Crossett city council met in special session April 30, 2018 at 4:00 p.m. at the City of Crossett Annex Building.

Present: Mayor McCormick

Council Members: Martin, Knight, Rowe, Marshall, Foster and Rodgers

Absent: Clerk/Treasurer Walthall, City Attorney Hamilton

Mayor McCormick announced the purpose of this meeting is to discuss the City of Crossett Ambulance Service providing coverage for the entire county. He added that Fire Chief Bo Higginbotham had presented packets for each council member to consider.

Mayor McCormick turned the meeting over to Chief Higginbotham for discussion.

Chief Higginbotham stated that he feels that the county service can be run with supplement of around $266,000 - $315,000 annually. He added that the employees will be on 24-hour shifts working a rotation of 2 days on – 2 days off – 3 days on 3 days off. Two fully equipped ambulances and one bare necessities truck will be needed. Chief Higginbotham said that Hamburg Mayor Dane Weindorf has agreed to house the ambulance service and take care of all expenses associated with housing.

Chief Higginbotham reminded the council that the funding for the current county service will be cut out in June. If the city agrees to pursue a county sales tax for operations and take over the county service, there will be at least 6 months of funding without an extra revenue source. Billing collections will be the only money generated for that time period. He also estimated capital expense to purchase the necessary equipment will be around $500,000. It is unknown who will be responsible for the capital expense.

Councilman Rowe stated that if the city agrees to do this, an ambulance commission with concerned parties from all over the county should be appointed to oversee the operation. This commission should answer to the city council.

Concern was expressed about a county sales tax. Most council members feel that it is unfair to charge city of Crossett residents for a service they are already provided. They pay property taxes at a higher rate than county residents and also pay additional fees within the city. Councilwoman Rodgers stated that if the city decides not to do this, we will be putting the ambulance service out of business. She also agreed that an alternative revenue source should be looked into.

Councilman Knight asked if the city of Hamburg has ever considered passing a local tax and providing an ambulance service. The idea has been mentioned, but never pursued. Chief Higginbotham stated he will discuss this more with Mayor Weindorf.

Councilwoman Rodgers stated that Mrs. Connie Timmons, a member of the Ashley County Quorum Court, has mentioned adding a fee to county residence garbage bill. There are around 5,800 county residence who receive a garbage bill. If a fee of $10/month is assessed, this could generate $58,000/month or around $696,000/year. This would adequately fund the shortages and provide enough of a supplement to cover the projected cost.

Councilwoman Rodgers added that if the city does this, it could also establish better relations with the county and possibly enhance the ability to work together for the good of the entire county.

Chief Higginbotham added that in order to pay a fair price for employees to run county service, a raise will have to be given to the current department employees. They are not only running an ambulance service, but are also providing rescue service and fire protection. Mayor McCormick stated that if you give raises to fire department, you will need to give raises to every department. Councilwoman Marshall asked if there could be a more creative way of compensation for the current employees. She asked if instead of one bonus at the end of the year, a bonus be given during the middle of the year as well. Chief Higginbotham stated that he doesn’t feel like this would make up for an hourly increase for his department. This is something that will have to be considered later.

All council members feel that a sales tax will not be in the best interest of the city of Crossett, but agree to pursue this endeavor if a less risky and quicker source of funding can be found.

Motion by Councilwoman Martin, seconded by Councilman Knight to pursue operating ambulance service for Ashley County upon the implementation of a $10/monthly fee attached to county garbage bills for residents outside the city limits of Crossett, and also contingent on a contractual agreement between the city of Crossett and the Ashley County Quorum Court. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.

Jesse Walthall, Clerk/Treasurer Marshall S. McCormick/Mayor