, and federal entities as a first step in saving costs, increasing effectiveness, and as a way of making Charleston citizens safer.

Another survey question asked if citizens were willing to pay higher taxes to improve certain government functions. Among the top 10 answers were "higher level of law enforcement/public safety," "emergency response/homeland security," "new detention center/jail," and "expansion of emergency medical services." The Task Force does not believe it is necessary to raise County taxes to achieve greater efficiency in these areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: An ongoing Public Safety Cooperation and Coordination Task Force (PSCCTF) should be created to include high-ranking representatives of the Tri-County law-enforcement agencies and fire agencies to identify areas where coordination and cooperation of the various law enforcement and fire agencies are possible, to create mutually agreed-upon procedures, to cut costs to save taxpayer money, and to make public safety more effective for the citizens.

Background: Charleston is fortunate to have numerous award-winning law-enforcement agencies within the county. Several law enforcement entities have jurisdiction to enforce the law countywide. For example, the Department of Natural Resources and the Highway Patrol have statewide jurisdiction. The Sheriff has countywide jurisdiction. Federal agencies such as the FBI and DEA have limited jurisdiction. In addition, most municipalities have their own law enforcement agencies and jurisdiction to enforce the law within their municipal limits. At any given time, at least three law enforcement departments may have jurisdiction over a law enforcement matter.

¹ 94 percent of the 98 percent of respondents were registered voters.

To use an often-cited example, when a car carrying a mother and her daughter is carjacked, her abductor may be pursued on I-26 by Sheriff's Deputies, SC Highway Patrol Troopers, and North Charleston Police Officers. As they follow the carjacker, each law enforcement agency may be using its own (1) dispatcher and radio channel; (2) standard operating procedures in dealing with the carjacker; and (3) chain of command. Although it might seem that the officer who first began the pursuit is in charge, in fact he or she has no authority of the overall pursuit to take command, set up a rolling roadblock, direct other officers, etc.

In addition to law enforcement, there are numerous excellent fire departments throughout Charleston County, the oldest of which is the City of Charleston's Fire Department (1882); fire protection in the North Area began in 1935, and became a paid force in 1962. These fire departments provide services other than fire protection: hazardous material response, vehicle rescue (extrication), and search & rescue.

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| <p>List of Countywide Fire Departments
Awendaw Fire Department
C & B Fire Department (Ladson area)
City of Charleston Fire Department
Folly Beach Public Safety
Isle of Palms Fire Department
James Island PSD Fire Department
Lincolnton Fire Department
Mount Pleasant Fire Department
North Charleston Fire Department
St. Andrews Fire Department
St. John's Fire Department
St. Paul's PSD Fire Department
Sullivan's Island Fire Department
South Santee-Germantown Fire</p> |
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There is an entity known as the Charleston County Fire Chiefs' Association. The existence of this entity does not, of course, alter the fact that each department operates under its own chief and follows its own chain of command. Law enforcement agencies in the County have no such organization. However, all law enforcement agencies participating in meetings with the MAP Commission Public Safety Task Force were willing to listen to one another and to try to solve common problems.

No public safety recommendations may be made without considering homeland security, which involves not only law enforcement, but, in a broader sense, also intelligence gathering. The terrorist attacks of 9-11 have changed our world. As noted by the 9-11 Commission:

“[N]o agency can solve the problems on its own - to build the network requires an effort that transcends old divides, solving common legal and policy issues America needs unity of effort.”

Law enforcement agencies across America realize that they do not have the luxury to continue as they did a few years ago. A recent article published by the National Executive Institute Associates, the Major Cities Chiefs, and the Major County Sheriff's Association notes how international crime, including terrorism, argues in favor of cooperation between police agencies:

“[T]he nature of crime is changing. Cybercrime, crimes which are international and interstate in nature, both domestic and international terrorism, and narcotics trafficking are examples of current criminal behavior which are usually beyond the scope and resources of small departments to investigate. This fact is not lost on those people who engage in illegal activities.”²

² Edward J. Tully, *Regionalization or Consolidation of Law Enforcement Services in the United States*, Website of the National Executive Institute Associates, the Major Cities Chiefs, and the Major County Sheriff's Association (Jan. 2002). The report further noted that:

[R]egional police forces, theoretically, would have the resources to provide the region with better service in the areas of protecting citizens against criminal behaviors, quality investigation of criminal acts, faster response times, adequate manpower to handle most emergency situations, and a host of other non-traditional services. Properly deployed, a regional police force would provide each community with far more service/protection than they presently enjoy. This was the . . . the reason the United Kingdom began to consolidate its constabularies in the 1940's and as of this date have reduced the number to just forty-three organizations. It is the reason Canadians have instituted the concept of regional forces in several of the provinces which are no longer provided local police services by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It could be argued that in both Canada and the United Kingdom regionalization has achieved a higher degree of professionalism among police officers and better police services for the communities they serve. Finally, those larger departments, which have offered nearby smaller communities' "contracts for services," have proven to be beneficial to all of the parties concerned.

As one of the largest ports in America, Charleston County is vulnerable to a terrorist threat.³ The downtown State Ports Authority terminal is only a few blocks away from homes and yards where children play. Across the water from the Wando Welch terminal and beside its Longpoint Road entrance are neighborhoods and parks. The port terminal being developed in North Charleston is surrounded by residential areas. An explosion in Charleston will have immediate consequences to citizens and their families in Charleston County. Unlike Tulsa, Oklahoma, Lincoln, Nebraska, or Topeka, Kansas, far away from the coast or border, Charleston does not have the luxury of hours or days to react to a terrorist threat. We must *prevent* a terrorist attack, not just mitigate its destruction. This requires the cooperation of law enforcement and the citizenry.

On the federal level, there is a Department of Homeland Security. In Charleston, its telephone listing is “US Border Patrol.” There also is a top secret Operation SeaHawk designed to deal with a terrorist threat to the port. The Operation (or “Project”) SeaHawk Task Force, just now being expanded under the Department of Justice, was described by former Senator Hollings as follows:

Operation SeaHawk, established in Charleston, SC, is providing law enforcement an opportunity to coordinate their law enforcement and security missions, and is being utilized to help implement the security and contingency response plans for the whole area. I feel confident that this model will be found to provide the best structure to coordinate law enforcement activities of the various agencies that are involved in port security and provide a model for the Coast Guard to utilize Area Maritime Security plans.

There is no telephone number listed in directory assistance for the Project, and although law enforcement agencies are aware of it, very few citizens have heard of Project SeaHawk outside of the recent newspaper article on June 5, 2005, which noted that “[s]uspicious cargo often catches the attention of several law enforcement agencies, all of which have vastly different policies and plans to deal with dangerous situations.” Currently there is an Emergency Preparedness Department for Charleston County designed to implement a plan to deal with emergencies, but it does not actively participate in terrorist attack prevention.

The question may be asked whether it is fair to taxpayers in municipalities to support, for example, a municipal SWAT team and a county SWAT team, a municipal marine patrol and a county patrol, etc. The question also may be raised whether operations under a joint command, such as the COBRA (Chemical, Ordnance, Biological, Radiation) Team, do not in fact work more efficiently than independent operations in which numerous agencies use their own separate procedures. It should also be pointed out that Charleston citizens are entitled to the increased efficiencies that increased law enforcement agency cooperation might bring.

What types of issues might the Public Safety Cooperation and Coordination Task Force want to consider? The MAP Commission believes that many of the best ideas of ways to improve public safety come from public safety officials themselves, together with public input.

³ One federal official has cited intelligence reports indicating that Osama bin Laden may control a number of cargo freighters.

Some examples of issues the PSCC Task Force might consider:

- Cooperation in homeland security matters, discovering and repairing gaps in operational policies, rules, and procedures that, if ignored, may result in confusion or conflict between public service agencies involved in the pursuit and apprehension of criminal suspects when officers are moving from one jurisdiction to another (or when multiple agencies all appear at a crime scene in a Columbine High School-type scenario), so that a single law enforcement officer is designated to be officially “in charge” and all officers are following the same protocols;
- Written rules and procedures for use of radio communications in critical scenarios where multiple law-enforcement agencies are involved;
- A unified dispatch center;
- The possibility of joint training exercises or creating joint training facilities (fire and law-enforcement agencies);
- Designation of a specific agency (or multi-agency team) to handle one aspect of county-wide law enforcement (eg., SWAT, marine operations, animal control, crime scene, etc.) so that unnecessary duplication is avoided;
- Whether additional automatic aid agreements are needed to cover overlapping⁴ jurisdictions. The Task Force believes that law enforcement and fire prevention agencies are in the best position to identify such areas of cooperation, and so leaves the specifics to these officers.

One final note regarding the MAP Commission’s recommendation: *Because the PSCCTF’s efforts are intended to make the citizens of Charleston County safer and reduce taxes, it is imperative that the effort be given the support of the mayors, and the municipalities’ legislative bodies, such as town councils and city councils, and County Council.*

Recommendation 2: An updated, integrated countywide 800 MHz communications system should be implemented to allow all public safety entities in the County to communicate with one another and, in special circumstances, with other non-Charleston County public safety entities on the Palmetto 800 Network. The decisions as to which system, and its cost and features are best decided by the County, except that the Task Force believes serious consideration should be given to a mobile data solution when upgrading the communications system. The County should fund the new 800 MHz communications system in a reasonable amount designed to encourage the municipalities, PSDs, City of Charleston, and any other non-County government entities to participate in the system. Input from public service agencies should be sought as to the new system, and the plan proposed by the local fire chiefs regarding alterations to their radio communications should be implemented as soon as practicable.

⁴ For example, Awendaw & Mount Pleasant fire service, St. Paul’s and St. Andrews, etc.

Background: The current 800 MHz radio communications system in Charleston County has served a vital purpose, but it is fast becoming obsolete. The County has studied several options and has proposed a way to replace the old radio system. A mobile data system⁵ should be considered. The real question regarding the new system is not its specifications but money: Should the County, non-County users, or both pay for the new system and its upkeep? It would be a step backwards if the public service agencies in the County, including those of the municipalities and PSDs, were to purchase and operate their own non-integrated communications systems, thus isolating public safety agencies at a time when they should be coming together. The ability of all public safety agencies to communicate with one another in the event of an emergency is critical to the citizens of Charleston County.

The Task Force believes that the County should subsidize a new communications system. However, free use of the present communications system has led to an extraordinary increase in the number of persons using it for non-essential reasons (eg., the MAP Commission heard a report of a local college's custodial staff using the County system for routine, daily communications), further causing maintenance costs to grow. Thus, the County's subsidy should: (a) be high enough to make participation by non-County public service agencies less expensive than buying or leasing their own systems but (b) also require that the non-County entities contribute a reasonable amount toward day-to-day operations and defraying future system upgrades or replacement, so as to discourage non-public safety and non-essential government use of the system. All public service agencies in the Tri-County area should work together in a united front to help secure grants and funding for the new communications system from the Department of Homeland Security and sources other than Charleston County.

The last part of Recommendation 2 involves a written plan submitted to the County by local fire chiefs dealing with software improvements they have requested. The chiefs believe that their plan would allow better operation of their radio communications system, particularly during critical events. The chiefs' plan should be implemented as practicable.

Recommendation 3: A system of countywide codes inspections and enforcement procedures should be created either through the Building Services Department, through creation of a separate countywide entity, and/or by agreements between the County, public service districts, and municipalities. Public safety and other agencies should consider the benefits of increased coordination in Charleston County to improve enforcement of code violations.

Background: Although codes inspections were more coordinated in Charleston County many years ago, this has fallen in disuse. Today, fire code inspections and enforcement are neither uniform nor systematic throughout Charleston County. The best way to reduce injuries, death, and loss of property from fires is to prevent them before the crisis arises.

⁵ The County is considering a 7x system which provides for voice and data on the one system. Mobile data has three basic components: (1) the device, typically a laptop PC, (2) a radio or other device for transmitting the signal, and (3) a system to receive the radio signal and send the data to a terminal or computer aided dispatch.

The second part of Recommendation 3 suggests increased inter-governmental agency coordination regarding safety code enforcement. Some counties have a standing arrangement with their codes enforcement officers in which law enforcement officers and the codes officer coordinate operations with each other. For example, when law enforcement officers notice a code violation, they notify the county codes officer, and the codes officer then inspects the property. Another example would be when law enforcement officers are planning to raid a crack house. Codes enforcement officials are notified in advance, remain on call, and may respond to inspect the premises regarding codes violations noticed by law enforcement officers.

Recommendation 4: The County Building Services Department should be funded in an appropriate amount to allow for a fire marshal to prosecute or otherwise enforce violations reported by the fire departments in the public service districts and other areas in which they typically enforce the fire code. The County Building Services Department is charged with the duty of fire inspections in the PSDs but lacks manpower to do regular or systematic inspections there or elsewhere in the County.

Background: This recommendation is an additional measure designed to rectify the same problems set forth in Recommendation 3 through creation of a fire marshal. The primary duty to inspect for and enforce fire code violations falls upon the Charleston County Building Services Department. Currently, this Department does no inspections in the municipalities except by contract, and inspections are complaint-driven in the areas in which they are charged with enforcing the fire code. The Building Services Department's position is that it lacks funding for widespread inspection and enforcement of fire code violations.⁶ Fire chiefs may inspect for violations, but they lack the ability to enforce code violations.

Recommendation 5: Qualified applicants from the Public Service District fire departments who have completed all due training and requirements of state law, and upon approval by the County Building Official, should be authorized⁷ by County Council on a case-by-case basis as deputy fire marshals. These deputies would operate under the authority of the Building Services Department and have the power to issue citations for enforcement of violations of the fire code. These additional deputy fire marshals would be authorized until countywide inspections and enforcement are a reality (and possibly thereafter if Council approves).

Background: The public service districts lack authority to adopt their own fire codes, and thus the County Code applies in those places. However, the County Building Services Department's position is that it lacks the staff to do regular and systematic inspections in the PSDs. Currently officers in the fire districts do some inspections but are hampered by a lack of enforcement powers because they are unable to issue citations.

⁶ Section 8-21 of the County's Fire Prevention Code designates the County Building Official as the person responsible for enforcing the Code. The Code provision states that county council finds the building official "has adequate manpower . . . to enforce the regulations." The ordinance appears to have adopted on June 15, 1982. The County has grown greatly in the past twenty three years, however.

⁷ It is unclear whether this requires changes at the state level and/or to the County's Code. An opinion by the County Attorney on this issue would be advisable.

Recommendation 6: The County should adopt the administrative code sections of the Fire Code.

Background: Adoption of the administrative fire code sections is urged to help in implementing the changes noted above.

Recommendation 7: The training and qualifications of a sufficient number of First Responders in rural areas farthest from existing EMS stations should be upgraded to Intermediate Level, or at a minimum to Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) Basic. Once this program has been in place for a period of time, the County may want to consider further upgrading to Paramedic level if cost effective.

Background: Some fire personnel are EMT First Responders. First Responders have less training and are able to perform less complex emergency care than Paramedics.⁸ However, in some rural areas, these fire fighter/First Responders will be the first medical care provider on the scene. For example, in remote areas such as Seabrook and Kiawah Islands, the Medical University of South Carolina notes that “The 911 operator will immediately dispatch the St. John’s [Fire] Department located on the island. They will be at your location in about 5 minutes and there is always an emergency medical technician [sic] (EMT) in attendance.”⁹ These EMT First Responders can respond to emergencies and provide limited care and treatment; however, they may not transport patients. Thus, if an EMT First Responder is called to an accident scene, or to treat a heart attack or other serious medical emergency, the First Responder may not take the patient to a hospital but must wait for EMS Paramedics to arrive.

Just as important, there is a limit upon the level of care that a First Responder is authorized to perform. A basic aspect of medical training is the ability to keep the patient’s airway open (i.e., make sure the patient has the ability to breathe), which may require intubation. A First Responder is not authorized to intubate, although an EMT Basic and EMT Intermediate Level may perform these procedures, as can a Paramedic. Although allergic reactions are rare, only a Paramedic is authorized to administer drugs at the scene to deal with the problem. There other such examples.

Charleston is largely an urban county; however, there are rural, and certainly many remote, areas within its borders. The primary hospitals with more extensively equipped emergency facilities are located downtown on or near Calhoun Street (MUSC, Roper, and Charleston Memorial), near I-526 in Mt. Pleasant (East Cooper Regional Hospital on Bowman Road), near I-526 and Highway 17 (St. Francis Hospital), and in the north area (Trident Regional Hospital). Smaller facilities exist. Helicopter transport is also available.

Citizens in Charleston’s rural or remote areas often are farther from hospitals than those in urban areas. As traffic delays increase through urbanization, the response time to and from ailing citizens in rural areas will lengthen. Eventually Charleston County’s growing population will require that additional costly EMS stations be built in rural and remote areas to accommodate the citizens

⁸ Emergency Medical Technicians need only have 168 hours of training before they may test for state certification. Intermediates and Paramedics must have greater than 1,100 hours of training before certification.

⁹ *A Heart Attack - Time Makes a Difference!*, @ Med. Univ. of SC.

there. These citizens are entitled to expeditious, expert care of heart attacks, strokes, injuries and other acute illnesses at their homes or accident scenes, especially since they may have to wait longer to get to a hospital. Because the rural fire departments are already situated in the outlying parts of Charleston County, these fire fighters often will be the first to arrive at the scene of a heart attack, stroke, accident, or other emergency.

Two of the top three leading causes of death in South Carolina for people 25 to 44 years of age are heart disease and accidents. For South Carolinians 45 to 64, heart disease and accidents are in the top three causes. Heart disease is the second greatest killer of South Carolinians 65 to 74 and the number one greatest killer for those of 75 and older.¹⁰ In 2000, South Carolina had the highest death rate from stroke in the nation. In 2004, South Carolina ranked worst in the nation for the number of stroke victims – number 52 after Washington DC and Puerto Rico.¹¹

Quick medical response time is critical to saving lives when heart attacks or strokes occur. The Medical University of South Carolina has stated the obvious: "The shorter the interval between the onset of chest pain and treatment has been proven in many studies to correlate with survival." Studies by the National Institutes of Health back up the need for immediate critical care for heart attacks.¹²

¹⁰SC Budget and Control Board, Office of Research and Statistics, 2004.

¹¹Am. Heart Ass'n, 2004 rankings.

¹² "Our goal is to save lives by increasing the woefully low number of heart attack patients who are treated within the first hour of experiencing symptoms," says Director Claude Lenfant, M.D., [of the National Institutes of Health National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute]. "It is during that crucial 60-minute window that clot-busting medication and other treatments are most effective. Alarming, only 1 in 5 patients gets to the hospital emergency department soon enough to benefit from these treatments. "Most potential heart attack victims wait at least two C and possibly four C hours before seeking medical help and some wait a day or more," Lenfant adds. Nat'l Institutes of Health News Release, Monday, September 10, 2001.

Recommendation 8: Because of the effectiveness of defibrillators in saving lives of cardiac patients, the MAP Commission recommends that the County increase their availability on fire and law enforcement vehicles.

Background: Frequently the difference between life and death depends upon the emergency medical care provider's ability to provide medicine or treatment at the scene. Regarding heart attacks, the Public Safety Task Force has been told repeatedly by physicians who specialize in emergency medicine that defibrillators are critical to savings lives. These physicians have recommended that defibrillators be more available on public safety vehicles, whether on law enforcement cars, fire trucks, and other vehicles. The MAP Commission recommends that the County study the cost of making more defibrillators available on public safety vehicles, and if feasible, increase the number of defibrillators on such vehicles on a gradual basis.

Recommendation 9: Law enforcement agencies, fire departments, building officials, fire marshals, and EMS personnel should cooperate in reporting and enforcing violations of laws requiring that building street numbers be visible. These agencies should encourage voluntary cooperation of owners of any structures exempt, or grandfathered in, under such laws.

Background: There have been reports to the Public Safety Task Force that a serious problem for EMS paramedics is simply finding the residence in which an ailing person is located. This is because of inadequate or a lack of visible house numbers as required by the law.

Recommendation 10: An activity-based accounting study should be instituted at EMS, and once this has been done, billing operations¹³ there should be reassessed to see if these and any other functions should be privatized.

Background: Charleston County's award-winning¹⁴ Emergency Medical Service was created in 1973 and was one of the state's first consolidated EMS programs. Unlike law enforcement and fire agencies, Charleston County EMS operates under a single chain of command countywide. It is a self-contained system doing its own billing and collections.

Various EMS stations are located throughout Charleston County. The distance that an EMS vehicle must travel from a station to the scene of a medical emergency varies according to where one lives in the county. Charleston County EMS responded to over 38,500 calls for assistance that resulted in over 49,000 responses. According to its website, Charleston EMS does not "[p]rovide routine convalescent transportation, such as taking people home from the hospital or to clinics or private doctor's offices," but instead lists its duties as including the following:

- Provide emergency lifesaving care to people who are seriously ill or injured
- Transport patients to local hospital emergency rooms
- Operate ambulances and Quick Response Vehicles to support these services

¹³ Currently the billing department is set up to include 1 supervisor, 3 clerks, and a collections person.

¹⁴ Of note, Charleston County EMS is the Lowcountry winner of the 2004 S.C. Regional Paramedic Competition. Charleston County EMS also received the 2002 Large System of the Year award from the S.C. DHEC Division of EMS.

- Offer First Responder training for the Awendaw Fire Department and the Town of McClellanville and other fire districts within Charleston County
- Provide emergency communications dispatch services for EMS, Rescue Squad and four fire departments
- Provide a variety of educational programs to the public on many safety issues
- Dispatch for the Charleston County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Squad

There is also a Volunteer Rescue Squad in Charleston County responding to hundreds¹⁵ of calls. Including volunteer hours devoted to training and to community service, the total savings to Charleston County taxpayers in 1996 was \$237,668 (calculated at minimum wage).

EMS does its own patient billing. New electronic billing software was put in place this year that reportedly has increased collections dramatically, and decreased the incidence of delinquent accounts. Still, it is difficult, if not impossible, to tell what the actual cost is to the taxpayers for EMS to do its own billing. This matter should be addressed once activity-based accounting is implemented to see if EMS billing operations should be privatized. An activity-based accounting study is one of the MAP Commission's most important suggestions and applies to not only EMS but to many other areas of County government. Privatization and accounting-based studies are discussed in greater detail in the Procurement, Outsourcing, and Privatization Report (also in this MAP Commission Report).

¹⁵ According to the Charleston County website, "[i]n 1996, the Volunteer Rescue Squad responded to 618 calls, representing 33,222 volunteer rescue hours."

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