

**CITY OF FLANDREAU
1005 W. Elm Avenue
Flandreau, SD 57028-1404**

**COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS
November 25th, 2024**

The City Council of the City of Flandreau, South Dakota, met in a special joint session with the County Commissioners on Monday, November 25th, 2024 at 4:30 p.m. at the William J. Janklow Community Center, Flandreau, SD.

Present for the County: Chair Carla Bruning. Commissioners: Jerry Doyle, Randy Hemmer, Dan Miles and Dave Reker. Also present were Commission Assistant Marty Skroch, Auditor Tawny Heinemann and States Attorney Paul Lewis.

Present for the City: Mayor Dan Sutton. Aldermen: Curt Ahlers, Brad Bjerke, Mark Ekern, Mike Fargen, Karen Tufty, and Tim Yeaton. Absent: None. Also present were City Administrator Cohl Turnquist; Finance Officer Lori Kneebone, and City Attorney Corey Bruning. There were approximately 47 city and county residents in attendance and those who spoke will be referenced in the minutes.

The County Commission meeting was called to order by Chair Carla Bruning at 4:30 p.m. Motion by Doyle and seconded by Reker stating the meeting not exceed 6:00 p.m. All commissioners voted aye. Motion carried.

Motion by Reker and seconded by Hemmer to approve the County's proposed agenda. All commissioners voted aye. Motion carried.

The City Council meeting was called to order by Mayor Dan Sutton at 4:31 p.m. The following council members voted aye: Ahlers, Bjerke, Ekern, Fargen, Tufty and Yeaton. Nays: None. Absent: None. Motion carried.

The city's proposed agenda was reviewed. Motion by Fargen and seconded by Tufty to adopt the proposed agenda. The following members voted aye: Ahlers, Bjerke, Ekern, Fargen, Tufty and Yeaton. Nays: None. Absent: None. Motion carried.

Commission Chair Carla Bruning started the meeting by thanking everyone in attendance. Bruning asked Auditor Tawny Heinemann for a financial recap of the ambulance service. Heinemann stated that when planning for the 2023 budget, in mid-2022, inflation was out pacing the allowed property tax increase and the county was forced to make cuts to non-mandated services. In mid-2023, while discussing the 2024 Budget, changes still needed to be made to keep the county in a good financial position and county officials began looking for new ways to fund non-mandated services. The ambulance was identified as a more costly service and the County asked the City for a subsidy of \$25,000 in August of 2023. Heinemann presented charts to those in attendance showing the ambulance call volume from 2023 and according to county data, the City of Flandreau makes up 60% of ambulance calls. Heinemann also noted that the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe gives a \$10,000 annual subsidy to the county for ambulance services.

Commissioner Doyle asked what makes up a Flandreau ambulance call, and it includes all calls within the Flandreau border, including hospital transfers.

Mayor Sutton also thanked everyone for attending the meeting and said as a city council, we believe the ambulance is an important service. Sutton stated the City also provides non-mandated services that don't necessarily provide a city

profit including; fire protection, the swimming pool, and parks and other recreation. Sutton questioned how ambulance calls are determined.

Alderman Brad Bjerke stated that when the City was financing the new firehall, funds were used from the city's capital improvement fund. Bjerke says the city needs to sell the old fire hall because we have a financial responsibility to replace the capital improvement funds, which will be used for other important city projects. Bjerke proposes the county purchase the old fire fall, with the stipulation that if the building is ever retired as an ambulance garage, the City can buy it back for the same money. Bjerke also stated if an annual subsidy is needed by the County to operate the ambulance, there shall be an annual cap on the increases and the City will receive detailed ambulance financial reports from the County.

Alderman Tufty stated we do need an ambulance in Flandreau and both parties need to work together to find a solution. Tufty also noted the City provides a lot of services to the county.

Alderman Yeaton agreed that the county and the city need to work together and encouraged residents to speak out during the public comment part of the meeting.

Alderman Ekern stated the county has done a poor job of running the ambulance service and agreed with the comments made by Alderman Bjerke.

Alderman Ahlers stated if the County pulls ambulance service from the City of Flandreau, they would be losing 60% of their revenue.

City Administrator Turnquist thanked everyone for coming to discuss this important topic in our community. Turnquist addressed the 60% call volume data received by the county. Cohl stated that the city agrees that the numbers provided by the county were accurate, but a deeper dive into the call volume shows that at least 35% of the calls assigned to Flandreau were transfers out of Avera Hospital, according to Flandreau Police Department data. Turnquist shared that the data showed that 194 of the calls assigned to Flandreau were calls assigned to standard EMS services within the community, leaving 87 calls that are unknown. Turnquist stated that of the 87 unknown calls, some of them may be standard EMS calls, but it's possible that many of those calls include community assistance activities, such as attending sporting events, assisting with community programs or other community services. Turnquist reported that he is unsure what the actual shares of calls are for Flandreau, but the data likely suggests that Flandreau is responsible for somewhere between 30-50% of the calls in Moody County. In conclusion, Turnquist stated he was fairly disappointed when Moody County informed the city that small group discussions would no longer happen. Turnquist wants to work together to find a solution.

Commissioner Hemmer agreed with Turnquist, stating both parties need to work together. Hemmer suggested the City take over the ambulance and the county would provide a subsidy to the City.

Commissioner Doyle agreed it's time to stop finger pointing and figure out how to move forward. Doyle also noted, the county doesn't get paid what is charged out for an ambulance call, it is significantly less.

Commissioner Reker stated the county has been asking for some money, not the majority of the costs, and feels the city should share in the costs of ambulance operations.

Commissioner Miles said the county has tried several times throughout the past years to talk to the City and has never gotten any answers.

Commission Assistant Marty Skroch agreed everyone needs to work together and stated that even if you separate out the hospital transfers, Flandreau is still the biggest entity of the calls. Skroch also stated it's not as simple as increasing rates.

State's Attorney Paul Lewis addressed the group stating, we have a bigger problem than both of the public entities can handle. Lewis stated the county has a personnel problem, along with a budget problem, and Moody County can't make the ambulance service happen on its own.

The meeting was now turned over for public comment. Bruning respectfully reminded everyone to keep their comments to 3 minutes.

Dorothy Bauske said it's most necessary that everyone work together as a group and do whatever it takes to keep the ambulance service in Flandreau, even if it means taxes increase.

Wes Hall, city resident and full-time EMS, spoke about the reimbursement rates for ambulance calls from Medicaid and Medicare.

Scott Ganschow said none of the people who work for the county want the ambulance to stop servicing Flandreau. The county is just asking for a little bit of help.

Ione Johnson told the group they need to think about the human aspect of the situation and what residents would be thinking if they don't have an ambulance in town. Later in the meeting, Johnson also asked the county if they have checked into other funding options from the state to operate the ambulance and Chairman Bruning said they have not.

Bill Wellman, a rural resident, said if the ambulance leaves town, it will never come back.

Anna Duncan, a former city council member said she knows it's not easy to run a budget for a municipality, but feels everyone should work together to figure out what is feasible.

Stuart Zephier, representing himself and the Moody County Breadbasket, spoke about the old fire hall. Zephier stated the bread basket organization would like to share the old fire hall with the ambulance service, as they have outgrown their current location. Zephier accused Turnquist of being unprofessional by questioning the county's call volume data.

Don Whitman, a former administrator for the City of Flandreau, stated this issue has brought him out of retirement. Whitman is concerned about the county saying if the city doesn't give them the old fire hall, they will pull the ambulance services. Whitman also referenced the dispatch agreement between Moody County and the City, which has increased significantly over the years. Whitman agreed with the comments made by Alderman Bjerke.

Rick Veldkamp pointed out that there are a lot of rural residents that live in Moody County, but aren't close enough to utilize the Moody County Ambulance, and still pay taxes for it.

Mark Bonrud, who worked for 44 years owning and operating the ambulance and as a previous employee of Moody County, said the ambulance is a critically important service. Bonrud stated threatening to shut down the ambulance is not the way to run a business. All entities need to work together. Bonrud noted that the City found funds to build a new fire station and believes the County also has money they could put towards emergency services.

Troy Naaz, who lives next to the old fire hall, is concerned about auctioning off the building. Naaz also expressed concerns about the county mismanaging their funds.

Kayla Charles thinks the City of Flandreau should be subsidizing the ambulance and pointed out the funds the City gives to other organizations in town.

Ryan Kills A Hundred, representing the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe, said the tribe is currently giving the ambulance \$10,000 annually. Kills A Hundred said the tribe is willing to work together and will pay their fair share.

Emily Pieper thanked everyone for being there and having a voice and sharing their thoughts.

Flandreau Avera Hospital Administrator Bryan Breitling stated Avera is deeply supportive of the ambulance service. Breitling said Avera will step in and provide assistance, if needed, but said this should be a local decision.

Linnea Janssen asked the group if there are underlying issues that need to be discussed and stated whoever runs the ambulance service needs to be the party that desires to do so.

The public comment portion of the meeting was closed and a motion was made by Commissioner Doyle and seconded by Commissioner Miles to adjourn the county commission meeting at 6:00 p.m. All commissioners voted aye. Motion carried.

The City Council went into a short recess at 6:03 p.m.

Mayor Sutton called the City Council meeting back to order at 6:06 p.m. Due to time restraints, Mayor Sutton asked Administrator Turnquist to share some additional information. Turnquist believes the problem with the ambulance is three-tier; there is a problem with recruiting and retaining staff, a facility problem, and an operational problem. The gifting of the old fire hall and/or a subsidy won't solve all of the county's problems. Turnquist said a lot of time has been spent discussing the challenges and not a lot of time talking about solutions. Turnquist recommends forming another task force, to continue to work on finding a solution to this situation. More discussion will occur at the City's next council meeting on December 2nd, 2024.

Council Comments: None.

The Mayor declared the meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Daniel D. Sutton
Mayor

ATTEST:

Cohl Turnquist
City Administrator