

CALLED MEETING

COMMISSION CHAMBER

January 24, 2023

Augusta Richmond County Commission convened at 1:00 p.m., Tuesday, January 24, 2023, the Honorable Garrett Johnson, Mayor, presiding.

PRESENT: Hons. Johnson, Williams, Mason, Frantom, Garrett, Scott, McKnight, Pulliam, Lewis and Guilfoyle, members of Augusta Richmond County Commission.

Mr. Mayor: Ms. Bonner, I think we're in place. I'd like to call this meeting to order please.

The Clerk: Yes, sir. I will start, sir, at the point of our invocation today. Will be delivered by Rev. Anthony Booker, Pastor of the Broadway Baptist Church after which we would like to ask Chief Antonio Burden if he would please lead us in our pledge of allegiance. Would you please stand?

The Invocation is delivered by Rev. Booker.

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America is recited.

1. Approve Gold Cross contract with a \$1.95M subsidy. (Requested by Commissioner Brandon Garrett)

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Madam Clerk. Before we get started, I just want to remind the members of the audience, my colleagues on the Commission, we all understand this is a very contentious issue for our community. With that said I think it's in our best interest and we owe it to ourselves to be respectful of one another, to be respectful of these Chambers. Everyone is going to be given the opportunity to speak but we're not going to speak over anyone else and that is not going to be allowed so be respectful, let's be great stewards of this community and let's proceed. The very first person I see in the queue is Commissioner from the 5th, Bobby Williams.

Mr. Williams: Yes, sir, my question today is which contract are we dealing with? Sometime ago the Augusta Commission asked our Administrator and our Attorney to negotiate a contract with Gold Cross. They did that. Well, last week Mr. Garrett came in with a contract from Gold Cross and that's the one that we voted on. Well, my, I'm thinking and we can ask the attorney even before that contract from Gold Cross can be entered into whatever to be voted on, we have to vote it in and vote the other one out. So my question today is which contract are we going to be voting on? Mr. Mayor.

Mr. Mayor: Before I get clarification, Attorney Brown, can you come up a second please?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Mayor. Mr. Mayor.

Mr. Mayor: Commissioner from the 5th.

Mr. Williams: I think, is Ms. Sams in the room? Geri Sams? She deals with Procurement and contracts and what have you. I'd like to see what she has to say on this because I just don't think that contract that Mr. Garrett came in is a legal contract.

Mr. Mayor: Certainly. Ms. Sams, would you mind approaching please?

Ms. Sams: Good afternoon.

Mr. Mayor: Ms. Sams?

Ms. Sams: Yes, sir.

Mr. Mayor: The question from the commissioner from the 5th regarding the contract. Is it a legal or not legal contract? What is your opinion regarding this matter?

Ms. Sams: My opinion regarding this matter –

Mr. Mayor: The Chair recognizes counsel.

Mr. Brown: Yes, I would ask that the Mayor reconsider the question. I do not believe Ms. Sams should be asked whether a contract is legal or not as she is not authorized to practice law to say whether it's legal or not. She may have some opinions on it but we should not ask her for a legal opinion.

Mr. Williams: Well, let's just ask her for an opinion. I just want to ask her for an opinion. You can't stop her from talking. I asked her.

Mr. Mayor: Attorney Brown, is that permissible? Ms. Sams, proceed.

Ms. Sams: My opinion as the Procurement Director for Augusta, Georgia and let me give you a little bit of historical data. The full Commission appointed a committee to come up with a proposed contract as it relates to Gold Cross. That committee submitted that contract, proposed contract, to the Commission. As of this day and I've gone through many minutes and I was very careful, I could not find where the Commission appointed a representative to make contact with Gold Cross for negotiation. Now the contract that was proposed coming out of the official committee appointed by the Commission put a contract forward and then another contract which was delivered, I cannot say negotiated by, came forward last week and we were like on pause because we had not seen or reviewed or nobody said that there were other issues to be discussed so I guess for me, my opinion as Procurement Director, unless the Commission authorized a representative to negotiate, then your second contract would be questionable.

Mr. Williams: All right and I have one more question, not of Ms. Sams but I'd like for the Fire Chief to come forward. Yes, sir, Mr. Fire Chief, I'm trying to dispel all this scare tactic about if Gold Cross walks away what will happen. Tell us what will happen if Gold Cross walks away. What is the ambulance service in Georgia going to do? What's the process?

Chief Burden: Well, good day, Mr. Mayor and Commission. My understanding and I certainly lean to counsel of the state rules and regs as it pertains to the EMS zone falls directly within the state office of EMS. The state office of EMS in my understanding has oversight as it relates to the actual zone and so I'm careful not to speak for that office in terms of any changes or any different direction that the City would go in. I think oversight or administration comes from that office.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Chief.

Mr. Williams: And, Chief, how many days will Gold Cross have to serve if they "walk away"? Will they have to do 120 days? Six months? What will they have to do?

Chief Burden: Again, Commissioner, I have reviewed Code Section 5.11-9-2 and once again with the state office being oversight, I think that they will be best or more equipped to answer that question. It doesn't in the code section speak directly –

Mr. Williams: Okay, but they would have to serve, but they would have to serve a number of days, correct, before they could just walk away?

Chief Burden: Once again, code section 5.11-9-2 doesn't directly speak to a set amount of time.

Mr. Williams: I gotcha.

Chief Burden: It doesn't spell it out so the state office of EMS would be our best resource

Mr. Williams: Okay, but they would have to serve a period of time before they could just walk away, correct?

Chief Burden: Again, I think the state office would probably be best to answer that question because it's not exactly spelled out in the rules and regulations.

Mr. Williams: Okay, but they would have to serve a period of time, correct?

Mr. Mayor: Commissioner, you keep asking the question.

Mr. Williams: Hang on a second, sir. Let me go to Attorney Brown please. Attorney Brown, what's your take on what happens if they walk away?

Mr. Brown: Commissioner Williams, the state regs referred to by Chief Burden provides that the department which is the Department of Public Health would appoint a temporary zone provider and that temporary designation and I quote, "the temporary designation shall be in place until the Regional Ambulance Zoning plan is modified. The modification of the zoning plan means to designate another provider. Gold Cross walks away, the Health Department would provide for

the ambulance service on a temporary basis and the length of time that they can serve is indefinite until another provider is called for.

Mr. Williams: Okay, thank you, and my point is we will have a provider regardless of whether they walk away or not. But, Mr. Mayor, I need a determination on the contract. We should be concentrating on the contract that was negotiated by Attorney Brown and our Administrator rather than something that was brought in by Mr. Garrett and just to say this and you might have to take a look at it or what have you, I'm not talking to you, you might have to take a look at it but my understanding is by law if somebody negotiates a contract, a commissioner negotiates a contract, he cannot vote on it. Thank you.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, commissioner from the 5th. Before we proceed on, I'm going to ask Steven Vincent from Gold Cross to come up for just a second please.

Mr. Williams: But, sir, we do need to make a determination as to what contract that we're going to be voting on.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, sir, would you state your name and address please.

Mr. Vincent: Steven Vincent, 221 Seaton Circle.

Mr. Mayor: Mr. Vincent, the question has been raised regarding your level of service regarding if you should decide to surrender the zone. What are your requirements as you see it?

Mr. Vincent: There are no requirements. All we have to do is call the state and surrender the zone. As the attorney said, as the Chief said, there are no stated rules or regulations regardless of what anyone else says that requires any kind of time frame. I have spoke to the Director of the state office of EMS, Kelly Joiner, yesterday after hearing some contradictory information and she verified exactly what I just said. As far as the contract, could I speak real quick on that, what version?

Mr. Mayor: Sure.

Mr. Vincent: The contract, I'm really confused about why we keep hearing there's two different contracts. The contract that Mr. Garrett, Commissioner Garrett, proposed is Augusta's contract. As Administrator Douse brought forth back in September, there was still a few items that were not agreed upon and so the contract that Commissioner Garrett presented is Augusta's contract with Gold Cross's request which Administrator Douse put those in a comparison sheet for each commissioner last week, those are the only changes that she outlined for everyone, but it is Augusta's contract. There's no different. That's why she did the comparison chart to show you that there is only a few differences. There is no new contract that was drafted. Gold Cross did not draft that contract. That is the contract drafted by Augusta.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you. Madam Administrator, can you confirm that please?

Ms. Douse: That is accurate. I would like to further clarify that the contract that the Administrator presented is no longer the Administrator's contract if there are changes that have been made to it. So what Mr. Vincent has just stated is the fact that Gold Cross made changes to the Administrator's contract in which I did provide the Commission the comparison document which means it is no longer the Administrator's contract –

Mr. Williams: Correct.

Ms. Douse: -- so it is two separate contracts. The Administrator's contract and Gold Cross's contract.

Mr. Mayor: Attorney Brown.

Mr. Brown: Yes, sir.

Mr. Mayor: Can you weigh in and let us know if we can proceed, please, based on, do we need to vote on the Administrator's contract seeing as we now have two contracts? Can you provide guidance, please?

Mr. Brown: As previously stated, the Administrator and I were tasked to assemble a team to negotiate with Gold Cross. There was a negotiation. The negotiation resulted in the contract that the Administrator presented. It is presently in your book. There is a second proposed contract and at the top of your book it has Administration II. That is the contract that you ordered us to bring back. The other contract, which was first seen by staff to everyone that I have spoken with on staff including the Administrator, was first seen when presented on the Commission agenda last time by Commissioner Garrett which the Administrator now says is properly labeled the Gold Cross contract because it's not what staff did. The Commission will need to decide was the order from the Commission to the staff to negotiate a contract and bring it back to the Commission, if the Commission is going to continue to follow its line of authority toward the staff or whether or not the Commission is going to allow for the first time to my knowledge to have a vendor present a contract for its consideration. That is not customary for procurement. This is a procurement even though Gold Cross was the only group since they are the zone provider, they were the only group that it could be procured from but Augusta never procures something from a vendor and allows the vendor to write or to present the contract to Augusta. It is usually the Procurement staff that presents the contract to Augusta, the Commission approves it and finishes up any minor negotiations with the vendor and the contract is signed.

Mr. Vincent: Mr. Mayor.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Attorney Brown. I'm going to stay in the queue please and next I want to recognize the commissioner from the 8th, Commissioner Garrett.

Mr. Garrett: Thank you, Mayor. So you said the first time you saw this contract was prior to last meeting. Did I not try to also add this line item to our last committee meeting and Commissioner Bobby Williams prevented it from being added to the committee but the contract was attached to it so for you to say that no one from any staff saw that, that is a false statement.

Mr. Brown: No, sir, that is not a false statement. What I said was the first time staff saw this contract is when you presented it not in the committee meeting is when you presented it and it was on the agenda.

Mr. Garrett: So with that being said, if no one saw it, how was the comparison sheet that was provided prior to the Commission meeting able to be presented?

Mr. Brown: I said that no one saw it prior to being on the agenda. Once it was placed on the agenda, the Administrator did the comparison and delivered that to the Commission the morning of the meeting which was Tuesday. Some commissioners said they did not see the comparison –

Mr. Garrett: So can we vote on the Administrator's contract today?

Mr. Brown: Yes, sir, you can vote on the Administrator's contract. You can vote to alter that contract, you can vote to redo the contract, you may vote on the contract as you see fit. The only question really is the protocol since this is a procurement. The protocol that the presentation and the authority of the Commission was to consider the contract by the staff. The changes can be made –

Mr. Garrett: That was the same contract that Ben Hasan put on the agenda –

Mr. Mayor: Commissioner Garrett, let him finish please.

Mr. Garrett: Go ahead, Attorney.

Mr. Brown: I was finished. It's fine. Let me say this. Some of this is semantics but the real question of it is is for the Commission to become centered on the contract that it is going to consider whether Commission follow up it's own directive that the staff would bring back a contract and then it would be considered by the committee. Once that is decided, the Commission may of course go in any direction it chooses provided that it has the adequate number of votes to get it passed.

Mr. Garrett: And can I ask another question to the attorney or the Administrator? I know you've heard this question before but I want this on the record. Has any contract ever been presented to the Commission without all the terms including the subsidy or contract value for the Commission to vote on? When does that ever happen except for when it comes to Gold Cross?

Mr. Brown: The Commission reserved and prohibited the staff from negotiating a subsidy with Gold Cross. During the negotiations neither Gold Cross nor the staff pursuant to that direction, we did not discuss a subsidy. We perceived that to be out of bounds. Gold Cross never said we want this, this or this and the staff never said we will only give you this. We negotiated all the other terms that were left open by the Commission.

Mr. Garrett: So the answer is no other contract is typically presented without the full terms?

Mr. Brown: No, sir, the answer is that all the terms were negotiated that was allowed by the Commission. There was nothing left undone by the staff. We cannot disobey the orders of the Commission. They reserve the subsidy for their decision. It would have been a violation for the staff to plug in that number.

Mr. Garrett: So how were we supposed to come to a number as a Commission to submit to you?

Mr. Brown: You could ask the staff, you prohibited it but you could discuss it among yourselves and you could ask the staff for their recommendation. You also could ask Gold Cross what is it they want and why do they want it.

Mr. Garrett: But according to our Procurement Director that's not supposed to happen. You said that we're not supposed to talk to them.

Mr. Brown: No, I said that it is unprecedented that the contract being presented to the Commission for passage would come from the vendor, but if you solicit a request from Gold Cross, what is the subsidy that you think is appropriate and tell us why, why do you deserve this, why do you need this. Gold Cross could answer, it could consider it. Another commissioner may ask the staff what do you think is appropriate under the circumstances from what you understand and then the Commission will make its decision. It's really not a staff decision.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Attorney Brown. We're going to move on; there are some other people in the queue. Commissioner from the 5th, before I come to you I want to catch some of these folks that haven't had an opportunity to speak.

Mr. Williams: That's fine.

Mr. Mayor: Commissioner from the 10th, Commissioner Guilfoyle.

Mr. Guilfoyle: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Let me follow up on what Attorney Wayne Brown was speaking of as far as when he was a deputy attorney under Andrew MacKenzie. Actually the TEE Center, the parking deck, Paul Simon and them actually that organization brought their contract to us. Augusta did not do that contract for one. But my question to the attorney, what road does the State Board of Health have to do with Augusta Richmond County and Gold Cross contract at this time because I keep hearing about this Board of Health. What role do they play, what jurisdiction do they have, what oversight do they have for Augusta Richmond County contract with Gold Cross?

Mr. Brown: Commissioner Guilfoyle, I'm unaware of any role that the Health Department's Board of Health would have in formulating a contract between Augusta and Gold Cross.

Mr. Guilfoyle: Apparently something is supposed to be happening Thursday with the State Board of Health and I don't know why we're waiting so long because if they don't have a role in it, they don't have any say so in what we're doing up here at this point. Would you agree?

Mr. Brown: They do not have a role or better yet said they do not have veto power of a contract that Augusta wishes to enter with Gold Cross.

Mr. Guilfoyle: Okay. Just for the sake of the people that's in this room as well as people that's watching, a lot of correspondence has happened, believe it or not. A lot of correspondence has been discussed about this Gold Cross contract with Augusta Richmond County weeks and a matter of fact before some of us was even sworn in. We keep finding reasons not to do this contract; it's been going on, Commissioner Alvin Mason last April tried to move it forward. And ten months later we've got the same staff in the same position with no results, nothing's changed. But I will tell you what will change is that Gold Cross had tried to come to the table again, they keep giving up, they're moving the goal post towards us while we're steadily putting roadblocks for them. They actually, if everybody read the contract, you'll understand that they're giving up the zone where one of the commissioners doubted that and they actually spoke verbally right here in front of this podium. They cut the contract which was a five-year/five-year renewal, they changed it to three-year/three-year renewal. That's a savings after cutting it from \$1.95 million down to 1.75 which is additional \$1.2 million dollar savings to the taxpayers. They increased their QRV, quick response vehicles, from one during peak hours. They're adding two more to help the citizens of Augusta Richmond County and so I don't know what more a company can do. We keep looking at the Health Board as the, our safety net but if you look in the CSRA, who do we have for the state Health Board to call on? There's nobody. So everything that they do to provide an ambulance service for Augusta Richmond County is they're going to have to hire ambulance drivers here locally. We can't even fulfill our Sheriff's Department, our Fire Department and Gold Cross even has a challenge to maintain employees and half their employees is minorities. All the money here that we give them stays here in Augusta Richmond County. They do a lot of free stuff for Augusta Richmond County and people question hey, you know, response time. They don't do this, they don't do that. Well, that's what the difference is with a contract. It holds them liable. I see Mr. Johnson shaking his head no but a contract is a heck of a lot different than an MOU. An MOU is just a handshake but this body has got to make some tough decisions and if this here fails today there is going to be some tougher decisions and I'm going to lean on the people who staff as well as the commissioners who's found a better way here in the next few weeks, few months, few years because that's what it's going to take, a couple of years for another company to come in and know the area, hire the people, etc. so that's my take on it. Thank you, Mr. Mayor, Councilmen.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Mr. Guilfoyle from the 10th. Commissioner Williams, we're still going to put you on pause as I want to let, recognize the commissioner from the 4th, it's his first opportunity to speak please.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Ms. Sams, if I could have Ms. Sams come up please.

Mr. Mayor: Certainly. Ms. Sams.

Mr. Mason: I have a question for Ms. Sams.

Ms. Sams: Yes, sir.

Mr. Mason: Ms. Sams, how long have you been in the procurement business?

Ms. Sams: About 30 years.

Mr. Mason: About 30 years. And for the City?

Ms. Sams: Since 1999.

Mr. Mason: All right. During this timeframe have you ever on any occasion had commissioners in a position to negotiate a contract for you?

Ms. Sams: That's a great question. And my answer to you is when I saw or it appeared that a commissioner was going to negotiate a contract, I always warned against it because there are laws that says if a commissioner negotiate a contract with a vendor then too that commissioner cannot vote on that contract.

Mr. Mason: Great and so the reason I asked you that, thank you, and when we hear all this mumbo jumbo that's going on up here, but the fact of the matter is we've got to take responsibility ourselves, the commission that was here, for how we got into this position that we're in. First and foremost, we should have never had a subcommittee with commissioners negotiating contracts. First and foremost, that never should have happened. Ben Hasan, other commissioners that was on that committee, they tried to put me on it and I didn't want to be on it because I knew that was not the right thing to do. That's why I chose not to be on it. But yet instead we still do the same thing, we put the sub-committee together where commissioners would come in helping to negotiate a contract. Wrong move from the very beginning. So all this other talk that is going on doesn't even make sense. Now from the legal side and our staff, a little disappointed here because what you're saying now is not necessarily what you continue to say throughout or you didn't interject it at the right time, especially from the legal standpoint. My opinion. So here we go. This contract that we're looking at and Ms. Douse sent us an email. It had four or five, it was a comparative analysis with four or five different ones, I can't remember exactly, Ms. Douse, right now but it was four or five differences than the original contract. So what we should be looking at at this particular point if we're going to be looking at anything legal is that those additional items we can either vote them up or we can vote them down because that is what the comparative analysis was for. We could agree or not. Now I keep hearing about workshops and all this other foolishness, we've been talking about this for two years and kicking the can down the road. If you know you're not going to vote for it, I'm not doing no workshop. That's crazy. We're wasting time. We're wasting people's time, we're wasting our citizens' time. What we need to do here we're going to make a decision or we're not and then we're going to live with it. We'll let a provider come in, you've heard them say a provider will come in. Do you know who that provider is? No. Do we know what their service is like? No. Do we know how many ambulances they have? No. Do we know what their response times are? No. And instead of being adversarial, why don't we become partners in this venture? It's all I've said from the very beginning and have that type of attitude. A partnership attitude instead of coming immediately from an adversarial attitude. I'm telling you right now here today I am not going to continue to push somebody's agenda that never wanted Gold Cross here in the first place. I won't do it and I hope nobody else would either. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, commissioner. Commissioner Williams, I'm still going to hold you in the queue. There's one other commissioner that has not spoken yet and I'm going to recognize the commissioner from the 7th, Mr. Frantom.

Mr. Frantom: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. First off, I totally agree with what Mr. Mason just said. I've been on this Commission for seven and a half years and frankly, whether it was department heads, whether it was commissioners, they've always wanted Gold Cross out. The number of things that have happened behind the scenes if this vote fails today, you're going to hear all about it and it's not going to be pretty. I keep hearing about this EMS Council. Look at all the changes in the EMS Council in the last six years and who's the changes and who they are and whether they support Gold Cross or against Gold Cross. This has been a plan in motion for many years and here we are today on whether we're going to move forward with Gold Cross or not. If the vote fails today, we're going to pay just as much money if not more to a state-provided service. Right now we don't know whether those ambulances, whether we're going to have to pay for them, the state's going to have to pay for them and it's a serious unknown. We have a company that, do I think Gold Cross can do better? Absolutely. Do I think, they've never had a contract so we can't hold them accountable, but am I fearful of what the alternative is? Absolutely. And anybody that's anti-Gold Cross because of the history of Gold Cross, you can't tell me that you just know it's going to be better if they're gone tomorrow and frankly I think we've got ten days to two weeks if this vote goes the way it seems like it's going to go today. I think that we talk about, department heads talk about it, we've never had, frankly we shouldn't be discussing this on the floor. Frankly when we had workshops, committees, we didn't have Gold Cross at the table or let them speak at those committees because we wanted to push our agenda. We didn't want to hear them. We've done Gold Cross wrong. This city has done Gold Cross wrong whether you want to believe it or not. For the past Mayor to call them Burger King last year, that's absolutely ridiculous so they haven't done right, totally, Gold Cross. I admit that. But this city has not treated them right and never wanted a partnership and here we are on the one-yard line, they've come back with significant changes to a contract that started at ten years, started at much more, came down, came down, came down and today we're going to vote on it and I feel like it's not going to pass and it's because people want to hold the line thinking that the EMS Council knows better than the government and how they think this is going to play out. We're going to get the zone. We put in the contract today that Commissioner Garrett will read that if we don't get the zone, we void this contract. So we're getting what we want and we're getting a partnership and I think right now, this is unprecedented times. We've never had a company attacked like the City of Augusta has attacked them and in the coming days when this vote fails today, you're going to hear a lot about it because I can assure you I'm going to be one of them to tell the whole story because this has not been a pretty thing for us for the past seven and a half years I've been on here and it starts way before I was on this commission. So I hope that we can come to an understanding and people can realize that politically people, past commissioners scaring commissioners up here, I'm going to have you an opponent. I can assure you that the community is not going to forget this vote. I can assure you of that one so whether you think your vote to not support it because you're scared somebody's going to get you an opponent, that's crazy because this one's going to have serious ripple effects that the community is going to feel and I feel sorry for us. This is going to be a sad day for Augusta. Thank you.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, commissioner. The Chair recognizes the commissioner from the 3rd, McKnight.

Ma. McKnight: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I've got one quick question to ask. I don't know if I should be directing this, probably need to direct it to Mr. Vincent, if that's okay. May I ask him a quick question?

Mr. Mayor: Proceed please.

Ms. McKnight: Yes, is there a Department of Public Health ambulance service around here?

Mr. Vincent: No. The Department of Public Health does not have any type of ambulance service. I think maybe what they're referencing is there is a possibility they could put out a request for help. There is no ambulance provider in the country that is just sitting around waiting for a county to open for them to all of a sudden bring their resources down. That doesn't exist. Everyone in the whole country is short-staffed. There are ambulance services, large services, national services, worldwide services that are pulling out of counties right now for similar reasons because the counties that they're in chose not to work with them. Usually most of those are much smaller. But I do want to make one quick statement about the EMS Council. I keep hearing EMS Council, EMS Council. The EMS Council has no authority just so you know. Zero. So you keep saying that they're going to take something away from us. They have no authority at all. They are a recommending body that is in the statute. They have no authoritative power, they are a recommending body. This zoning committee that you're discussing, they've been doing a review of the zone based off of a request from a citizen of Hephzibah over a year and a half ago and when they did the first review, it showed that our numbers show great improvement. And they are continuing the review and that's what it is. There is no investigation. There are some agendas on that council of people that have been against Gold Cross for many years and so at the very end of a meeting, they're like let's just open records request and see if there's any complaints. Well, you could do that on any county in the entire state of Georgia. However, the last 17 years Gold Cross has touched over 850 lives in this area that we've responded to calls for and transported over 650,000 patients to local hospitals. You're going to have some complaints and I'm okay with that because we strive to provide great service on every call which is like if you go to Amazon or EBay you know you pretty much trust those people with a 99.9% success rate and that's what we have. You're always going to have that small number that you know you wish you could have done better on. But going back to this EMS Council, they're a recommending body. They can make a recommendation. This Thursday meeting that you're referencing is a committee that can make a recommendation to a full Council that happens later down the road who then depending on that vote, they can make a recommendation to the state and then the state from there can make their final decision which we've gone down this road numerous times over the last ten years and the local body has recommended before to open zoning and bring in a potential new provider and the state said no. So this local council, like I said, is a recommending body and the last time this happened, the state did not take their recommendation.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Mr. Vincent.

Ms. McKnight: Thank you so much.

Mr. Mayor: The Chair recognizes the commissioner from the 1st, Commissioner Johnson.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I want to take an opportunity to sort of clear up some things and I don't know if it's going to be helpful but I'm going to try at least. I don't recall anyone up saying that we didn't want Gold Cross as our provider. I don't remember anybody coming out of our mouth saying that. Certainly, I haven't said that. Every time I've been recognized from the floor I've always spoke about how Gold Cross has been helpful to the community. I've always spoke about how they've been helpful to me. I remember one time when I had a heart episode, I have heart disease, Gold Cross came and got me and took me to MCG or AU, we're good. So this whole notion that we're doing this because of past commissioners or we're doing this because we don't want Gold Cross, it's just rhetoric. It's a lot of rhetoric up here that we're talking about just like when Mr. Guilfoyle decided to call my name out, I didn't say anything to him, but he said we're not talking about response times because an MOU can't be enforceable. Well, let me share something with you. With my organization, my real job, right, if we have an MOU on the table, right, you do this, we do this, we give you this, that is enforceable. I'm not saying that we should keep Gold Cross on an MOU because I do support a contract but even if we're talking about MOUs so forth and so on. Let's stick to the facts here right. I'll tell you where I am. I've told every commissioner up here what I will vote for, I've told every commissioner up here why I will vote for but at the end of the day when the contract came before the committee cycle, number one, it didn't come through the proper committee, that's why Mr. Williams opposed it because it didn't come through the proper committee, that's where conversations are held. That's where things are fleshed out during the committee cycle. When you have disagreements on an item, you talk about them throughout the committee cycle so that we can get something done on the floor. We won't have to go to a workshop if you just let the committee cycle play itself out. There are items in those recommendations that we are willing to talk about. I can speak for myself. Let me speak for myself. There are things on that recommended chart that I absolutely think we can talk through but as folks in this gallery and on line are seeing, there is no will to have a conversation. When we're sitting here asking for one nine or one seven or whatever and again, I am not opposed to supporting Gold Cross but one nine or one five, where does the number come from? You will be shocked to know that we have asked for financial records to show where the need is. When the business community came before this City and asked for support during the COVID 19 pandemic for \$7500, they were asked for their birthright and a bowl of soup. Why are we holding a major corporation to the same standard that we were holding small businesses many of which shut down during the pandemic? That's all I've been asking for. That's all I've been asking for but yet and still as you see, we're not interested in having an adult conversation about what we can give, what we can take, what we can live with, how is it going to be funded, what will the budget look like afterwards, where is the transparency? We always talk about transparency and accountability but only when it matters to somebody else or when it doesn't matter to somebody else. And quite frankly I'm tired of it. I was told I would be a one-term commissioner if I didn't support this. So the point that I'm making is this. While we're sitting up here and talking to each other and going back and forth, there is somebody waiting to get to the hospital via ambulance and when we're done somebody is still going to be needing to get to the hospital via ambulance and although it's not necessarily our job to get into the ambulance business or our job to decide zones or our job to decide who the provider is going to be, we have a

responsibility to negotiate number one, within ourselves and let our staff do its job. All of the rhetoric that, you know, the news is putting out and commissioners are putting out talking about airing dirty laundry, is this the Jennie Jones show? So come on ya'll. Let's get it together. At the end of the day we have a contract that was shown to us two and a half hours before a vote. Now I can admit that I am not that smart to look at a contract two and a half hours before a vote and make a sound decision and we also have a contract that administration proposed that we have not even had a conversation about. So all I'm proposing to this body, we don't have to go into recess, we don't have to huddle, we don't have to go out and we can literally give ourselves the time to look at the contract that staff proposed. It's not perfect, it's not perfect by a long shot. We can look at that contract, we can ask Gold Cross what they need because I'm absolutely sure that there is a need and we can look at what this city can give because I'm sure that the city can give something. We can come to the table, we can vote on a contract, we can be on to the next item of business because there are still homeless people on the street, there is still a need for housing, roads still need to be paved, trees still need to be cut, sewers still need to be improved but we're sitting here fussing about what a past commissioner wanted or what past commissioners wanted. Those commissioners are not here today. The old Mayor is not here today. They're not here so at the end of the day, ya'll, I think we can do much better because while we're sitting here talking about the policies that we know, the folks out here in this gallery are looking at us like we are fools because we don't want to have a conversation. And quite frankly I did not run for office for this, I didn't run for office to get intimidated, I didn't run for office to get bullied, and I didn't run for office to be jerked around up here. So at the end of the day, let's have a conversation. That's what our constituents put us in office to do and if you don't want to have a conversation, go back to your districts and tell them that you didn't want to talk. But you have commissioners coming out of their mouth on public record saying we are willing to have a conversation.

Mr. Mayor: Commissioner Johnson.

Mr. Johnson: I don't think my time has expired according to the rules of procedures. I still have time and I am done, Mr. Mayor. But what I'm saying is let's have a conversation. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Mayor: You're welcome. Before we move in the queue, we have a couple of folks that want to speak. Both are former commissioners and I'm going to call up the first to come up. Commissioner Todd. Sir, will you state your name and address for the record and you have five minutes.

Mr. Moses Todd: My name is Moses Todd. I live at 2747 Deans Bridge Road, Augusta, Georgia. Mr. Mayor and Commissioners, I'm not one that comes down here before you guys to make you look good or to make you look bad. However you look is the way you're going to look as far as I go. But I do email you, phone call you when I can and I've sent out several emails in the last few weeks in reference to this issue. I think Gold Cross is a good corporation, a good company and I don't have anything personal against Gold Cross. I don't have anything personal against anyone. I do represent the taxpayers in the best of my ability of this political subdivision and I think that regardless of who the service provider is that they want to get paid and they want to get paid fairly. The taxpayers want fairness too. The users of ambulance service provider want a certain level of service and I know that there are some challenges. I indicated some of them in

the email that I sent out to the Commission and the Mayor. On the wall is one of the challenges that's the ambulance that's waiting down at University, AU or Doctors that's trying to get a patient into the Emergency Room. I think that's an issue that as I stated in my comments to you in the email that we need to have the Augusta lobbyists working with Dr. Toomey in Atlanta to help out with that issue. That's not Gold Cross's necessarily blame altogether. But what Gold Cross could do is put some additional ambulances out there and I know that's a cost there. I made a recommendation that we give Gold Cross a 70% increase that would put you at approximately 1.2, 1.3 not 1.7 or 1.9. I think if you're going to give them 1.7 or 1.9 then we need to see receipts, you know. We talked about receipts from the old Mayor's office, you know, the former Mayor's office. We need to see receipts. That's all the taxpayers and the community want if we're going to give them additional funds. If we're going to give them additional funds, we want to see improvement in the service level. We've had commissioners to mention that if we don't do this deal, if we don't throw money at it that we're going to have folks to die out there in the community. Well, we have folks dying out in the community now so just to throw money at it I don't think is right. I think the money we throw at it should be justified with receipts and you know I understand that south Richmond you know we have a certain poverty level. I get that. But there's also many individuals live in south Richmond County that use ambulance service that have VA 100%, have white card, Savannah River Site. I don't think that we should be in the business of paying anybody's uncollectibles kist because they could not collect them. We run into this situation with indigent care when I was on the Board. We were paying an entity, I won't name it, \$8 million dollars a year. When we got through looking at it and dealing with it, we was able to cut them \$4 million dollars a year. So I'll close this by saying I have nothing personal with Gold Cross or any service provider. I have nothing personal with any commissioner on the decision that they make but I do have something personal when it comes to representing the taxpayers and the users of the ambulance services in Augusta Richmond County and I think it's unfair to those individuals that use this service to have no shows or two hours to wait on ambulance services. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, former commissioner Todd. Thank you so much, sir. The Chair now recognizes former commissioner, Dennis Williams, from the 2nd. Commissioner, for the record please state your name and address please.

Mr. Williams: Dennis Williams, 2590 Richmond Hill Road, 30906.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, sir, you have five minutes.

Mr. Williams: I'll be quick. One of my concerns with rising this afternoon is to ensure or to see if there's been an improvement in the response time to emergency vehicles to different sites. Now I bring this up because I have seen plenty myself where the ambulance is taking at least 30 to 45 minutes to arrive on scene and in some cases not even arriving. So my concern is that. If we're going to use taxpayers' money to provide a subsidy, we need to ensure that the service is there for our patients. I personally have nothing wrong with Gold Cross. They picked me up one time when I had a problem and took me to the hospital. That's fine but we need to make sure that our response times are beneficial to the public as a whole. I also want to make sure that the Commission ensures that the vendor provide us with the data that we discussed in many of the conversations that this data will be a permanent part and a fixture of the records meaning how

patients and different ways like that and going to the individual invoicing process instead of paying, giving the subsidy as a whole it will be paid out in increments once a quarter or whatever way the group decides on. And we wanted to ensure that the provider is providing the service that we need in our community. It's a good provider like I said. The only problem that I see and I've heard a lot of complaints from people is about the response time so if we can improve the response time, not just adding on two or three more vehicles during peak time, but providing the service, getting to the site early instead of later. Thank you very much and a pleasant afternoon.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, commissioner. The Chair recognizes one last individual, former commissioner John Clarke.

Mr. Clarke: I wasn't prepared to say anything but John Clarke, 3308 Sandpiper Lane, Augusta, Georgia, District 7.

Mr. Mayor: Mr. Clarke, you have five minutes.

Mr. Clarke: Thank you, sir. My commissioner is Sean Frantom and Sean has put out some figures that I think every citizen of Augusta should look at those figures and see exactly what they state. Your eyes would be opened. Commissioner Guilfoyle made a statement a while ago about what it would cost to go into the ambulance business. It would be phenomenal. Those figures are going to be forthcoming pretty shortly. I remember a time when under Sammie Sias, Chris James and a couple of other people when Chris James was chairman of the EMS committee. They had an impromptu called meeting that they thought they were going to pull the zone and that the Fire Department under Chris James would get the zone. They were shocked when Commissioner Brandon Garrett and myself walked into the room. The temperature changed. They backed away from it. You say we need to have a conversation. What do you think has been going on for the last few years. There's been nothing but a conversation and it goes back and forth and back and forth. And the same people that used to be on the Commission that was against Gold Cross are now making their phone calls and they're writing their emails and they're telling the new commissioners and other commissioners what's going to happen to you if you vote for Gold Cross. And that's fine. That's the way politics are. Glad I'm not doing it anymore. Thank you, Wayne. Augusta has got to come to the realization that we cannot afford to go into the ambulance business. We have got to put it out. Gold Cross has been doing a fabulous job and I want ya'll to remember during COVID how many vaccinations Gold Cross gave to these citizens. Think about that. Gold Cross has been an excellent partner to every citizen in Augusta, Georgia whether you back them, agreed with them or not. They've been a great partner. It's time to get off the pot and do something. Thank you.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Commissioner. So obviously you've still got to come back to me, sir.

Mr. Mayor: Wait a second, sir. We've obviously had an opportunity to address everybody in this Commission as well as some folks on the floor. It's almost time to vote on this and we keep going around and around so there are some people in the queue. Please keep it brief as we need to move on. So, Commissioner Williams, you're up, sir.

Mr. Williams: Yes, sir. Everybody has been talking today and you tried to put me on ice but I'm okay. When I think about the calls that I get, someone told me the other day that some lady died waiting on the ambulance at Kroger. I know that my sister-in-law had a stroke the other day last week and it took the ambulance over an hour to get there. I know of an incident where a lady came all the way from Savannah before the ambulance could get to her husband. I know of another incident where a man fell and hit his head and his head was bleeding and the ambulance never showed up and his son put him in the car, I think that was Bob Hale, and they called me. I know of another incident where a lady's life was in the balance and the ambulance never showed up. The Augusta Fire Department showed up and stabilized her and they put her in the car and what have you. Those are the people that I'm fighting for. I'm fighting for those people who have or can't say anything about the EMS service. I'm fighting for those people who want to be up here, who want to vote. Why should we reward someone who is not doing the job. If they were doing what they needed to do, I would have no problem. But they're not. You're asking for a really, really big raise and I don't think Augusta really has, you go in your rainy day fund and we'll probably end up having to have to raise taxes next year. We're talking about if they pull away. We'll have service. I just want what's fair for Augusta. You're getting \$607,000 right now. Let me tell you I'm connected with a medical facility myself and we get payments for indigent care but we get nowhere near a million dollars. Now I know that someone sent some statistics and said maybe 10,000 people from Augusta didn't pay their bill last year but Augusta has over 200,000 people in Augusta so if 10,000 didn't pay their bill you've still got 190,000 out there. Also during the pandemic, what have you, John Clarke said they gave out a lot of shots. They did and I do appreciate them so much, but they also received money from the government I'm pretty sure that they did to do that. So they're doing what they should do. They're just not doing it good enough. Now somebody said that maybe they're over at the hospital because they don't, they won't release them or what have you. Well, somebody told me the other day that Gold Cross only has three ambulances in the zone. I don't know if that's true but it was told to me so don't try to sue me. Isn't that right, Mr. Rich? Somebody told me that Gold Cross only has three ambulances in the zone. I don't know which means they're not fulfilling what they should if that's true. I don't know. But what I will say is that when I ran, I ran to do the business of the people. I ran to do what's right for the people. I ran to do what the people need and not somebody just want to give a buddy. You've got people and commissioners running over there, they're meeting with Gold Cross and they're bringing contracts back and they know what's going on before anybody else knows what's going on. They've got the statistics. You ask them for statistics, they won't give you the statistics or what have you and then when you ask something, they've got them in their pocket because they've already met with Gold Cross and the other folks out there or what have you. My thing is Augusta is a great place to live. It's just a few things we've got to get right. I don't call anybody's name and I don't expect anybody to call my name. Keep the name out of your mouth. But you've got some people that have been walking around trying to intimidate people just like the commissioner from the first said, somebody told him and I know that to be a fact that he was going to be a one-term commissioner if he didn't vote for this. As far as I'm concerned, you can vote me out if this is going to be the tell tale of the (inaudible) because I ain't voting for it as long as it's not right. And this contract that Brandon Garrett brought forth nobody authorized him to bring that contract forward. We authorized the Administrator and the Attorney to negotiate a contract and that's the one we need to vote on and I say we need to make a decision on that, Mr. Mayor. Thank you.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, commissioner from the 5th. In the queue is the commissioner from the 8th, Commissioner Garrett.

Mr. Garrett: Thank you, Mayor. In regards to the contract that was presented, we've already stated that this contract that I sent in was basically the cleaned up version from the negotiations back and forth between Gold Cross and the administration and legal. The only reason that I submitted the way I did is because we never received an update from our Administrator or legal because they claimed they did not have any direction from us. So with that being said, I'm going to put a motion on the floor but also I want to respond and ask a question up here. Out of the ten of us or eleven of us sitting up here, how many of us have actually read the various contracts that have been put in front of us? Raise your hand, please.

Mr. Williams: Okay, Mr. Mayor, before we do that we've got to --

Mr. Mayor: Commissioner from the 5th, commissioner from the 5th, stand down, sir. You're out of order. You're out of order, sir.

Mr. Williams: I'm just telling you we need to do that, Mayor.

Mr. Mayor: You're out of order, sir. You are out of order, commissioner from the 5th. This is a warning that you're out of order.

Mr. Williams: I'm just telling you that we need to determine which contract that we're going to vote on.

Mr. Mason: Legal, point of order.

Mr. Williams: Like Marion Williams said, you can't put me out.

Ms. McKnight: Yes, you can.

Mr. Williams: No, you can't.

Mr. Mayor: Commissioner from the 8th, are you done?

Mr. Garrett: No, I'm not done. Thank you, Mayor, and I apologize to the public that is watching this. We're trying to present ourselves in a professional way, but anyway, here is the motion that I want us all to hear and listen closely. The motion is to approve the contract with Gold Cross EMS as presented by the Administrator with the following: 8 ambulances 24 hours a day housed in the fire stations, 1 QRV 24 hours a day, 2 additional QRVs during peak hours as stated in the contract, \$1.95 million dollar inducement paid immediately, a \$1.75 million dollar subsidy paid annually, 120-day grace period as agreed to in the contract, annual financial disclosure as well as weekly updates as well, no performance bond, Augusta may terminate this contract if they are not awarded the Richmond County zone as Gold Cross has agreed to relinquish and help Augusta get and a three-year contract with a three-year renewal. That is my motion.

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

Mr. Frantom: Second.

Mr. Mayor: Madam Administrator.

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

The Clerk: Whose second was that? Was that you, Mr. Frantom?

Mr. Mayor: Madam Clerk, we have a motion and a second. Before we proceed, did you have time to record that?

The Clerk: Yes. Commissioner Garrett submitted a hard copy which I will put on the screen.

Mr. Mayor: Please.

Mr. Williams: Point of order, Mr. Mayor.

Mr. Mayor: Hold tight, please.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Mayor, I have a substitute motion.

Mr. Mayor: Wait a second, just let her get it up on the screen. Okay, we have it up on the screen. Madam Clerk has it recorded. The Chair is going to recognize the commissioner from the 1st.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. These, I thought you just recognized me.

Mr. Mayor: Hold on tight.

Mr. Johnson: I'll wait, yes, sir. The Chair is going to recognize the commissioner from the 5th on a point of order but you have to be brief.

Mr. Williams: What is brief? A minute, three?

Mr. Mayor: 30 seconds.

Mr. Williams: What's the \$1.95 inducement for? For the zone?

Mr. Mayor: I'll ask the commissioner from the 8th to answer that question. Unfortunately, commissioner from the 5th, that is not a point of order.

Mr. Williams: Okay, but the inducement is for them giving us the zone, correct? But that's illegal so that needs to be taken off the board. 1.95, they're trying to give them 1.95 for them giving up the zone. That's illegal.

Mr. Johnson: If I may, Mr. Mayor.

Mr. Mayor: Attorney Brown.

Mr. Williams: Attorney Brown, that's illegal.

Mr. Brown: I have expressed to doing staff meetings with some of commissioners and the Mayor in preparation for this meeting, I've expressed my concern about Augusta paying an inducement to Gold Cross to give up the zone. The basis for my legal concern is that one, it would be inducing a company who is in contract with the state, we would be using local funds as a political subdivision of Georgia to induce someone to break or end a contract with the state. Secondly and even more importantly, we would, this inducement appears to be a violation of the gratuity clause of the constitution of the State of Georgia. There is no demonstrated value in that Gold Cross cannot give Augusta the zone. I fail to see the value that Augusta would get from Gold Cross releasing the zone.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Attorney Brown. The Chair recognizes, I want to ask Steven Vincent to come up and address a question –

Mr. Williams: You know, Mr. Mayor, I'm so sick and tired of ya'll texting back and forth, I'm so sick and tired of ya'll texting back and forth.

Mr. Mayor: Stand down, sir. Stand down.

Mr. Williams: I'll stand down but I'm so sick and tired of ya'll texting back and forth –

Mr. Mayor: Stand down. Stand down, out of order. Out of order.

Mr. Williams: I'm so sick and tired of ya'll texting back and forth to bring somebody up. He had his phone in his hand back there. I'm watching him. He's texting him to come up.

Mr. Mayor: Out of order.

Mr. Williams: I don't care.

Mr. Vincent: It was my wife who I was texting. Thank you.

Mr. Mayor: Out of order.

Mr. Williams: I don't care if you texted –

Mr. Vincent: I want to make two statements. Commissioner Williams, you've been in my office and I've shown you the stats.

Mr. Williams: When I was a first year and whatever, Butch Gallop brought me to your office so I'm so far away from that now. It's my fourth year.

Mr. Vincent: But to say you've never seen stats or statistics, I've actually shown you EOBs from Medicaid –

Mr. Williams: Never.

Mr. Mayor: Mr. Vincent, I just need you to answer the question what is the purpose of the inducement?

Mr. Vincent: The inducement is to increase our staffing. You may have seen what Aiken County EMS did yesterday. They are so short-staffed that they put out that they are switching to a 24/7 schedule. That's going to be millions of dollars to be able to accommodate that to increase their staffing. We're looking at doing the same exact thing is to increase our staffing, buy more equipment, buy more vehicles to put more ambulances, put more quick response vehicles on the road so we can decrease the response times that you're up here discussing right now. That is what the inducement is for. The inducement is to increase staffing. It is not to give up the zone. It is not any type of gratuitous for past performance or anything like that. It is to increase our staffing, purchase equipment and overall improve the quality of service.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, sir. The Chair recognizes legal counsel.

Mr. Brown: If Gold Cross is saying that or if the Commission is saying that the inducement is for a specific thing, it is yet to be stated by the Commission what the inducement is for. It's simply saying an inducement. In the prior meeting it was specifically stated by certain commissioners to induce them to give up the zone. That is my legal concern, however, if the inducement is for something other than that, staff needs an opportunity to place that in writing in the contract so that the Commission will have some way to do what the Commission says it wants to do and that's to have accountability. If the inducement is given without a specific promise or commitment from Gold Cross, the inducement will remain a gratuity. It has to be designated what the inducement is for.

Mr. Mayor: The Chair recognizes the Clerk of the Commission.

The Clerk: Sir?

Mr. Mayor: Oh, I'm sorry.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Mayor. Also, they took out the performance bond. The performance bond is for doing your job and being on time.

Mr. Mayor: Please stand down, sir. I'll come back to you. Just give me a second. Next in the queue is the commissioner from the 1st.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Even with these terms on the screen, again, we're going back to the same conversation about these figures, these questions, these recommendations and so I think one good meeting, and this is the form of a substitute motion, that we allow staff to go back into negotiations with Gold Cross. Obviously, there are some mediums that Gold Cross would be willing to go with, there are some areas that we would be willing to go with. I believe that having us get to a point of having a real conversation with commissioners not meddling. We have a lot of conversations about too much commission meddling. We've had that conversation, Mr. Mayor. And so I think to get the Commission out of the way, if that's a such thing, but to get the Commission out of the way we need to go into negotiations, have our staff go back into negotiations with Gold Cross to bring us a contract that both sides will be ready to support and that's the form of a substitute motion.

Ms. Scott: Second.

Mr. Williams: Second.

Mr. Mayor: All right, so I have a substitute motion and a second. Before we move forward, there is a commissioner that has not been recognized and that's the commissioner from the 2nd. Commissioner Pulliam.

Ms. Pulliam: I can hold, thank you for recognizing me, Mayor Johnson. I can hold my question until I know whether or not this second motion passes because it, the substitute motion passes, because it's in reference to that.

Mr. Mayor: Madam Clerk, we have a substitute motion and a second.

Mr. Garrett: Mayor, I need to add these statements as recommended by the attorney to the original motion.

Mr. Mayor: Madam Clerk, I think the order is we need to do the substitute motion first before we can add that item to the original motion. Am I correct?

The Clerk: Okay, we're going to vote on the substitute first? And he wants to amend the original motion to include the attorney's comments regarding the position of inducement?

Mr. Garrett: Yes. I was wanting to state what the inducement was for. It's not a gratuity. It's for the purchase of vehicles, labor and training and equipment.

Mr. Mayor: Let's do the substitute motion first and then we'll go back and address this so we have a motion –

Mr. Frantom: I need clarity on the substitute. Is the substitute motion mean they're going to go meet right now and we're going to come back in 30 minutes?

Mr. Williams: No.

Mr. Johnson: That's unrealistic.

Mr. Frantom: Okay, all right. Because we're at the end.

Mr. Mayor: Commissioner from the 1st, I'm going to ask you a question. Can we put a time limit on your substitute motion as to when we could get back to this body?

Mr. Johnson: I want to defer that to the staff, Mr. Mayor, because I do believe they would know when they could meet. We have a meeting on the table with the School Board, we have a meeting on the table with a few others, so I want to make sure that they have ample time to go to the table with Gold Cross to have a conversation and bring something back to this body so I would defer that to staff how long it would take for negotiations to conclude. Here's the thing. This is another thing. Again, Mr. Mayor and to my colleagues, we're saying that we want to have a conversation, we're saying that we want to finish this, we want to get it done, we want to put an end to it. Let our staff do their job.

Mr. Williams: Exactly.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Commissioner. Madam Clerk, we have a motion and we have a second and we're ready to vote.

The Clerk: We're voting?

Mr. Williams: Substitute motion.

The Clerk: Substitute motion.

Mr. Mayor: Can you re-read the motion just to make for clarity, Madam Clerk?

The Clerk: Substitute motion is to allow staff to enter into negotiation with Gold Cross and bring back an acceptable agreement to the Commission from both parties.

Ms. McKnight, Mr. Mason, Mr. Frantom, Mr. Garrett and Mr. Guilfoyle vote No.
Motion ties 5-5.

Mr. Mayor: Madam Clerk, does that mean that I get the opportunity to vote?

The Clerk: Yes, sir.

Mr. Mayor: I vote No.

The Mayor votes No.
Motion fails 5-6.

Mr. Mayor: All right, so the substitute motion fails. Commissioner from the 8th, you mentioned on the idea of adding something to the original motion.

Mr. Garrett: Yes, and for the inducement we need to add that the inducement is for equipment, vehicles, and training as stated by Gold Cross.

Mr. Williams: Well, since he's talking, Mr. Mayor, I was told by –

Mr. Mayor: Give me a second, sir. Madam Clerk, have you had the opportunity, you good?

The Clerk: Yes, sir.

Mr. Mayor: The Chair recognizes the commissioner from the 5th.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, sir. One, I was told yesterday by, you know what, we met with two or three people yesterday and we were told yesterday that the inducement was for the zone. That's one. Two, he took out the performance bond that is in the Administrator's contract so the performance bond, that means that they can be late or whatever. They won't be taxed. Now the third thing is that you've got in here 120-day ramp up. Why do you need 120 days to ramp up when they've been doing this for years? They don't need 120 days to ramp up. That's three. And the four, the man asked for a meeting so we could talk this out. A lot of us don't even know what's in the Administrator's contract and a lot of us definitely don't know what's in the contract that they gave us the other day an hour or so before the meeting. So you really need to know what's in the contracts before you vote. That's all Mr. Johnson is saying. We need to know what's in the contract. Not something you jammed down our throats and that's what you're trying to do today. Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Call for the question, Mr. Mayor.

Mr. Williams: You can –

Mr. Mason: Call for the question, Mr. Mayor.

Mr. Williams: Call for the question. You've still got people in the queue, sir. You've still got people in the queues.

Mr. Mayor: I want to recognize the commissioner from the 2nd because she's been our quiet angel down there. I want to give her an opportunity to speak.

Mr. Williams: And you've got the commissioner from the 9th in the queue.

Mr. Mayor: Commissioner from the 2nd, you have to stand down. There's been a call for the question which means we're prepared to vote on the original motion.

Mr. Brown: Not quite, Mr. Mayor. Commissioner Mason called for the question. In that there is disagreement of that, the Commission, to call for the question means to, a request to end the discussion. The Commission has to vote whether to end the discussion. If six members vote

to end the discussion, the discussion is ended. If six members do not vote to end the discussion, the discussion may continue.

Mr. Mayor: Madam Clerk, we're ready to vote.

The Clerk: We're voting?

Mr. Brown: On the call for the question.

Mr. Williams: It'll be easier just to recognize the people, sir.

Mr. Mayor: Madam Clerk, let's vote for the call.

The Clerk: The Parliamentarian has issued a clarification so we're voting on the call for the question.

Ms. McKnight, Mr. Mason, Mr. Frantom, Mr. Garrett, Ms. Scott and Mr. Guilfoyle vote Yes.
Mr. Johnson, Mr. Williams, Mr. Lewis and Ms. Pulliam vote No.
Motion carries 6-4.

Mr. Mayor: All right, Madam Clerk, let's vote and I will remind the audience and my colleagues on the Commission that this is people's house and we're going to be respectful regardless of how the vote goes. Madam Clerk, can you read the motion please?

The Clerk: The motion is to approve the contract with Gold Cross EMS presented by the Administrator with the following: 8 ambulances 24 hours a day housed in Fire stations, one QRV 24 hours a day, two additional QRVs during peak hours, \$1.95M inducement for equipment, vehicles and training immediately, \$1.75 subsidy, 120-day grace period ramped up period and annual financial disclosures, no performance bond, Augusta may terminate contract if they are not awarded Richmond County zone, a three-year contract with a three-year renewal.

Mr. Mayor: We're ready to vote.

Mr. Johnson, Ms. Pulliam, Mr. Lewis and Ms. Scott vote No.
Mr. Williams abstains.
Motion fails 5-4-1.

Mr. Garrett: I'd like to call for a vote of reconsideration and let's try to make a firm decision up here today and not leave it this way. You abstained so that's not trying.

Ms. McKnight: I agree.

Mr. Mayor: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for being here today. I know this isn't always pretty but it's our government at work and I really appreciate your time and have a great day and this meeting is adjourned.

[MEETING ADJOURNED]

Lena J. Bonner
Clerk of Commission

CERTIFICATION:

I, Lena J. Bonner, Clerk of Commission, hereby certify that the above is a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Called Meeting of the Augusta Richmond County Commission held on January 24, 2023.

Clerk of Commission

