



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

FITCH-RONA EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES DISTRICT

Proudly providing a high-level of emergency care to the families and visitors of the City of Fitchburg, City of Verona, and Town of Verona, since 1977.

A Message from EMS Chief Patrick Anderson



In December of 2024, the City of Madison Fire Department hosted a leadership development class and graciously invited Chiefs and other future leaders from area services. One of the questions that the host Bob Norton asked the group was, “What ignites your pilot light?”

Bob used the questions to start the conversation about conflict resolution, but as I continue to look through the take-home packet from that workshop even two months later, that section header led me down a different path. I am starting my 24th year with Fitch-Rona and am starting to see my friends and peers retire, so I frequently ask myself how much longer I plan on working and seeing those words, what ignites my pilot light, gets me reflecting.

In 2023, the municipalities approved a second full-time Deputy Chief position. We started a hiring process at the end of 2023 to start filling the position in 2024. The process did not yield a good-fit candidate for the service. The process started again in the fall of 2024 and successfully brought a candidate to Fitch-Rona who will take the position and run. Over those two years, from “selling” the position to municipal leaders and the lengthy interview processes, I had a chance to talk about the service. Through generous grants over the last five years, we were able to purchase transport ventilators, IV pumps, and point-of-care ultrasound, and in 2024, we added integrated scales into our ambulance stretchers to obtain accurate patient weights. These pieces of equipment are tools that are leading the charge in bringing medical care to the side of the patient in their home, work, or wherever care is needed. Adding to that, the tools are nothing without the people to use them. The field providers at Fitch-Rona are committed to making a difference in the lives of our residents and community members who work and play in our district. That difference may be as little as assisting someone back into their bed, or chair, after a fall, or as great as using all the tools listed above to recognize and stabilize a patient for whom time is critical for advanced medical intervention.

Those tools, and those people, are what make me excited to come to work every day. It is rewarding to be part of a system that is committed to being the best we can be and is the thing that ignites my pilot light.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick Anderson".

Sincerely,
Patrick Anderson
EMS Chief

A Brief History-

In the summer of 1976, the Dane County Traffic Department announced they would no longer be providing ambulance services to municipalities in Dane County. This announcement was in line with the national movement that started during the 1960s to create an Emergency Medical Services program that was aimed to increase the survival rates of people involved in traumatic accidents.

With some guidance from Robert Breunnig from Dane County, the municipalities of the Village of Verona, and the Towns of Fitchburg, Verona, Springdale, and Dunn, started conversations about sharing the cost, and resources, of an EMS district. At the time, the Fire Departments of those municipalities were not interested in taking on the task of building an EMS service, so after many months of meetings, the Village of Verona, and the Towns of Fitchburg and Verona ultimately entered into an agreement, and effective September 10th, 1977, the Fitch-Rona EMS District was established.

It started with a single ambulance donated by the County's newly formed Department of Emergency Management, and under the first EMS Director, Jack Vaughn, the department had 81 volunteers, who were also volunteers in neighboring communities. The first station was in the house used for maintenance at the original Dane County Home, which has since evolved into the Badger Prairie Health Care Center in the Town of Verona.

The district functioned as a 100% volunteer agency until the early 1980's when a part-time administrator was hired to help with the day-to-day operations of the district, as well as cover daytime hours. This is also the time when Fitch-Rona advanced to the next level of EMS, known as the EMT-Intermediate. It should be noted that Fitch-Rona was one of the first services in the State of Wisconsin to upgrade to this level. The volunteers continued to give their time to the service until the late 1980s when increasing call volumes, and an ever-growing need to maintain skill levels and continuing education required the hiring of additional full-time staff.

After a few additional station moves, in 1993, Fitch-Rona moved into the new Fitchburg Fire Station #2 at 5415 King James Way in Fitchburg. In 2001, Fitch-Rona became the second paramedic-level EMS agency in Dane County outside of the City of Madison, with the Town of Madison upgrading its service just a month prior. A staff of 7 full-time paramedics, an Assistant Chief, a Chief, and a Full-Time Office Manager, ran the day-to-day operations of Fitch-Rona. During this time, several volunteer EMTs continued to provide additional staffing on the ambulances.

In 2003, a continued rise in call volume necessitated an additional staffed ambulance during the daytime hours. Two years later, this ambulance would become a 24-hour response vehicle at the paramedic level.

In 2006, in conjunction with plans to build a new fire station in Verona, Fitch-Rona moved the second ambulance into rented quarters at 416 Venture Ct. This move provided reduced response times to the City and Town of Verona. Fitch-Rona occupied those "temporary" quarters until 2015 when the new Verona Fire Station was opened at 101 Lincoln St.

A few short years later, the paramedics moved along with the City of Fitchburg Fire Department to the new Fitchburg Fire Station #2 at 2931 Marketplace Dr. This move followed the eastern direction of growth in the City of Fitchburg and reduced overall response times throughout the City of Fitchburg.

2018 saw the next great leap for Fitch-Rona. To address the increasing call volume and reduce the response time to the east side of the district, the district municipalities approved the addition of a third, full-time, paramedic ambulance. This approval brought seven new paramedics to the full-time staff at Fitch-Rona EMS in July of 2019. The third ambulance operated out of Fitchburg Fire station #2 for a short duration while the final construction was being completed on the new fire station, and on September 16th, 2019, Fitch-Rona moved into Fitchburg Fire Station #3 at 2950 South Syene Road.

This additional staffing made Fitch-Rona the busiest and largest EMS service in Dane County outside of the City of Madison until the City of Sun Prairie combined with the Marshall EMS District in the fall of 2022.



Operations

Stations

Fitch-Rona operates three paramedic-level ambulances 24/7. These ambulances operate out of the Verona Fire Station located at 101 Lincoln Street in the City of Verona, the second out of Fitchburg Fire Station #2 at 2931 Marketplace Drive, and the third out of Fitchburg Fire Station #3 at 2950 South Syene Rd. Dispatching of ambulances is based on two factors: Municipal borders and the Global Positioning System (GPS) of the ambulance. Fitchburg does have Fire Station #1, located at 5791 Lacy Rd, which houses the administrative staff of the department and some reserve apparatus.





Resources

The district owns five ambulances (2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, and 2021). They are all built on a Ford F450 or F550 4x4 chassis with the patient care compartment built by North Central Ambulance Vehicle on a Braun Chief XL model base. They are identified as Fitch-Rona Medic units 43, 44, 45, 46, and 47.

The district owns two response SUVs (a 2010 Ford Expedition and a 2020 Ford Explorer). Their call signs are FitchRona Car 15 and 17, respectively. They are stocked to an AEMT level, with a few additional medications like diphenhydramine and ondansetron. Their use is multipurpose. The chiefs use them as work vehicles for meetings and training, but also provide a first response unit when they are in the area of a call or may arrive sooner to an address when a “home” station unit is out.



In 2020, Fitch-Rona re-purposed a retired mass-casualty trailer donated by Dane County Emergency Management. The trailer was wrapped with a Fitch-Rona logo and the rehab supplies which were originally kept at each station, are now stored in one place. The trailer is primarily kept at the Verona Fire station and includes water, nutrition, a shelter, cooling chairs, a misting fan, and an ‘M’ oxygen tank and delivery manifold. The unit can be pulled by either SUV, and can be taken throughout the County when requested, and a driver is available.

Fitch-Rona has a bike medic program which was initially funded through a grant from Epic software. It purchased two mountain cycles and attached panniers. These bikes are used at special events and around the Epic campus during their annual user’s group meeting which brings in about 10,000 learners from around the world every fall. The program has expanded to include larger



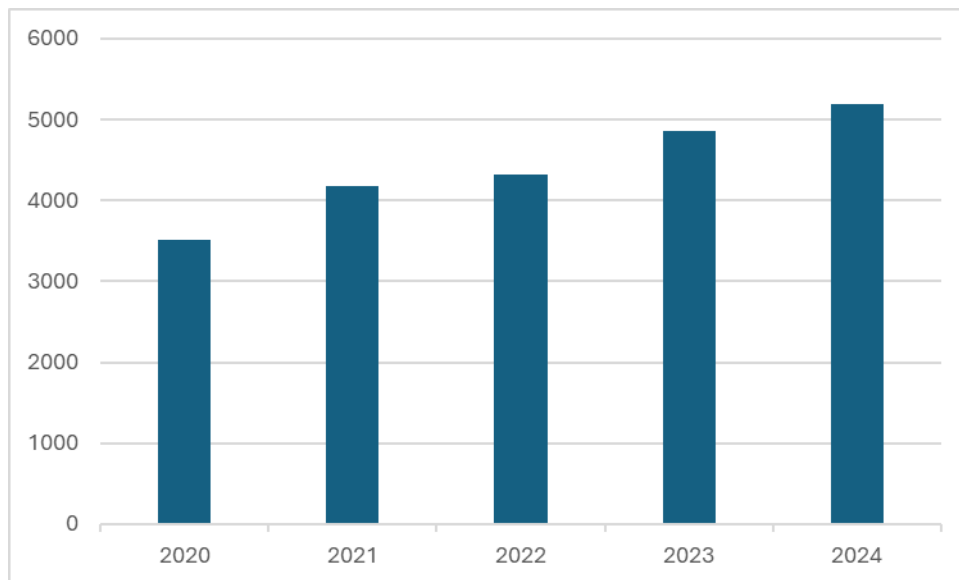
and smaller frame bicycles to allow for the safety and comfort of more riders.

Lastly, in 2022, Fitch-Rona purchased an electric Polaris Utility Vehicle (UTV). The funding through the State Flex Grant program purchased an eco-friendly UTV along with an insert that allows for a Stokes basket and provider seat in the rear of the UTV that can be used for crowded, or limited access events such as the high school cross-county invitational or the Thanksgiving Day Birdie Derby, which brings in 5,000 runners into the district and continues to grow each year.



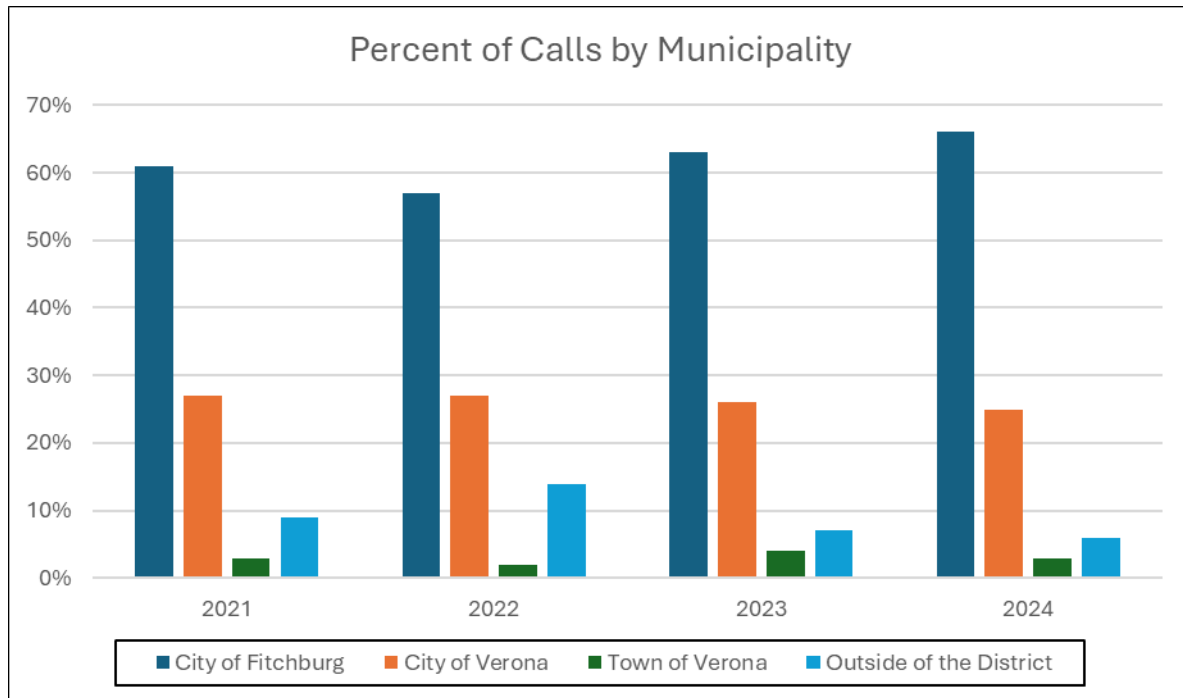
Annual Call Volume

The very nature of emergencies means that estimating the number of calls for service is unpredictable. In 2024, Fitch-Rona was alerted to 5,184 calls for service. This is a 7.0 % increase over 2023 and significantly more than our 47-year average of a 4.8% increase annually.



Distribution of Calls

2024 had an average distribution of Fitchburg 65%; Verona 24%; Town of Verona 3%; Outside of the district 7%.



Calls Outside of Our District

As an Advanced Life Support (ALS) service, Fitch-Rona is offering patients the highest level of pre-hospital care available. Smaller communities often do not have the call volume to support paramedic-level care and must ask for assistance when ALS service is indicated. This response is called an Intercept. We also respond as Automatic Aid (automatically sent to support services on high acuity calls based on questions asked by the 911 center) to nearby areas that take us out of the district. Finally, Fitch-Rona participates in a borderless ALS system with a group of other ALS providers in Dane County (the Cities of Madison, Middleton, Deer-Grove, Waunakee, and Sun Prairie). This means that in a high acuity call, the closest Advanced Life Support ambulance will be sent, regardless of the community the resident lives in.

Out-of-district call volume represents 7-10% of total calls each month.

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Belleville	35	44	56	45
Madison	69	49	58	74
Mount Horeb	77	70	69	83
Other	159	167	123	70

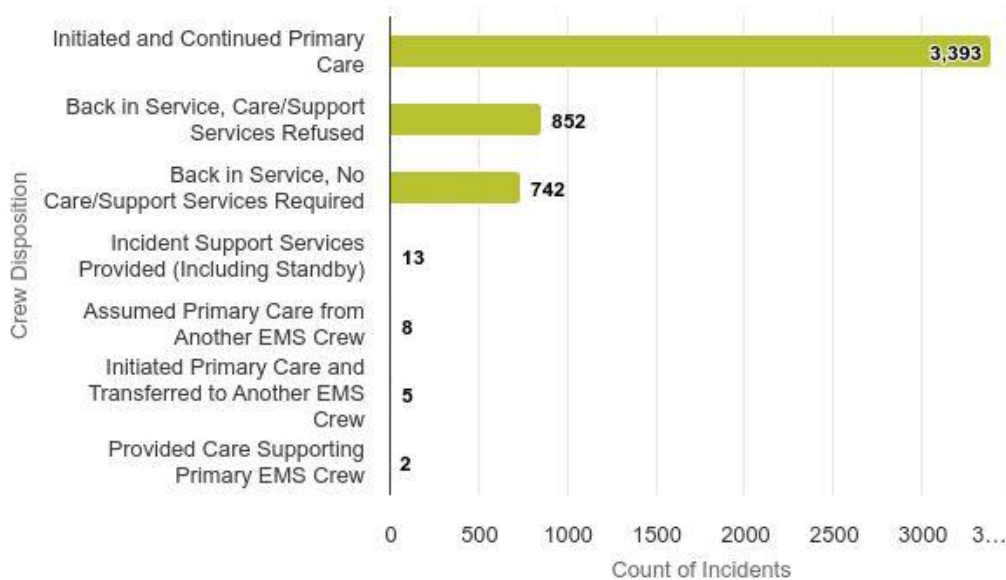
Top Fifteen Dispatch Codes 2024

Incident Complaint Reported By Dispatch	Number of Runs	Percent of Total Runs
Sick Person	927	17.88%

Falls	880	16.97%
Breathing Problem	380	7.33%
Unknown Problem/Person Down	366	7.06%
Chest Pain	355	6.85%
Unconscious/Fainting	326	6.29%
Traffic Incident	247	4.76%
Hemorrhage/Laceration	166	3.20%
Convulsion/Seizure	160	3.09%
Abdominal Pain	147	2.84%
Fire Incident	131	2.53%
Stroke	121	2.33%
Heart Problems	119	2.30%
Traumatic Injury	101	1.95%
Cardiac Arrest	99	1.91%

Incidents by Crew Disposition

Jan 01, 2024 to Dec 31, 2024

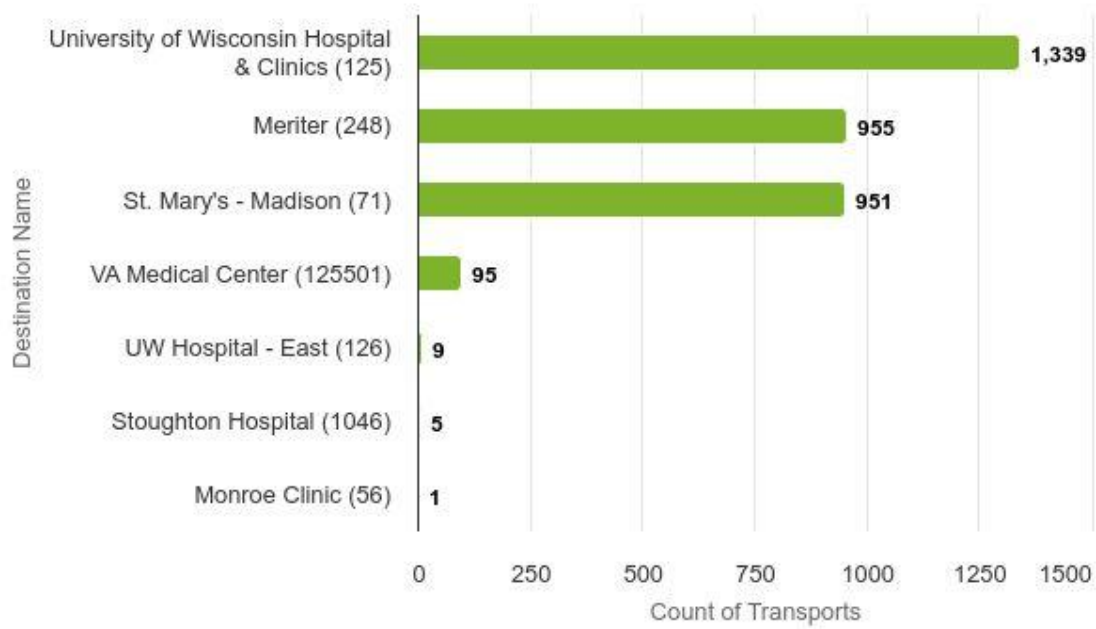


Receiving Hospitals

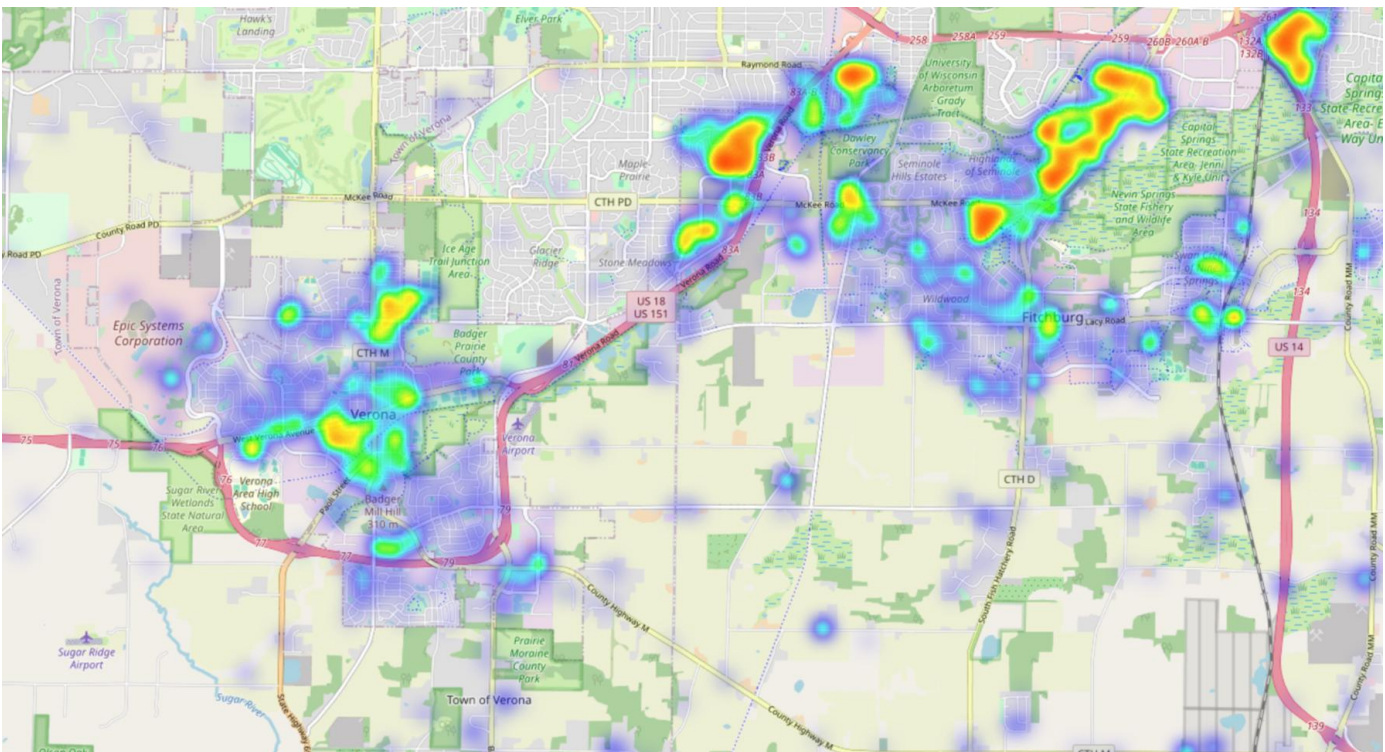
The selection of hospital destinations is determined by several factors including acuity, type of call, patient choice (insurance-based), and specific emergency room situations.

Transports by Destination (Top 40)

Jan 01, 2024 to Dec 31, 2024

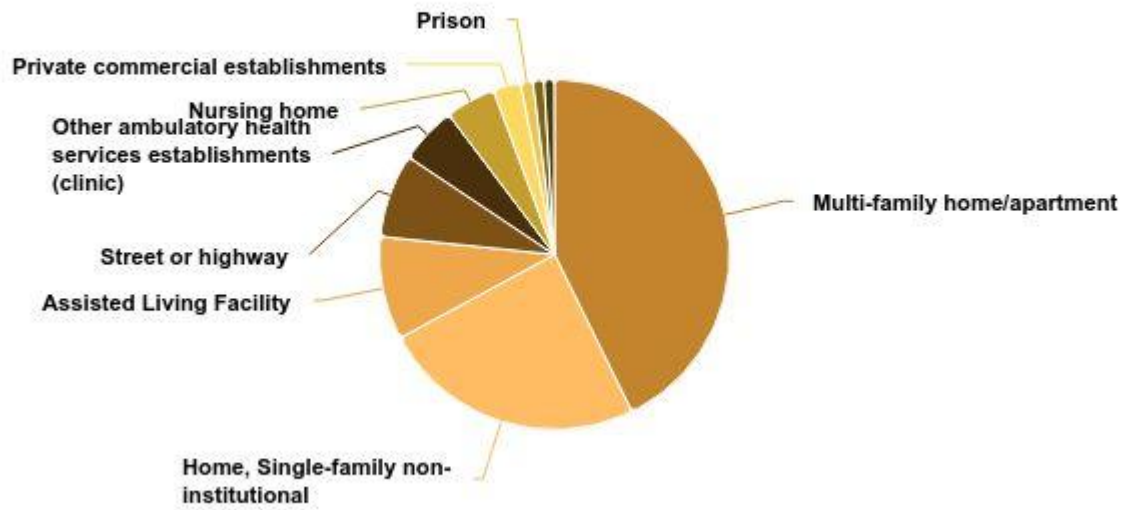


Heat Map for Calls for Service in 2024



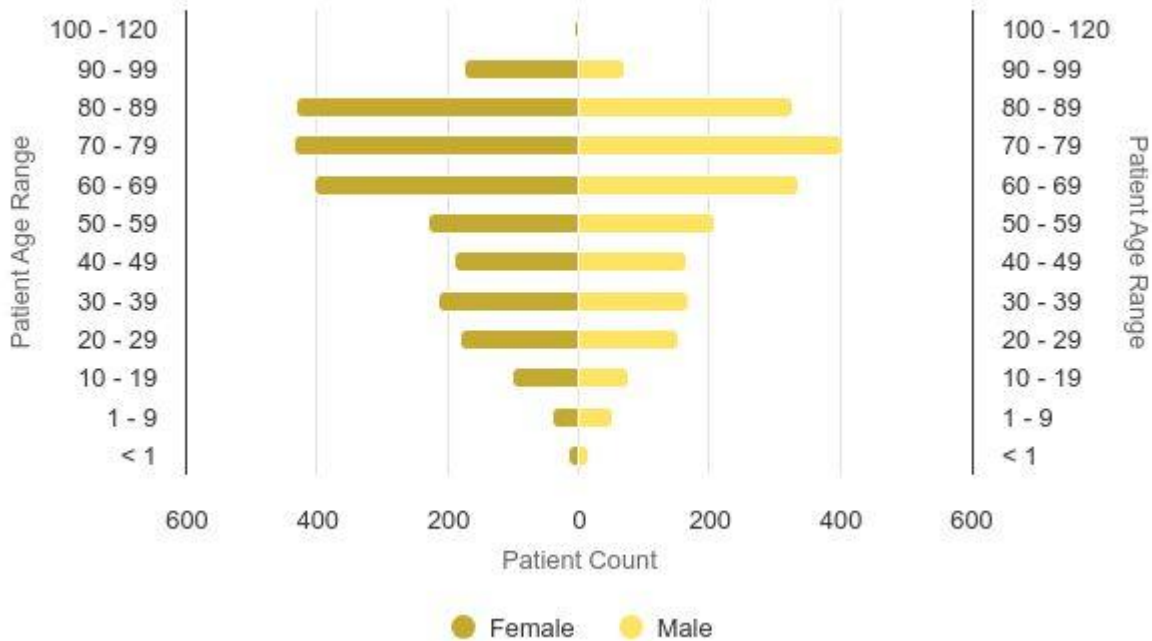
Incidents by Location Type (Top 10)

Jan 01, 2024 to Dec 31, 2024



Patient Gender And Age Range

Jan 01, 2024 to Dec 31, 2024



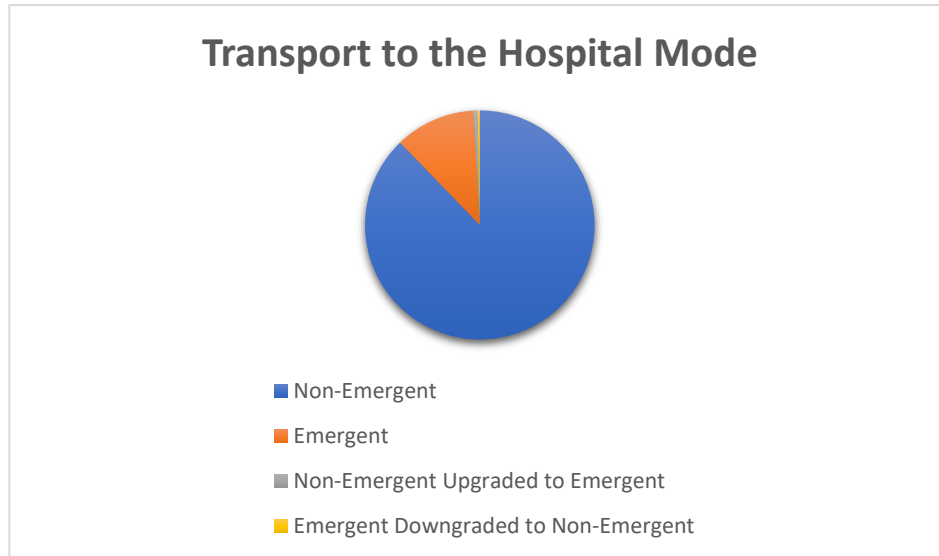
Call Time Median

Total call time medians are dictated by many factors. Many of those are outside of our immediate control such as station location, traffic, weather, vehicle extrication, and level of call dispatched. Scene time is considered one of the most important factors in patient care. Our median scene time of 14 minutes 16 seconds (27/60) is just under our benchmark goal of 15 minutes. Of special note is the median time it takes us to get back into service for another call which is less than an hour. We pay particular attention to the total “in service” time for each of our ambulances. This is one of the methods we use to determine capacity issues in the district.

2024 Median Run Times (in minutes)	
Enroute	00:01:47
To Scene	00:04:78
At Scene	00:14.71
To Destination	00:15:30
Back in Service	00:12:00
Total	00:48.26

Transport Mode from the Scene

Included with our response time analysis is a discussion of transport modes from the scene to the hospital. If our crew determines that a patient can be transported non-emergently – proven to be the safest mode of transportation - they opt to do so.

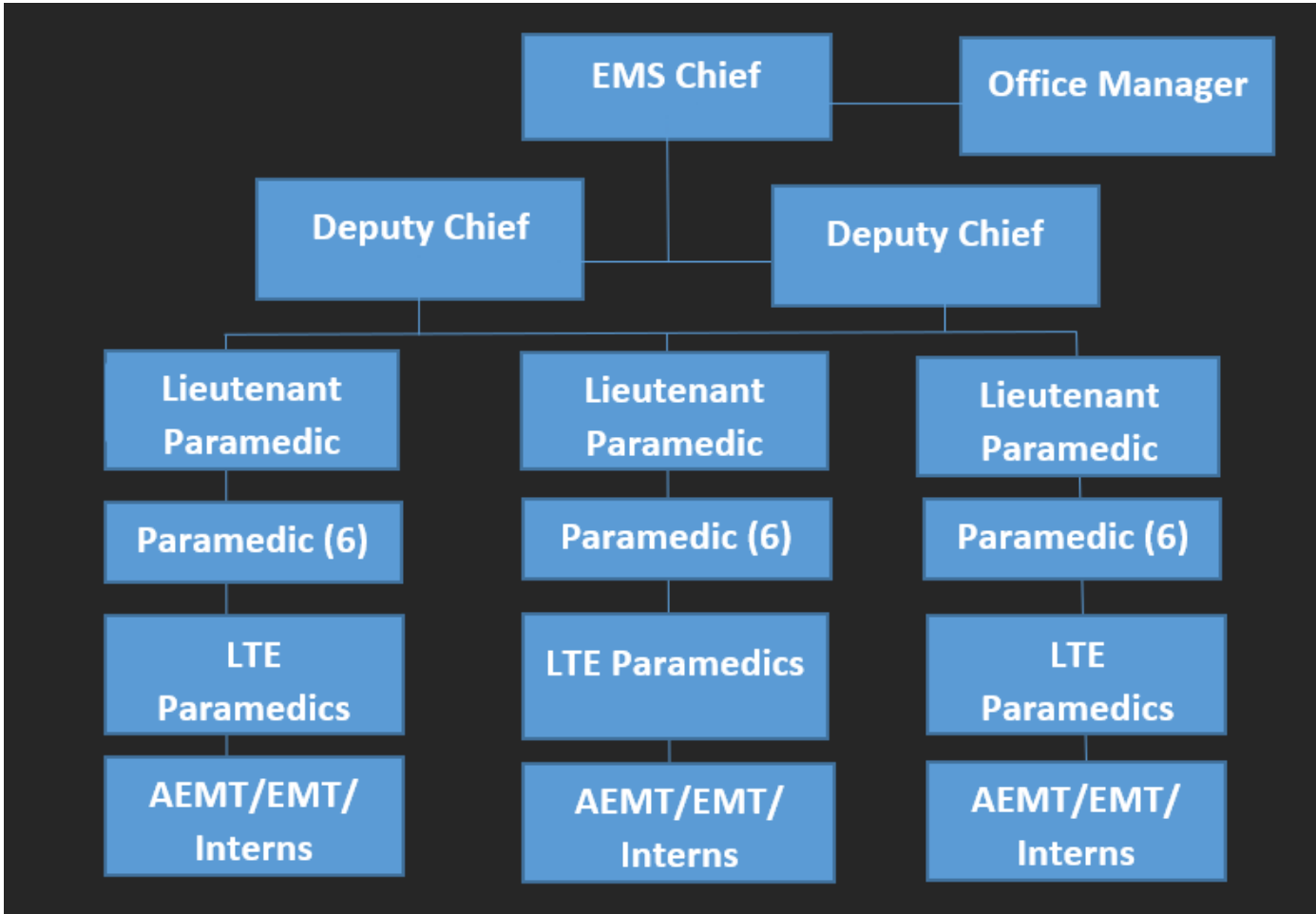


A 2019 study in the Annals of Emergency Medicine concluded that the risk an ambulance crash is 2 ½ times greater when transporting a patient using lights and sirens¹. Ongoing studies continue to look at patient outcomes with the increased risk of the of lights and sirens, and largely suggest that transport times have minimal effect on outcomes².

¹ Watanabe BL, Patterson GS, Kempema JM, Magallanes O, Brown LH. Is Use of Warning Lights and Sirens Associated With Increased Risk of Ambulance Crashes? A Contemporary Analysis Using National EMS Information System (NEMSIS) Data. Ann Emerg Med. 2019 Jul;74(1):101-109. doi: 10.1016/j.annemergmed.2018.09.032. Epub 2019 Jan 12. PMID: 30648537.

² Murray B, Kue R. The Use of Emergency Lights and Sirens by Ambulances and Their Effect on Patient Outcomes and Public Safety: A Comprehensive Review of the Literature. Prehosp Disaster Med. 2017 Apr;32(2):209-216. doi: 10.1017/S1049023X16001503. Epub 2017 Jan 30. Erratum in: Prehosp Disaster Med. 2019 Jun;34(3):345. PMID: 28134063.

ADMINISTRATION



EMS Commission

Our EMS Commission is made up of members of our District municipal Councils and Board, as well as citizen representatives.

There are 3-representatives from each community we serve. As of December 2022, these representatives are:

City of Fitchburg: Jim Wheeler (Council Member), Connie Hilla, and James Roberts

City of Verona: Patrick Lytle (Council Member), Derek Johnson, and Brent Kyzer-McHenry

Town of Verona: David Lonsdorf (Town Board Member), Deb Paul (Town Board Member), and Sue Luginbuhl

The duties of the Commission include approving policies, fee schedules, and expenditures for the operational management of the EMS District. They are responsible for hiring the Chief of EMS and ensuring that he, or she, conducts day-to-day operations in the best interest of the municipalities.

Chief and Deputy Chiefs

The EMS Chief and Deputy Chiefs are the three full-time administrators of the district. They are licensed paramedics and must maintain their medical skills, in addition to education, training, and practice in advanced operational management. Their positions are primarily weekday hours, however, to manage overall operational capability twenty-four hours a day, each Chief is tasked with the on-call position of Officer-in-Charge (OIC) on a rotating basis. It is an on-call position, and no additional compensation is paid for this duty.

Paramedic-Lieutenants

In 2017, Fitch-Rona created the position of a paramedic Lieutenant. These staff members still work a regular rotation on the ambulance but are assigned additional duties. They are assigned as the point person for each station during their rotation and assist the administrative staff in ordering medical supplies, basic vehicle maintenance, and overall staff communication. In addition to station-specific duties, they also assist in the Quality Assurance process, intern coordination, billing review, new hire orientation, and training.

Paramedics

In order to staff three ambulances 24/7, a staff of 21 full-time paramedics is required. The average number of years of service for our current staff is just over ten years. These dedicated staff are supported by a pool of 15-18 Limited Term Employees (LTE) who cover the shifts that are opened due to vacation and paid time off requests.

Fitch-Rona paramedics work a 24-hour shift, followed by 48 hours off duty. This schedule results in a dedicated Kelly shift crew that works every Sunday and Wednesday.

Medical Direction and Education

Fitch-Rona contracts with the University of Wisconsin Hospital ALS Consortium that provides medical direction and continuing education to participating Dane County EMS agencies (City of Madison Fire Department, City of Middleton EMS, City of Sun Prairie Fire and EMS, and the Villages of Waunakee, Belleville, Brooklyn, and Mount Horeb). Dr. Mike Mancera is assigned to Fitch-Rona for specific operational issues, but the benefit the consortium gives Fitch-Rona is access to a myriad of other emergency physicians as challenging cases arise.

The UW Emergency Education Center (UWEEC) provides much of the continuing education for our paramedics. These sessions cover the required emergency care topic areas required by the State of Wisconsin Department of Health and are presented by Emergency Physicians, Fellows, and Residents. The Consortium utilizes web conferencing so monthly trainings are viewable regardless of where the speaker is presenting. This training is uploaded into a Learning Management System (Varikko) allowing the Medics to view the training while on duty, reducing training costs of off-duty training.

In addition, Dr. Mancera works with our QA workgroup to tailor service-specific training and run reviews on the third Tuesday of each month. This review/training is also streamed to allow for each station to participate, and for staff that may have challenges physically attending the training to benefit from the education.

Firefighter /Paramedic Intern

Fitch-Rona EMS sponsors a Paramedic Intern Program in conjunction with the Fitchburg and Verona Fire Departments. We have jointly developed a program that supports interns in their third year of training. The process is competitive, and interns accepted into the program are assigned to a paramedic mentor. The intern is assigned to work the same shift hours that the paramedics keep (24 hours on/48 hours off) for the few months preceding, and while attending paramedic school. The success of the program is evident as many of our recent interns have accepted full-time paramedic jobs in departments throughout the United States.

Madison College EMS Diversity Project

In 2021, Fitch-Rona EMS, Sun Prairie EMS, and Madison College began discussions to increase diversity in the field of EMS. According to a journal article published in 2020, the field of EMS remains largely undiversified concerning gender and race³. The College has conducted a NexGen Fire and EMS Academy for students in high school who are largely in under-represented populations. Students from that course with an interest in EMS and show potential for achievement are recommended to FitchRona.

Students are provided an internship with an EMS service while attending EMS courses and receiving academic and social support from both the College and the service. Sun Prairie EMS accepted the first candidate in the fall of 2021 and Fitch-Rona interviewed and accepted our first paid intern the following year. The intern works 72 to 96 hours per month supplementing the EMS crew, as well as supporting special events. We graduated our first intern in 2024 with her Paramedic Technician associate’s degree and have additional interns in the first and second years of the program currently.

Community Outreach Programs

The staff at Fitch-Rona actively teach Community CPR programs at the City of Fitchburg Library, City of Verona Library, Verona Town Hall, and various other locations. Counting these courses, as well as numerous contract CPR courses with businesses and organizations, there are over 80 new citizen lifesavers in the public now trained in compression only-CPR in the last three years. Our paramedics started teaching Stop-the-Bleed programs in these venues in 2019, as well as a partnership with the Verona School District. Stop-the-Bleed teaches bystanders the basic skills of bleeding control in environments where EMS may be delayed due to location, or scenes of active violence.

FINANCES

Funding Sources

EMS services are unique in the public service sector with our ability to offset a portion of our operational funding requirements by billing for services provided. We anticipated for 2024 that EMS revenue would cover 48% of our operating expenses. The remaining operational budget needs are divided between the municipalities based on Equalized Valuation. These numbers demonstrate the extreme financial value of the district model in cost and resource sharing.

Funding Source	2024 Annual Cost	Percentage
Fitch-Rona Run Income	\$1,699,600	46%
Fitchburg	\$1,160,960	31%
City of Verona	\$807,610	22%
Town of Verona	\$98,444	3%
Other Income	\$42,200	<1%
Total Budget	\$3,667,236	100%

³ Remle P. Crowe, William Krebs, Rebecca E. Cash, Madison K. Rivard, Erin W. Lincoln & Ashish R. Panchal (2020) Females and Minority Racial/Ethnic Groups Remain Underrepresented in Emergency Medical Services: A Ten-Year Assessment, 2008–2017, Prehospital Emergency Care, 24:2, 180-187, DOI: [10.1080/10903127.2019.1634167](https://doi.org/10.1080/10903127.2019.1634167)

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Capital Improvement Projects

As part of the fleet management of Fitch-Rona, the 2024 CIP included funding toward the fleet replacement fund of the ambulance and response car fleet. As explained later in the report, we purchase an ambulance every two years in the district. This new ambulance replaces an ambulance, and much of the equipment in it when it is ten years old.

Service Fees

The fee structure used for EMS service is divided into two parts: Base Rates and Mileage Fees. In 2023, we discontinued itemizing supply charges since many insurance companies, including Medicare, were no longer accepting itemized invoices. Subsequently, the overall cost to our Base Rates was increased to absorb the cost of medical supplies.

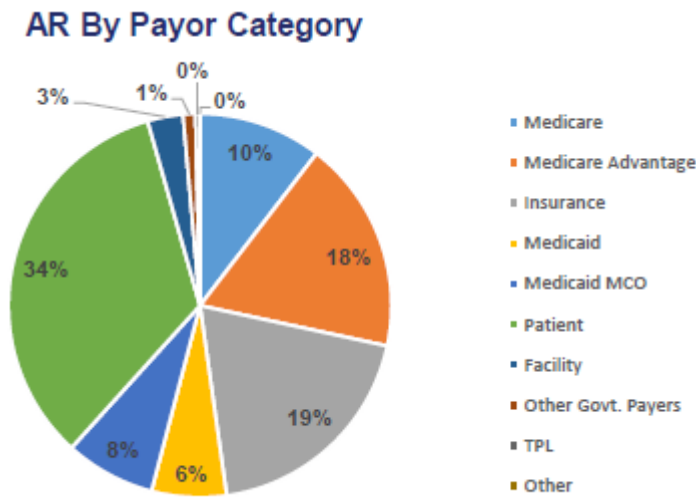
	2022	2023	2024
ALS Resident Base Rate	\$1,300	\$1,300	\$1,462.79
ALS Non-Resident Base Rate	\$1,400	\$1,400	\$1,565.79
No-Transport	\$150-\$400*	\$150-\$450*	\$150-\$450*
Mileage	\$22/mile	\$22/mile	\$22.66/mile
Stand-By	\$130/hr	\$130/hr	\$136/hr

** Fitch-Rona uses a tiered billing scheme for no-transport.*

Resident/Non-Resident Transports

Fitch-Rona tracks and bills residents differently than non-residents using our service, understanding that resident tax dollars are already used to some extent to support EMS. Below is a breakdown of this demographic:

	% of CALLS
RESIDENT	82%
NON-RESIDENT	18%



Service Fee vs. Actual Payment

Service fees charged do not accurately represent potential income. Both Medicaid and Medicare limit payments to a fraction of the fee charged and do not cover our actual cost of service. Additionally, some of our calls result in no charges such as canceled calls, false alarms, and calls where no assessment is necessary.

Annual Charges vs. Receivables

This chart represents charges sent out vs. revenue received. As noted earlier, there are significant adjustments that are made due to Medicare and Medicaid. Additionally, we receive requests for payment forgiveness due to financial hardship. These invoices are reviewed and reduced, or written off, per a standing policy. When dealing with insurance companies, there is a delay in payment due to submittal time and review processes which is reflected in our monthly aging reports.

2024 BILLED	2022 REVENUE	Collection Rate
\$4,681,014	\$2,891,677	43.2%

Accounting Policies

The district undergoes an external audit or financial review on an annual basis. The Certified Public Accounting firm of Johnson Block will again be retained to complete an audit of the 2024 financial records. Each member of the Fitch-Rona EMS Commission and each municipality will be presented with a copy of the independent accountant’s review report once it is completed in early 2025.

Accounts Receivable

The patient care accounts receivable function within the district is outsourced to EMS Management & Consulting (EMS MC). The billing process involved with the various government programs that are responsible for a large number of the district's invoices requires the capabilities of the third-party billing service to attain maximum efficiency. Receivables are in line with EMS standards and are reviewed monthly by the EMS Commission. In the Spring of 2023, the State legislature approved a budget to increase reimbursement rates for EMS charges for those patients who qualify for Medical Assistance. The Wisconsin Medicaid Supplemental Payment Program is currently working with agencies to gather response and payer data that will result in increased payment for services, retrospectively.

Cash Flow

The district has a positive working relationship with Oak Bank in Fitchburg to use a combination of bank accounts and CDs to manage available cash to maximize potential interest earnings. An internal cash flow report is completed and reviewed by the Commission monthly to provide oversight and assist in the management of this process.

Designated Funds

We have reserved funds set aside for future financial obligations. Except for the Post-Retirement Health Insurance Fund, all interest accrued from these accounts becomes part of the general Operating budget. In 2019, Fitch-Rona joined the Wisconsin Investment Series Cooperative (WISC). The funds for the Post-Retirement Healthcare were moved into an investment account to allow for greater FDIC protection of funds and a larger return on the investment of funds that are infrequently utilized.

Designated Fund	12/31/2024 Balance
Post-Retirement Health Insurance	\$ 267,737.27
Labor Contract Legal Fees	\$ 24,000.00
Funding Assistance Program (State Assistance)	\$ 9,367.13
EPIC Grant	\$580.00

Healthcare Retirement Account (HRA)

As part of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, employees are eligible for a payout of unused sick time funds into a Health Retirement Account upon retirement, to a maximum of 1296 hours. We annually perform an analysis of funding needs to estimate the amount needed to ensure sufficient dollars are set aside to provide health insurance to our current and future retirees.

Legal Fees for Labor Contracts

This fund is set up to manage attorney costs incurred during the negotiation process. This fund is used to cover the legal fees directly related to negotiations of our Labor Contracts. 2022 saw the negotiation of a new Collective Bargaining Agreement starting in 2023 through 2025. The annual operational budget includes funds to start to replenish that account at a smaller amount each year, to avoid the spikes generated during contract years.

Ambulance Replacement

As explained earlier, Fitch-Rona has a fleet of five ambulances. Three of those ambulances are used as primary response vehicles. The other two are utilized for additional staffing during special events and to rotate into service during scheduled maintenance and unexpected repairs. We purchase an ambulance every two years. On this rotation, an ambulance spends six years as a front-line ambulance and four years as a reserve ambulance. At the end of ten years, the ambulance is sold, and the funds are placed in a designated fund to offset the purchase price of the next ambulance.

2023 should have seen the purchase of the next replacement ambulance. Supply chain issues still persist from the pandemic and ordering times for ambulances across major manufacturers are 36-48 months. We were able to work with our current manufacturer and in 2022, orders were entered into the queue but still have estimated delivery dates in the Spring of 2025. The 2024 CIP included funding to purchase two ambulances in 2025 (the one that should have been purchased in 2023, and the one that will be purchased in 2025).

Un-Assigned Contingency Funds

Per the current intergovernmental agreement (IGA) the district operates under requires a Contingency Fund balance of 15-25% of our total operating budget by year's end. The purpose of the fund is to ensure short-term financial stability for the department in the unlikely event of an interruption or downturn in our revenue stream. In years where revenue exceeds expenses, we add to the contingency funds. Our goal is to contribute to this account balance during years with increased run volumes rather than budget for these funds. Our unassigned fund balance per the 2023 audit was \$958,648, or 24% of the 2024 operating budget.

In a collaborative effort to continue to increase contingency funds and take advantage of a state law that allowed tax levy exemptions for EMS Districts under certain conditions, the 2024 budget included a \$41,000 line item to dedicate operational funds toward the district reserve. The short-term levy limit relief will be continued in the long term as the fund is replenished and the funds can be utilized to offset future funding of staff with a lower budget increase.

VISION

Fitch-Rona presented its first formal 5-year plan in 2001. Since then, the plan has been reviewed and presented as a strategic plan at the Annual District meeting of the City Councils and Town Board in October. The plan looks at attainable near-term issues, as well as the far-reaching long-term needs of the district.

Near Term

Before the addition of the third full-time ambulance staffed at Fitchburg Fire Station #3, the district was reliant on our neighbors to respond to our municipalities for our residents when both of our ambulances were assigned to other calls about 8-10 times per month. In 2022, that assistance was only required 14 times over the year. However, that number has gone up three-fold in the last two years. To keep up with the growing senior housing market in our communities, this number will continue to rise, and Fitch-Rona will need to respond likewise.



To pave the way for anticipated growth, and to work collaboratively with our municipal partners with staffing needs in all departments, Fitch-Rona was approved for a second full-time Deputy Chief in 2024. A successful hiring process at the end of the year will see that position filled in early 2025. The Chiefs are assisted by an outstanding part-time office manager and 3-shift lieutenants. These three Chief-level positions manage training requirements, community assistance and education, and strengthen the continuity of operations base for the future of the district.

With the support structure in place at the top, the district is primed to add ambulance and staffing to manage the growing volume of calls in the near future. Based on a 3-5% historical growth, the calls for EMS will approach 5,500 calls by 2027. An additional fourth ambulance staffed during “peak hours” would require the hiring of four full-time employees or a combination of full and part-time equivalents. Over the following three to five years, this may need to transition to a 24-hour ambulance, with additional full-time paramedics added to the staff, but remains fluid, based on district needs.



Additional near-term goals include increasing our public outreach. The American Heart Association reports that 40% of cardiac arrests occur in public settings. Survival rates from those cardiac arrests increase to nearly 45% when bystander CPR is administered. When public safety allows, providing more training for simple compression-only CPR at area stores and events is a priority for Fitch-Rona. In addition, we have been working with the local businesses, places of worship, and libraries in our District to train bystanders in Stop-the-Bleed programs. These simple skills can assist in saving the lives of people who are victims of active violence events where EMS resources are unable to be accessed due to unsafe scenes.

Long Term

A review of forty-eight years of ambulance runs has shown an average annual increase in calls for service of 4.6%. Continued building projects and growth projections in the municipalities estimate around 6,000 calls for service in 2029. As the service progresses to four, and five, full-time ambulances over the next ten years, this will result in an on-duty crew of 10 people and a full-time staff of 35 paramedics. Most likely, a greater administrative presence will be needed in the district to manage the 24/7 operations that will occur and a significant pool of part-time employees will be needed to cover the time earned off for career staff.

As we look into the future population growth in the district, we also continue to look at response times. It would be difficult to predict with any certainty where the population of the two cities will be residing in 10-15 years, but as a long-term plan, we continue to watch the areas our services are being utilized and need to keep in our vision the potential for new station placements.

Outside of our own district, the state of volunteer EMS services is in crisis. Across the state, and including our own County, service mergers and regionalization is occurring. We continue to work and cooperate with other services in the County to find the best systems for the greatest patient outcomes at a reasonable cost to the taxpayers. This may include alternative responses such as mental health teams or community paramedics to triage calls that may not necessarily require an ambulance.

Finally, increasing the size of the service also comes with a cost. Though the weight of the budget will always come from user fees and municipal support, options for expanded service to neighboring municipalities, and providing inter-facility transportation are potential revenue options that will continue to be investigated.

