

April 17, 2017

Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly  
144 N. Binkley Street  
Soldotna, Alaska 99669

Re: Ordinance 2017-09, An Ordinance Creating the Eastern Peninsula Highway Emergency Service Area

Dear Members of the Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly,

First, I would like to start by introducing myself because I wear a few different hats. I am a full time employee of Central Emergency Services (CES) and work as their Training Officer. In my off time, I volunteer with Cooper Landing Emergency Services (CLES) and serve as their interim EMS Chief. I have a unique dual perspective as both a career and volunteer responder.

Historically, in the town of Cooper Landing responder numbers are either feast or famine, there are either very few EMS personnel to respond on calls or there is a large sustainable base to work from for long periods of time. The town is aging and the elderly population are not able to work in the EMS field like they once were able. The younger generation is starting families. And truly, volunteering in this field is not for everyone.

In 2015 I responded on a call to Cooper Landing with CES, a mutual aid request for a motor vehicle accident. Based on some observations, I opened a dialog with the CLES personnel. In short order it became apparent that Cooper Landing Emergency Services was in need of assistance. The ambulance staffing was at an all-time low, there were very few volunteers and those who did respond were becoming burned out rapidly. Additionally, CES was being requested to respond for many of the Cooper Landing calls as a primary response agency due to a "no responder available" problem, which falls outside of the Mutual Aid guidelines. In short Cooper Landing Emergency Services was in real danger of losing their ability to respond to EMS calls.

Because of the burn out occurring, a concern for the stability and life of the agency and the understanding that a functional ambulance service within the boundaries of the eastern peninsula was important, myself and one other Paramedic began volunteering for Cooper Landing ambulance in January 2016. This helped to allow the Cooper Landing responders some time off. Staffing levels were still low, but after the completion of a small EMT 1 class, CLES was left with a small group of individuals available to respond during the summer months. However, the service personnel still had to think "outside of the box" to create a new game plan to stay afloat. Members recruited within the EMT and Paramedic programs at KPC, which included the Paramedic and EMT instructors and signed Memorandums of Agreements with KPC to allow students to perform ride time on the Cooper Landing ambulance.

From these effort, Cooper Landing was able to gain several members who were consistently available to staff the ambulance for 24/7 responses. Cooper Landing Emergency Services had created a way for the service to survive while it continued to look for other avenues to gain assistance for funding, training and the biggest singular factor: sustainability.

Many of the CLES volunteers give 100's upon 100's of hours of time for free, drive from 50-70 miles one way to spend 24-56 hours a week away from their homes, sleeping in a bay dorm room on a single bunkbed in a station where there are no couches, no chairs, no kitchen table to eat on and no stove to cook food.

History of a department can be important, however, I think it is equally as important for everyone who is involved in the decision making process to understand that the personnel within Cooper Landing Emergency Services are trying everything possible, including some "non-traditional" variations, to keep their service operational. Reimbursement for responders is for a call response only and is capped at a specific dollar amount. Almost all of us turn down any type of mileage reimbursement so we do not bankrupt the service.

Consistently, from January 2016 until today, Cooper Landing Emergency Services has been able to staff their ambulance 24/7 with minimum of an EMT or Paramedic and a Driver (who may also be an ETT), although there are times where the staffing is with multiple EMS personnel and a Driver. Rarely does Cooper Landing see multiple calls come in at the same time, however the response area is large and the chance of this occurring is real.

The area of coverage for the Cooper Landing ambulance is the north entrance of Skilak Lake (Mile 58 Sterling Hwy) to Mile 38 Sterling Highway, Mile 38 Seward Highway to Ingram Creek (Mile 76 Seward Highway) and the Hope Road. If the calls are in Cooper Landing and the crew is in the station, the dispatch to scene times can be short. If the calls are in Hope or at the furthest end of the area (up around Ingram Creek), response times are long. Motor vehicle accidents make up a majority of the call responses in this area and some runs require extensive extrication, along with multiple agency response (including mutual aid) to transport everyone involved to a hospital.

It is of utmost importance to us that our ambulance staffing be maintained and available for responses without fail. A staffed station or in-town volunteers gives Cooper Landing a dedicated crew for the first call, however, a second response request during that same time causes the agency to be reliant on mutual aid responses from various surrounding agencies and the first responders who are not on duty that live within the Cooper Landing area. This works no different for Central Emergency Services, Kenai, Nikiski or various other departments when their resources are taxed, they also turn to Mutual aid and Auto aid agreements for personnel and equipment support.

With that said, Cooper Landing only has one staffed ambulance. Volunteers can see every end of their coverage area, plus some if they transport to a hospital. Multiple calls in one day or even several days in a row, weather and bad calls can start to wear on a responder. And assistance, when requested from another agency such as Girdwood, CES or LifeMed, comes from up to 30 miles away or more, which in turn can create significant delays for patients who sometimes cannot afford to wait for help.

While Cooper Landing has had success in their ability to find volunteers now, we know that this is not always going to be the case and we watch the other smaller agencies within our response area struggle just to maintain their personnel numbers. By creating a service area corridor, hopefully there will be a great deal more oversight, resource management and support for the smaller agencies who are trying to "serve and protect" the large number of travelers on the Seward and Sterling Highways.

The Fire and EMS services that cover the area you are addressing need assistance in various ways: added personnel, medical sponsorship, retention, training, funding. Any one of these items alone can create a monumental task for a volunteer system that is already stressed or tapped out and together they can end a service, especially if there is no help available to them.

Because of this I would like to voice my support to the efforts of the EMS Workgroup and Mayor Navarre in creating a highway corridor service area.

Lori Tyler  
Cooper Landing Emergency Services