



Garrett County Emergency Services Board

Meeting Minutes

Date: November 20, 2025

Location: Garrett County Emergency Operations Center

Time: 1600 Hours

Call to Order

The meeting of the Garrett County Emergency Services Board was called to order by Chairman Bill Ingram at 1600 hours.

Review of Previous Minutes

The minutes from the previous Emergency Services Board meeting were reviewed and approved by the board members present.

Roll Call – ESB Appointees

The following Emergency Services Board members were present:

- Alex Mellot – Garrett County Fire Association
 - Bill Ingram – Citizen Representative
 - Bob Stephens – Citizen Representative *(Not Present)*
 - Duane Stein II – Citizen Representative
 - Justin Orendorf – Garrett County Emergency Management
 - Mark Clookie – Southern Rescue
 - Malia Martin – Bittinger Volunteer Fire Department
 - Richard Carlson – Fire Chief's Committee
 - Steve Smith – Garrett County Emergency Services
 - Terry Spear – Northern Rescue Squad
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Present Guests

- Wayne Tiemersma – MIEMSS

Reports

Guests – MIEMSS

Wayne Tiemersma from MIEMSS provided an update regarding the Cardiac Grant Program. He advised that the grant is currently in process and that all requests submitted from Region 1 are expected to be approved. This funding will assist agencies in supporting cardiac care equipment and related initiatives across the region.

Garrett County Emergency Services – Stephen Smith, Chief

Chief Stephen Smith provided an update on Emergency Services operations, including EMS response statistics, staffing considerations, and equipment updates. Continued efforts to support volunteer agencies and maintain EMS coverage across Garrett County were discussed.

A total of 1,033 EMS incidents and 642 fire incidents were handled during the last quarter. Mutual aid received and provided continues to fluctuate from month to month but remains within normal limits and is not considered concerning.

The second clinician at Southern Rescue has proven successful and has significantly reduced the number of failed second-line responses for that station.

The Garrett County Commissioners recently reviewed and approved a request from the Bittinger Volunteer Fire Department for EMS staffing assistance during daytime hours. The Commissioners approved three personnel to cover 120 hours per week, and the added staffing is currently being implemented.

Currently Ambulance 951 is operating as the primary ambulance. Ambulance 952 has been sent to North Carolina to be refurbished and remounted on a new chassis. Delivery of a new ambulance is expected during the first quarter of 2026.

Two full-time employees are currently enrolled in the paramedic program, and one employee recently completed the program and is now a licensed paramedic.

Garrett County Emergency Management – Justin Orendorf, Director

Director Justin Orendorf reported that he recently traveled to Baltimore to meet with Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM) Secretary Russ Strickland to discuss current issues impacting emergency management funding in Maryland.

Garrett County receives approximately \$250,000–\$300,000 annually in FEMA Homeland Security funding, which supports preparedness and operational initiatives benefiting 911 communications, law enforcement, emergency management, EMS, and other public safety programs.

The County has been advised that FY25 funding has been approved, but the funds have not yet been released. There is also discussion of reducing the period of performance from three years to one year, which could significantly limit the time available to complete projects.

The County currently has four projects prepared and ready for implementation once funding becomes available:

- Development of a county drone program
- Purchase of medical pumps for volunteer EMS agencies
- Emergency Operations Center upgrades, including acoustic improvements and a dedicated training area
- Additional operational preparedness improvements

Director Orendorf also discussed Congressional earmark funding. The radio consoles at the County's backup 911 center located at the courthouse are nearing end-of-life and will likely require replacement in the future at an estimated cost of approximately \$1 million.

A survey was recently distributed to all Fire Chiefs to identify priority needs within the fire service. One major need identified was portable radios. NFPA guidance recommends that each seated position on an apparatus have access to a portable radio, particularly for personnel operating in IDLH environments.

Portable radios cost approximately \$10,000 each, so the long-term plan is to incrementally purchase additional radios over time to help close the gap.

Director Orendorf also provided an update on the 911 Communications Center transition, which was completed on September 7, with full relocation to the Emergency Operations Center on October 1, where operations now run 24/7.

Four new 911 Specialists were hired and completed EPD, EMD, and EFD certification training in Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

Additionally, inspections of radio tower sites identified several maintenance issues including loose coax connections and radios requiring service, approximately half of which have already been resolved.

The County also received approval from the Maryland 911 Board for a VESTA phone system refresh, a \$1.4 million fully grant-funded project that will replace the current 911 phone equipment at both the EOC communications center and the backup center.

Director Orendorf noted the QA Committee currently lacks the required Emergency Medical Dispatcher (EMD) representative, and the department plans to solicit interest from 911 staff to fill the position.

Finally, Director Orendorf noted that with the addition of EMS staffing in Bittering and the additional daytime clinician staffing at Southern Rescue, EMS coverage across Garrett County is likely the strongest it has ever been. Director Orendorf encouraged the Emergency Services Board to remain engaged in discussions regarding the future of EMS in Garrett County and to think outside the box in identifying ways the county can better take care of its own residents and reduce the reliance on mutual aid responses from surrounding jurisdictions.

Northern Rescue – Terry Spear

Terry Spear provided an update on Northern Rescue operations, including staffing levels, response activity, and operational considerations. Northern Rescue is currently evaluating the purchase of a new ambulance to replace an existing unit, although the project remains in the planning phase.

Southern Rescue – Mark Clookie

Mark Clookie provided an update on Southern Rescue operations, including call volume trends and staffing considerations.

Southern Rescue is currently in the process of having one ambulance refurbished and remounted on a new chassis. The anticipated turnaround time for the project is approximately three to four months.

Southern Rescue has also reported an approximate 3% fail rate for calls. However, it was noted that the majority of these failed responses involve second-line crew calls occurring during overnight hours, typically after the second clinician has completed their shift and left for the day.

Bittinger Volunteer Fire Department – Malia Martin

There was nothing additional to report beyond the previously discussed additional EMS staffing support.

Garrett County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association – Alex Mellot

The association continues to meet on a regular basis, LOSAP changes are being looked at and discussed with Garrett County Government but there is nothing to report on at this time.

Chief's Committee – Richard Carlson

Richard Carlson provided an update from the Fire Chief's Committee regarding matters impacting the fire service in Garrett County.

Chief Carlson reported that the Chief's Committee has been meeting regularly and has been working on a five-year strategic plan to ensure adequate staffing and response capabilities for fire incidents.

The Chief's Committee has requested a meeting with the Garrett County Commissioners and has asked the Commissioners to consider allowing existing Emergency Services staff to be cross trained to assist with fire incidents when necessary.

It was emphasized that this request is intended to alleviate immediate manpower shortages currently being experienced within the fire service. It was further recommended that the Emergency Services Board remain engaged and focused on this developing situation to help ensure that a more permanent solution can be developed in the future.

Old Business

Mark Clookie inquired about the grant project for tablets for Fire Mobile and asked for an update on the status of the project.

Director Orendorf reported that the project is nearing completion. The tablets have been purchased, the required software has been installed, and the tablets are now beginning to be installed into fire apparatus throughout the county.

New Business

Chairman Bill Ingram addressed the committee and discussed the possibility of adjusting the meeting time for the Emergency Services Board. Chairman Ingram proposed that future meetings begin at 5:00 p.m., rather than 4:00 p.m., while continuing to meet on the third Thursday of each quarter.

The committee discussed the proposal and agreed that the Emergency Services Board meeting time would change to 5:00 p.m. on the third Thursday of each quarter.

For the Good of the Committee

Board members were given the opportunity to provide additional comments or updates related to emergency services within Garrett County.

Adjournment

There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 1715 hours.