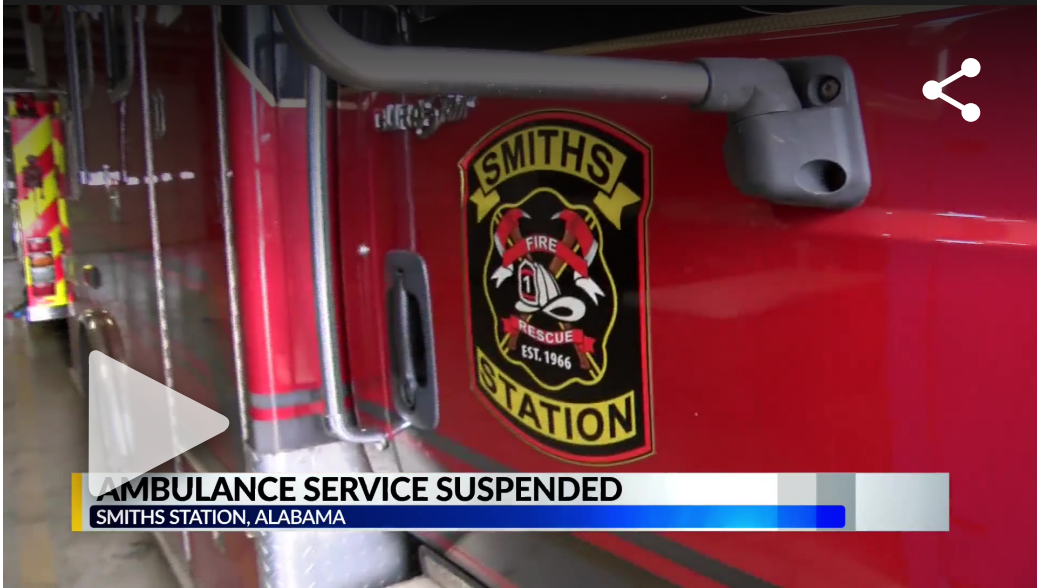


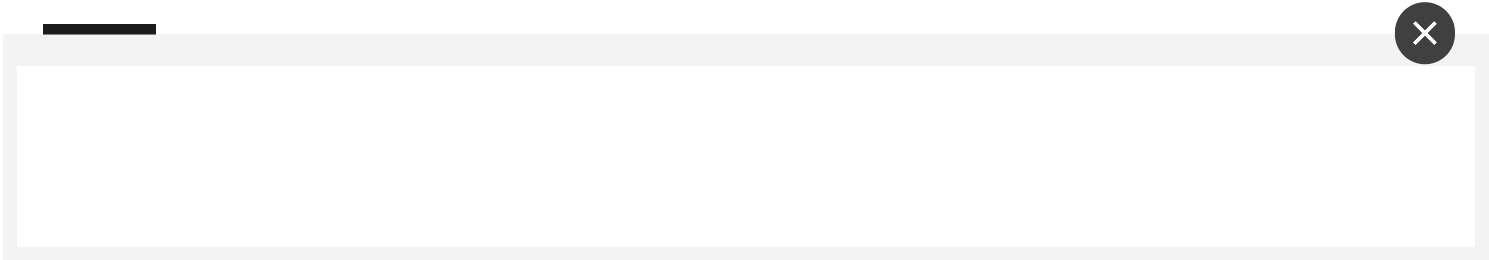


NEWS

Smiths Station Fire and Rescue suspends ambulance, needs community support to revive service

by: [Elizabeth White](#)
Posted: Feb 7, 2022 / 07:37 PM EST
Updated: Feb 7, 2022 / 08:31 PM EST

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the community. Effective February 5, 2022, Smiths Station Fire & Rescue “SSFR” suspended ambulance transport operations indefinitely. This reduction in services directly results from a severe staffing and funding shortage exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

“As a result, we have struggled to find enough personnel to staff our ambulance on a 24/7 basis for a number of months,” said SSFR Chief Deputy, Daniel Sexton.

The news is upsetting for resident David Cox, who is still alive because of the ambulance service at SSFR.

“In April of 2020, I did have a heart attack and fell down dead. I was dead. They came in and revived me. They carried me outside and put a defibrillator on me, and brought me back. My doctor told me if it had not been such a quick response, I had a ‘widow maker’ that’s what they called it, I would not have made it,” said Cox.

Cox isn’t alone. Since Smiths Station Fire and Rescue began running an ambulance in February of 2018, they’ve responded to hundreds of emergencies.

“In the last four years, we have transported about 900 patients to hospitals. So, certainly for some of these people, the outcomes were improved, and they lived because we were able to take them to the hospital,” said SSFR Chief Deputy Daniel Sexton. “We all want to help people, and it makes us sad when we can’t provide the level of care we want to.”

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“We are extremely disappointed that it has become necessary to suspend our emergency transport capabilities, we started our ambulance service to fill a need and save lives, and we have saved many lives. However, unfortunately, without additional funding and staff, we cannot continue operations at this time. It is our sincere hope to restart as soon as possible,” said Joe Walden, SSFR Fire Chief.

Smiths Station Fire and Rescue is staffed by around twenty volunteer firefighters who don’t get paid. The paramedics did. However, Smiths Station’s \$16 per capita flat Fire Fee established in 2012 can’t compete in a nationwide paramedic shortage already problematic before COVID-19. So now, on top of the fuel, maintenance, and medical supply costs inflating, SSFR is trying to compete with other ambulance services that pay more and offer bonuses, insurance, and other benefits.

“Smiths Station’s budget is around \$16 per capita budget. Phenix City has a budget of around \$155 per capita, and Opelika is \$234 per capita. We have been paying medics \$15 an hour; you can make \$18, all the way up to \$20 at neighboring agencies. Plus, some of the private ambulance services are offering \$10,000 signing bonuses, and we can’t compete with that. They also offer insurance, retirement. We can’t pay for that,” said Sexton.

While the federal government has sent billions of COVID relief dollars to hospitals and local governments, very little has filtered down to Fire & EMS.

“It’s very frustrating to watch the news or read the newspaper and see how literally millions of dollars are being allocated by the government to all kinds of projects that do are not directly covid related, while front line first responders -the ones answering 911 calls- are struggling to survive financially,” said SSFR Board Chairman Felton Atkinson.

SSFR is working closely with EAMC ETS (the other ambulance service in Lee County) to minimize the impact this reduction will cause.

“ETS has been incredibly supportive and will do everything possible to help our community.”

Smiths Station Fire & Rescue hopes to develop and submit a plan to the Lee County Commission very soon to help achieve the additional funding needed. They will share that plan as quickly as possible and host community meetings to engage families and get their input.

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“The biggest thing citizens can do to help us right now is call elected officials in the county and the city and say we need to have this ambulance here. We value the fire department, and we support finding alternative means of funding for them,” said Sexton.

Smiths Station Mayor Bubba Copeland says while the city of Smiths Station and Smiths Station Fire Department is not affiliated with one another, he’s committed to helping.

” It’s unfortunate and the city is willing to help in any way to help the Smiths Station Fire Department find any revenue streams to aid in re-commission the ambulance portion,” said Copeland.

David Cox knows the issue is life and death. SSFR, the paramedics, and the ambulance gave him his life back.

“Please keep the ambulance running. They save lives. Find the funding because they save



Everyone at SSFR wants to help people, save lives, and protect the community. However, they can't do it without appropriate funding. Concerned citizens founded Smiths Station Fire & Rescue in 1966. It covers approximately 72 square miles, 35,000 citizens, and answers over 2,000 emergency calls each year both inside and outside the city limits of Smiths Station. As the greater Smiths Station area continues to grow at a rapid pace, they expect to see rapid growth in calls for emergency assistance.

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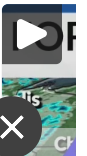
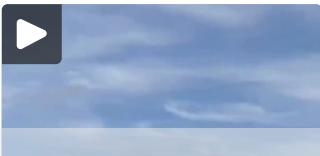
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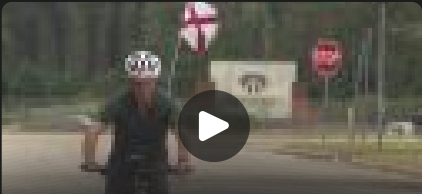
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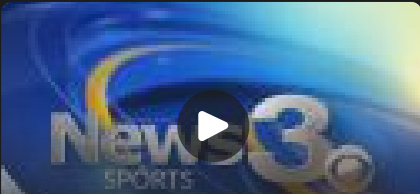
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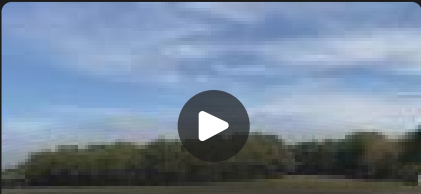
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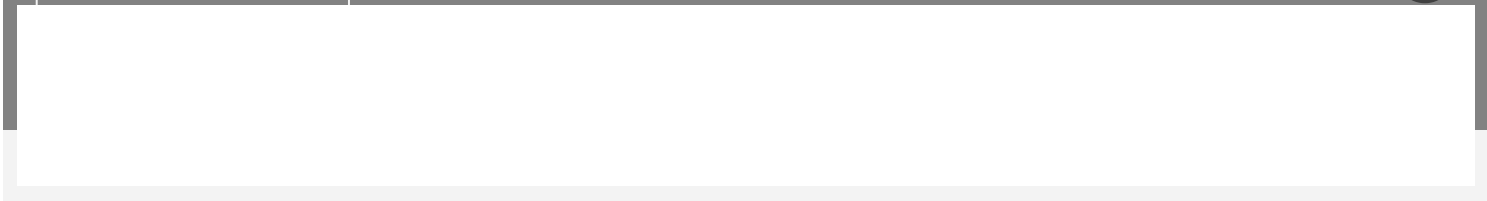


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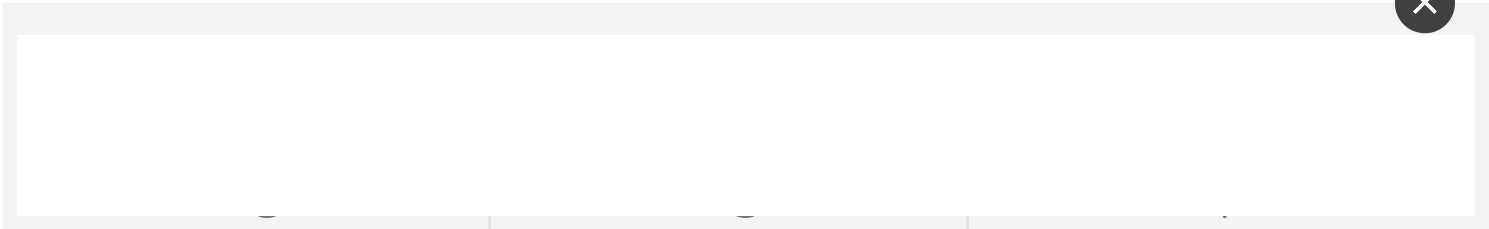
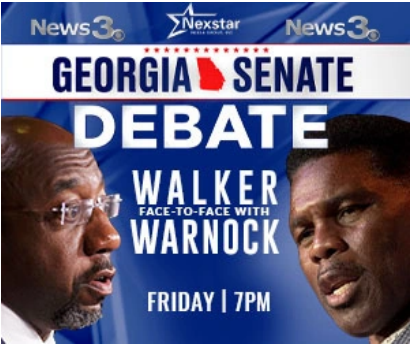
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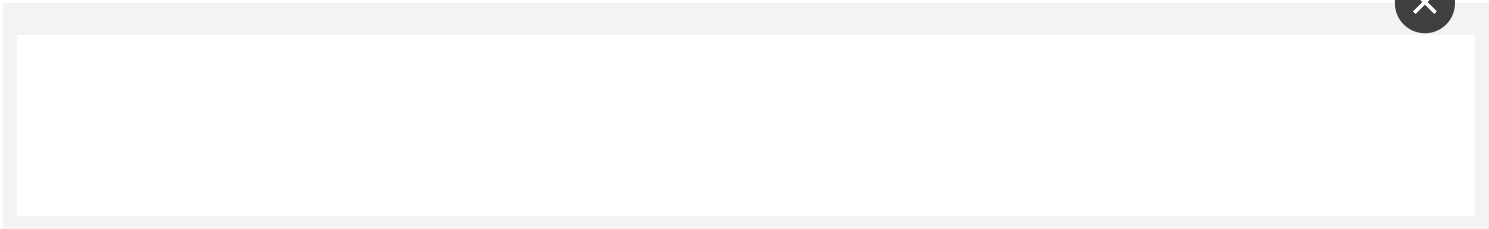


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