

11/10/22 - Citizen Workshop Recap

Location: Carefree Town Council Chambers

Facilitator: Matt Lehrman

Facilitator: John Little

Attendees: 32

AGENDA:

- Welcome (this is the first of 5 workshops)
- Why is this important now?
- What are the options & costs/benefits?
- How would we pay for transition to a new service model
- When/where/how will this be decided?

PANELISTS:

- Gary Neiss, Carefree Town Administrator
- Peter Burns, resident & public finance expert, P&Z commissioner
- Chief John Kratz, Fire Chief, Retired
- Luis Cordova- Rounds consulting group has done fiscal analysis

Matt opened the meeting by introducing himself and John Little as the facilitators and “tour guides” for the evening. He also provided a brief recap of the process along the way. He asked how many folks watched the video prior to tonight (large show of hands had watched the video). Matt explained how to watch the video if you missed it. After introductions of the panel members, Matt emphasized that this is a conversation – no decisions have been made – he asked the group to think about what concerns and what ideas they had so we can discuss them as a group and hear different perspectives.

Gary Neiss thanked everyone for taking the time to attend tonight’s meeting. He then explained why we are here discussing this topic today. (Providing the background of events leading up to today). Gary also provided an overview of Mutual Aid vs. Automatic Aid.

Chief Kratz reviewed and explained the unique nuances around the four options available to the Town of Carefree.

Matt asked what kind of coverage you expect in the Carefree community?

Matt clarified that we do have fire service today, but we do not have the automatic support of all the other fire departments.

Chief Kratz stated that currently, mutual aid gives discretion to departments as to whether they will respond. They can leave at any time. This also leaves Rural Metro firefighters to battle the fire on their own, increasing fatigue and injuries.

Luis Cordova provided a high-level overview of the Economic Analysis and considerations (expecting recession in 2023). Matt also mentioned the entire analysis is available to watch on the video series. Luis emphasized that continuing the status quo, the Town will be \$8M in debt by 2030. Gary also explained the 110 miles of streets that require a lot of capital to fund. If the Town uses the savings to fund fire service, it takes away funding to repair streets. (fire trucks need streets!) Other considerations: if the Town loses a large business that generates sales tax, it could adversely affect the funding of fire services) If the Town sticks with Rural Metro, the existing model should cover us.

Peter Burns helped explain the Midpoint Forecast Summary comparisons. He then explained the approval process of establishing a property tax in Carefree.

Gary closed the meeting by recapping the risks and the decision before us impacts us today and in the future. We hope you communicate with your neighbors what was discussed tonight.

Matt thanked everyone for investing their time and contributing to a big tough process.

CITIZEN QUESTIONS:

- What is Matt's background? And what is John's background? (They each provided their experience/background)
- What happens to our cell phone numbers if we participate in the text poll surveys?
- Are there any insurance ramifications to the Town with the current Rural Metro contract?
- Are the additional staff salaries factored in for the local/municipal fire department option? (Yes – Gary explained the Town has a staff of 17; an additional 17 staff are needed to staff our fire house)
- Is this conversation about EMT services as well as Fire Services? (yes) Chief Kratz also explained the dispatch process for EMT vs Firefighters. Firefighters can respond to medical emergencies faster than an ambulance. Peter explained that approximately 70% of calls are for medical emergencies.
- How many times would we have used Automatic Aid since 2007? (Only 9 calls for Mutual Aid over a 10-year period).
- Is there a perception that Rural Metro isn't big enough to support Automatic Aid? (no)
- How big are Daisy Mountain (6 stations) and Scottsdale (17 stations)?
- What resources are available to help me today if I need emergency response?
- Is there any statistic that demonstrates we don't have proper coverage?
- What were the calls for mutual aid? Were they attended to appropriately?
- How do we look at this for the future – 25 years from now?
- A citizen mentioned he read the PSAC report when it was published in January and mentioned everyone can/should view it online. Can we privatize snake removal to free up fire service response?
- Are we getting an opinion from the panel on which option is best? (No, not today)
- How many times have we been denied service for mutual aid?
- Citizen has preference for Auto Aid for fast response time
- What is the capacity issue that the Town faces?
- What decisions are we making today that will affect us 10 years from now?
- If we had Automatic Aid during the 'wedding cake' fire, would that have improved the response?
- If we move to Automatic Aid, will they have a better relationship with our Town? (The issue is with Rural Metro as a private company)
- Why is Daisy Mountain so much cheaper than Scottsdale? (Scottsdale has stated they don't want to extend service, but if directed to do so, they will)
- Clarification on Scenario 3. Why didn't we see forecasting for Scottsdale and Daisy Mtn?
- Did you consider the addition of the new hotel in tax \$ generation?

- What happens in year 25 with Scenario 3?
- If we delay the decision on this, would it be more difficult to obtain Automatic Aid in the future given current politics?
- What are the consequences of waiting? (Gary explained it's 'risk'.)
- What happens if we stay with Rural Metro, and they cancel our contract? (Gary explained that our current contract expires in 2024. There is a potential for Rural Metro to cancel contracts within the designated notification period.)
- If we stay with Rural Metro, are we on our own? Where will we get Mutual Aid come from? (Chief Kratz explained the closest Rural Metro back up is 25-30 minutes away, other stations are even further. If there is a life-safety situation, other stations will respond, but at their discretion.)
- When will we make this decision?
- What happens if this item goes to vote and doesn't pass? What happens next? (Gary explained the council can choose to take other considerations, however, The Town would not have the funds to remain solvency with the budget)
- Citizen admitted Carefree has incredibly low and said that Automatic Aid would be a worthy investment at a reasonable price.
- Citizen explained perception of new taxes wasn't her first choice, but after hearing the information, she agrees that this is a reasonable tax for a much-needed service.
- Is the money that comes from the tax dedicated to the Fire Service function?
- If we add \$1.5M via property tax, would we be covering our yearly expenses without problem? Are we still looking at a \$400K gap?
- If tax is approved, the first half of taxes would be levied in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024.
- When will the council vote to put on the ballot? (December)
- The election will be scheduled for 3rd Tuesday in May
- Citizen asked the Town to reduce costs to fire service (stated statistics of false alarms, snake removal, etc.) This person likes Rural Metro service as is and wants individuals to pay a bill for false alarms to help offset costs.
- How is this issue presented to people who aren't here? (They will get a tax bill)
- Citizen concern that Carefree community historically doesn't support new taxes, what happens then? Will we stick with Rural Metro? (Gary explained that the council would have to evaluate this, we will likely stick with old faithful and assume the risks we talked about tonight)
- John Little asked the group to consider how others looking to purchase your home will view the fire services available, this may impact ability to sell your home.
- Is there a way to parcel out the cost of the Rural Metro contract and spread out between citizens?
- How does the Town market this need to citizens to communicate the importance?
- Citizen stated that when her house is on fire or needs medical attention, she wants service and is willing to pay for it.