

RE: Response to Strategic Priorities and Core Values questionnaire

1. What functions and services, if any, is your department performing that do not align with these strategic priorities and core values?

It is my opinion that all of the functions and service provided by both the ambulance service and the emergency management office align with the strategic priorities and core values. This is especially true with Effectiveness (*Implement operational efficiencies to reduce the costs and free up revenue*), Growth (*Work to increase the county's population and tax base fund services in a balanced manner*) and Improvement (*Create a culture of continual improvement to sustain progress*).

The core values listed are the very same core values I try to instill in both the departments I oversee. You can see the correlation with the listed core values and the ambulance service's mission statement: *The mission of the Richland County Ambulance Service is to provide efficient, high quality emergency medical care and safe transportation to a medical facility for any resident or visitor of our service area. We will commit to being a public education resource on issues pertaining to emergency care and preventive medicine. We will create a safe work environment that encourages continuing education and the achievement of personal goals while continually striving to accomplish our primary mission. By working together and remaining well organized, committed to quality, active participation and continuous improvement, we can best meet the challenges of the future.*

2. What operations, or procedure changes would you plan on implementing to help your functions and projects better align with these strategic priorities and core values?

This question's response requires a multi-layer response which will show a connection to the listed strategic priorities and core values – particularly Improvement, Public Service and Open-minded. I will start out with the Ambulance Service as it appears to be the department most people are interested in at this time. I will also touch on Emergency Management as I feel it has a great impact on the growth of the County.

The County Ambulance Service has long been the topic of discussion and for anyone paying attention, the service of providing pre-hospital care is a hot-topic throughout the Country. Questions and issues such as funding, sustainable delivery model (volunteer vs. paid on-call vs. career), responsibility of ownership (private vs. public) and growing staff shortage across the Country. Improvement - Improving our processes will be key for the Ambulance Service's survival and embracing change will be necessary for the sustainable delivery of services. Public Service - As mentioned earlier, the Ambulance Service has been the topic of many conversations over the last 10 years. Some feel that the County should not be running an ambulance service and should create a district; others feel we are filling a gap that was created in 1968 when Wisconsin first adopted an official plan for the delivery of pre-hospital care and the transport of the sick and injured. State Statute does not clearly identify who is responsible for ambulance services with the exception of State Statute 60.565 which reads *60.565 Ambulance service. The town board shall contract for or operate and maintain ambulance services unless such services are provided by another person. If the town board contracts for ambulance services, it may contract with one or more providers. The town board may determine and charge a reasonable fee for ambulance service*

provided under this section. The town board may purchase equipment for medical and other emergency calls. The Statute allows the County to operate an ambulance service as stated in Statute 59.54(1) - 59.54 Public protection and safety.

(1) Ambulances. The board may purchase, equip, operate and maintain ambulances and contract for ambulance service with one or more providers for conveyance of the sick or injured and make reasonable charges for the use thereof. There is also the recent case between Portage County, who provides ambulance services, and the Town of Grant. Here is an excerpt from the case: *County home rule under s. 59.03 (1) allows every county to “exercise any organizational or administrative power, subject only to the constitution and to any enactment of the legislature.” The language of s. 60.565 authorizing towns to provide ambulance service acknowledges that another person can provide the ambulance service instead of a town and withdraws the mandate when another person provides ambulance services. The absence of a command from the legislature that towns provide an ambulance service in all situations causes the argument that county home rule prevents counties from providing ambulance service to miss the mark. Town of Grant, Portage County v. Portage County, 2017 WI App 69, 378 Wis. 2d 289, 903 N.W.2d 152, 16-2435.*

Most have no idea about the issues facing EMS nor do they concern themselves too much with who owns or operates the ambulance service. They do care about whether or not an ambulance shows up when 911 is called and they expect highly trained individuals to arrive in said ambulance within a reasonable amount of time and provide life-saving care and efficient, safe transportation. EMS is an essential service but does not get the same funding support or attention as other essential services such as fire protection, highways, trash removal and police protection. I suppose it is because EMS is a part of the healthcare system and thus the burden is covered by the individual needing the service whereas the whole community relies on good roads, timely trash pick-up and patrol cars protecting the neighborhoods as being essential to everyone. This leads me to the core value of being open-minded. Open-mindedness must be exercised by the County Board, the municipalities, the ambulance directors, the providers and the public. Questions such as “who should provide the service (district vs. County)” need to be made with all the facts being presented and not on past thoughts or feelings. Interestingly, the County does have the ability to levy taxes for EMS services where a district does not necessarily unless that district was formed before the levy rule changes from years ago. There are currently 7 ambulance services with 13 ambulances providing service to the County residents and visitors. Is this efficient? Could there be a better model that reduces the number of ambulances and stations, yet provides a higher level of care? Could this occur by forming a County-wide district or the County taking over ambulance services for the entire County? One fact is for sure: the current model is not sustainable as volunteers are few and far between. Recently two ambulance services in the northern part of the County hosted a well-advertised open-house in an attempt to attract new members; no one showed up. There is another ambulance service in the southern part of the County that has 5 EMTs and 3 EMRs. Three of their members are retirement age and have stated they will not renew their license in 2023; right now, they are not able to respond to every 911 without calling for back up or mutual aid. I share this not to ridicule or shame any service but to shed light on an issue that needs to be addressed. This won't get solved by the County getting out of the ambulance business or a district being formed; we will all still be vying for the two resources every ambulance service in the County needs: funding and people. It is bigger than that and will require intentional open-mindedness with the goal of an improved

system. This system must meet the needs of all County residents, be effectively run and ensure the service will be available for generations to come.

Emergency Management is a mandated service, and in Richland County we barely meet the mandated requirements of the programs due to a decreasing budget to meet the financial impact of personnel costs, so providing discretionary services isn't an option. The same core values that are applied and promoted within the ambulance service are also embraced in the emergency management office. However the one core value that is especially important in emergency management is Public Service. Mitigation and preparedness are actions that provide value in the now and in the future. How we respond to natural disasters will impact how communities thrive after the disaster is over. An effective program affords the director to put all their attention to mitigation, planning and recovery and this often requires some pretty ingenious out-the-box thinking to pull off, especially since over the years the operating budget has been reduced to cover the cost of health insurance, staff, or pay increases. This must change and just as I am asked to embrace effectiveness as a strategic goal, the County must embrace an open-mind approach as it prioritizes the services it provides. Maybe there needs to be money added to the operational cost of the program? Maybe the department needs a full-time director that can put all of their attention and energy towards building resiliency in communities and look for more mitigation opportunities? One thing is for certain we must be open-minded if we are to balance here in Richland County.

Albert Einstein once quoted "We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them". I believe if we adopt the idea behind this quote we will be better equipped mentally to find solutions to the problems of today and make tomorrow be better for those who come after us.