



# BENTON COUNTY REFERRED ORDINANCE NUMBER 2

(RESIDENTS IN UNINCORPORATED AREAS VOTE ON THIS)

## REFERRED ORDINANCE NO. 2

(An ordinance referred to the people by the Quorum Court)

**BALLOT TITLE:** An ordinance establishing an Emergency Medical Service District for the unincorporated portion of Benton County not currently part of the Northeast Benton County Emergency Medical Service District, establishing the services to be provided by the district, establishing fees to fund the district, including a \$40.00 per household fee, providing that the per household fee cannot be increased without a vote of the people providing for the per household fees to be included on the tax bills of residents of the district, and for other purposes.

### What is being proposed?

Referred Ordinance 2 would create an Emergency Medical Service District for parts of Benton County that are outside city limits and outside an existing district that serves property owners in northeast Benton County. The ordinance would also establish a \$40 annual fee that households in the new district would pay to help pay for emergency services in unincorporated areas of the county.

### Why is this issue on the ballot?

Under state law, the Benton County Quorum Court has the authority to create an Emergency Medical Service (EMS) District and set a fee to cover the cost of providing emergency medical services. The Quorum Court passed an ordinance last year with an \$85 annual fee for emergency medical services, but voters rejected the ordinance in a special election in February 2014.

In July, Quorum Court members voted to create an EMS District with a \$40 fee and referred the funding plan to voters to consider on the November ballot. This proposed fee is to help offset the cost of providing ambulance service to unincorporated areas of Benton County not served by an existing EMS District.

Cities within Benton County have historically provided ambulance service to unincorporated areas, but in recent years have told county government administrators that they could no longer provide the service without financial assistance from the county. Cities were concerned about the potential for lawsuits related to operating outside city limits without charging for services. Benton County has paid city ambulance providers since 2011 with money from the county's reserve funds, but officials have said they cannot continue to do that and need a dedicated funding source for ambulance service.

### General Questions

#### What is an Emergency Medical Service District?

An Emergency Medical Service District is a defined area that receives emergency medical services. Ordinance 2 would create Benton County Emergency Medical Service District No. 2.

#### Does the district and fee have anything to do with fire protection?

No. The district and fee are only for emergency medical services.

## **How would revenues from the proposed fee be used?**

According to the county ordinance being referred to voters, revenues would be used to provide residents of Benton County Emergency Medical Service District No. 2 the availability of “one-way transportation by ambulance to an emergency medical facility” and “emergency care while en route to the emergency medical facility by qualified medical personnel.”

## **If Ordinance 2 passes, who will pay the \$40 household fee?**

The \$40 annual fee would be applied to property tax bills of households within Benton County Emergency Medical Service District No. 2, which includes unincorporated areas of the county. The district does not include property within the existing Northeast Benton County Emergency Medical Service District, also known as NEBCO.

The fee would be applied to each living unit in the Benton County Emergency Medical Service District No. 2. For example, the property owner of a duplex or apartment complex would pay a \$40 fee for each living unit. The proposed ordinance exempts nonresidential buildings, vacant land, hotels, motels, and vacant residential properties that are used for storage from paying the fee.

## **If passed, when would the fee appear on my home's tax bill?**

The fee would first appear on the 2014 property tax bill, which is mailed to property owners in 2015.

## **Would I still pay this fee if my residential property is annexed into a nearby city?**

No. The fee would no longer apply because the property would no longer be included within the boundaries of Benton County Emergency Medical Service District No. 2.

## **Doesn't health insurance cover the cost of ambulance services?**

While many health insurance providers pay for ambulance rides, reimbursements and private payments from patients do not cover the entire cost of employees, ambulances, buildings and equipment necessary to make the service available.

## **Why does the county pay for ambulance services?**

County governments are not legally required to provide ambulance services. However, Arkansas Code gives county governments the authority to pass ordinances to provide services such as ambulance and health and human services. Benton County officials have said there are moral and practical obligations to have emergency medical services available outside city limits.

## **Would the proposed fee generate enough revenue to pay cities for ambulance service?**

No. The fee would generate an estimated \$528,000 a year. Benton County officials have also referred an ordinance to voters to establish an Ambulance Service Improvement District across the entire county and allow the county to levy up to two-tenths of a mill property tax to offset the cost of ambulance service. That tax would raise an estimated \$833,981 annually of the county's estimated \$1.25 million cost of paying cities for ambulance service.

## **Will this fee replace what people pay for ambulance services?**

No. People who receive emergency services from ambulance providers would still be responsible for the cost of their services, through their insurance or self pay.

## **What would happen if the fee does not pass?**

County officials have said they would have to reduce spending on other county services to pay for ambulance service in unincorporated areas.

**The following statements are what supporters and opponents have made public either in media statements, campaign literature, on websites or in interviews with Public Policy Center staff. The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture does not endorse or validate these statements.**

## **What do supporters say?**

- It would provide security to the citizens of unincorporated Benton County that they will continue to have access to this critical service.
- The alternative is we continue to find dollars from other parts of the county budget, such as county roads, to fund ambulance services.

### What do opponents say?

- County residents pay sales tax on groceries and other services in local cities, so the cities should provide ambulance service for no additional cost.
- It is unfair that the fee does not apply to business establishments and the fee is the same if you own a \$1 million home or a \$10,000 home.

### What does a "FOR" vote mean?

A **FOR** vote means you are in favor of creating a new EMS District for unincorporated parts of Benton County and a \$40 annual fee for households in that district.

### What does an "AGAINST" vote mean?

An **AGAINST** vote means you do not want to create a new EMS district for unincorporated parts of Benton County that has a \$40 per household fee.

### Where can I find more information about Referred Ordinance Number 2?

A copy of the ordinance and related information can be found online at <http://www.bentoncountyar.gov/Static/EMS/EMS.aspx>.

### Exercise your voting privilege.

We live in a democratic society where voting is a privilege of citizenship. Democracy works best when informed citizens exercise their voting privilege. Election Day for this issue is Nov. 4, 2014. Early voting begins Oct. 20, 2014. Please exercise your right to vote on this issue.

**The following is the referred ordinance as it will appear on the November ballot for residents of unincorporated areas who do not live in the NEBCO EMS District.**

### COUNTY SPECIAL ELECTION

### AN ORDINANCE REFERRED TO THE PEOPLE BY THE QUORUM COURT

### REFERRED ORDINANCE NO. 2

AN ORDINANCE ESTABLISHING AN EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE DISTRICT FOR THE UNINCORPORATED PORTION OF BENTON COUNTY NOT CURRENTLY PART OF THE NORTHEAST BENTON COUNTY EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE DISTRICT, ESTABLISHING THE SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED BY THE DISTRICT, ESTABLISHING FEES TO FUND THE DISTRICT, INCLUDING A \$40.00 PER HOUSEHOLD FEE, PROVIDING THAT THE PER HOUSEHOLD FEE CANNOT BE INCREASED WITHOUT A VOTE OF THE PEOPLE PROVIDING FOR THE PER HOUSEHOLD FEES TO BE INCLUDED ON THE TAX BILLS OF RESIDENTS OF THE DISTRICT, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

- FOR REFERRED ORDINANCE NO. 2**
- AGAINST REFERRED ORDINANCE NO. 2**

**Conflict of Interest:** This information was assembled to provide the citizens of Benton County with information to help them in making an informed decision on Election Day. An effort has been made to ensure the information is presented in a fair and balanced way that best represents the facts associated with this ballot issue. As part of this effort, we are obligated to divulge potential conflict of interest and to recognize their influence on the educational programs and matter we produce. The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture and Benton County Cooperative Extension Service are partially funded by state and county general funds. As such, any law affecting revenues of the state or county has the potential to affect the Benton County Extension Office.

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