

Dear Stillwater County News Editor,

You are sitting in your home, outside of Columbus. Your day is going great, but halfway through the day something starts to go wrong. You all of a sudden get a sharp pain in your chest. Your right arm hurts. You realize that you are having a heart attack. You call 9-1-1 and they send an ambulance your way. Two paramedics arrive and “jumpstart your heart” to get it pumping again. They give you some medication to help. They just saved your life.

The example above is frequent in our community. This is why we should provide funding for ALS (Advanced Life Support) services in our area. Some people in our community may ask why we need to pay for ambulance services when the ambulance already charges people for transports to the hospital. Our answer to that would be that the cost for transports and the trips to the hospital only covers for the diesel and supplies used. The money from transports doesn't pay the wages for the paramedics providing this life-saving service.

Columbus is the only ALS provider in Stillwater County. Columbus Ambulance covers an area from the Stillwater/Sweet Grass county line to the Columbus side of the I-90 rest area and 5 miles north of Absarokee to 10 miles north of Rapelje. The creation of an ambulance district that mimics the ambulance's current response area would provide funding for not only the ambulance maintenance but the wages for the paramedics who provide this ALS service as well.

We interviewed paramedics for Columbus Fire and Ambulance, and we also did a survey that was posted in a community forum. All of the paramedics we interviewed said that in order to provide for this service five years down the road, this district needs to be created. 71% of Stillwater County residents who responded to our survey said that they would be okay with a reasonable increase of local taxes to provide for this service.

Taxpayers should have the opportunity to vote for the creation of this ambulance district because the ambulance needs funding to pay for the life-saving level of care it is currently providing by national grant money. Grant money will not last forever. But if we can pull together a few extra dollars a year, then the paramedics will be able to provide ALS care to people in our community. And who knows? It might even save your life some day.

Sincerely,

Colton Cowger