

A New Ambulance Station for Rugby | The Build EMS Campaign Frequently Asked Questions

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What will be included in the proposed Ambulance Station?

The Good Samaritan Health Services Foundation (GSHSF) is spearheading a community effort to build a new Ambulance Station in Rugby. The station will have living quarters for EMS personnel, a community classroom, HazMat remediation facility, and bays for four emergency vehicles. Cost estimates are preliminary, with an upper budget bound of \$5M.

The Ambulance Station will complete the HAMC medical facilities in Rugby. It will be located adjacent to the recently completed \$62.5M Heart of America Medical Center (HAMC).

Why wasn't the ambulance station part of the 2024 building program?

The construction of the hospital came in on budget and on time. However, from the start we had an upper budget cap of \$62.5M. That forced HAMC to build out the campus in phases, and postpone the ambulance station.

Why do the citizens of Rugby need a new Ambulance Station?

Staff close at hand when needed. When HAMC moved two years ago from downtown Rugby to its current location, budget limitations forced the ambulance service to remain in the old location. That creates an issue, because Rugby Ambulance doesn't simply transport people to the hospital. *They serve as Emergency Room staff when additional skilled help is needed to handle patient load.*

Even though the current station is only 7 minutes away, those minutes are critical. *A station next to the ER shortens the response window to just 90 seconds.*

Proper rest during 48-hour shifts. In any 48-hour shift, ambulance crew may spend six to eight consecutive hours in the ER. Having an ambulance station on site not only improves response time, *it provides an opportunity for EMS staff to simply walk next door for rest when the opportunity presents itself.*

Outdated facility. Further, the existing 1947 station has only two bays for emergency vehicles. Two of four emergency vehicles remain outside in summer heat and bitter winter cold. Medicine and sensitive electronic cardiac gear cannot remain in the vehicle. They must be transferred into the vehicle only after the emergency call comes in, negatively impacting response times.

Finally, living quarters for the 24/7 crew of three are currently located on the third floor of a daycare—a less than ideal situation for emergency personnel who share stairwells with small children. Upon moving to a new ambulance station, existing EMS living quarters will be renovated into additional space for daycare.

Why ask citizens for support? Aren't hospitals responsible for providing ambulance service?

No. In North Dakota, EMS and Fire Service are usually sponsored by the *local government*. There are over 100 EMS service areas in North Dakota. All but 9 are operated by tax-supported local government. Rugby is one of those rare exceptions.

In 2012, the city asked Heart of America Medical Center (HAMC), a non-profit organization, to take over full operation of ambulance services. The service is now professional, not volunteer, with a crew of three on-site 24/7. The transition in 2012 relieved the community of managing the service, but shifted the financial burden to the hospital. *Unfortunately, revenue from insurance reimbursement and other sources does not cover operating costs.*

Ambulance service consistently operates at a deficit, with HAMC covering the shortfall to ensure emergency care. A February, 2026 *North Dakota Monitor* article referenced a recent study indicating that throughout ND, ambulance services lose on average \$500 per run.¹ In 2025, Rugby EMS completed 535 service calls. Over the last five years, HAMC has subsidized EMS services \$1.66M.

HAMC receives some support through taxes, which cover approximately 12% of the operating cost. However, it does not provide funding for capital improvements. ***Under these circumstances, HAMC is turning to citizens and area businesses for construction of a new ambulance station.***

If HAMC didn't run the ambulance service, who would be charged with that civic responsibility?

The local governing authority would be responsible for ongoing operating costs *and* the cost of a new ambulance station, which would require a significant tax increase.

What is the project budget and time line?

Of the estimated \$5M cost, HAMC will fund \$2M, secure a loan for \$1M, and seek \$2M in charitable gifts. We began requesting lead gifts in May 2026, and will wrap up the community campaign by December 2026. Plans call for construction to begin summer 2027.

Are there differing levels of ambulance service? What level does Rugby provide?

There are two levels. Rugby Ambulance protects area citizens with *Advanced Life Support*.

- Surrounding towns have volunteer EMS with *Basic Life Support* (think: stabilize and transport).
- Rugby provides *Advanced Life Support* (think: Hospital-level care in the field.)
- When outlying areas need Advanced Life Support, Rugby aids them via a Quick Response Unit equipped with medications, equipment and personnel with advanced training.

¹ See <https://northdakotamonitor.com/2026/02/25/north-dakota-ambulance-providers-losing-money-on-every-run-according-to-survey/>

Why does the new facility include a HazMat decontamination unit?

Farmers work with pesticides, anhydrous, and fuel; trains transport hazardous materials through the center of town. In the event of a spill, regulations do not allow patients exposed to hazardous materials into the hospital until they've been decontaminated. Thus, the HazMat unit will be located at the end of the ambulance station with immediate access to the outdoors.

Why is a classroom part of the plan?

In addition to ambulance service and staffing the ER, our emergency personnel provide medical training for the region: CPR, Advanced Cardiac Life Support, First Aid, Emergency Vehicle Operations, and an EMT Basic Course. The ambulance station will have a classroom for this purpose.

If the ambulance service is so costly to run, and losing money, why doesn't HAMC get out of the ambulance business? Why not just turn it over to the city?

- Like most of medicine, ambulance service is a highly regulated and complex service. That is part of the reason HAMC was asked to take over ambulance service in 2012.
- While it would be in HAMC's best financial interest to give it back to the city, we believe it's in citizens' best interest to have a medical organization continue to operate the service. Given the intricacies of licensing, regulation, staffing, and coordination with area towns (who are limited to *Basic Life Support*), we believe ambulance service can be more effectively managed by an organization that understands the medical field.
- The hospital's expertise in healthcare allows for the provision of advanced EMS services. This aligns with the mission of the hospital, and HAMC will continue to provide this service to citizens as long as it is feasible.

Was the mill levy vote a tax just on Rugby citizens, or the entire ambulance district?

- Tax support for ambulance service is the responsibility of the Rugby Area Taxing District. They are the entity responsible for asking for a mill levy increase.
- If the June mill levy increase had passed, it would have affected property tax in the entire Rugby Area Taxing District, which includes nearly all of Pierce County and portions of Bottineau, Rolette and Benson counties.

Was the June 2, 2026 mill levy vote intended to fund operations, the new ambulance station, or both?

The mill levy was only for funding *operations*. It would have provided nothing to build a new ambulance station.

Why was there a special ballot JUST for ambulance service? Why not add this issue to the regular ballot?

Ambulance service does not follow county lines, but rather is based upon other considerations such as response time. Only portions of four counties are included in the Rugby Area Taxing District. The levy increase vote cannot be included on any county-wide ballot, because it does not affect everyone in the county—only the people who fall into the Rugby ambulance service area.

For example, some citizens of Rolette County are in the Rugby Ambulance Taxing District, but not all. Therefore, you can't have everyone in Rolette county vote on a mill levy increase for ambulance service on a county-wide ballot—the vote doesn't pertain to most of that county's residents.

Thus, the stand-alone ballot.

If the tax was to affect such a broad area, why was there only one polling place—at the hospital?

- First, HAMC was not responsible for the vote—that is the duty of the Rugby Area Taxing District.
- As for the polling place, ambulance service is like fire service: both are the responsibility of the local governing authority.
 - By convention, votes regarding fire station funding typically have one polling place—the fire station.
 - In like manner, the Rugby Area Taxing District chose to have one polling place regarding EMS services.
 - They asked HAMC to allow use of its facility.
- Additional polling places could have been established. However, North Dakota law, designed to ensure fair elections, mandates that each polling place have five paid staff and be certified in advance, adding to the cost and complexity of holding the vote. In retrospect, it may have been worth the time and money to make the issue more known to a wider area.

Can't HAMC force the city to more fairly support an ambulance service?

No. HAMC has no authority in the matter. It is up to the citizens who live in the Rugby Area Taxing District. That is what the mill levy vote was all about.

It is our hope that citizens recognize the value of having HAMC administer the ambulance service on their behalf, and at some point in the future voluntarily choose to support it through an increase in the mill levy to at least make the service 'break even.' To our knowledge, the Rugby Ambulance Taxing District was the only district in the state that was declined an increase in mills to support its ambulance service.