OFFICIAL BALLOT PROPOSITION

FREMONT COUNTY, WYOMING

Shall Fremont County, Wyoming, impose one-half of one percent (0.5%) countywide sales and use tax, as provided by W.S. 39-15-203, for the specific purpose of funding, operating, maintaining, and improving ambulance and emergency medical services (EMS) within Fremont County, including staffing, equipment, training, facilities, and related system needs?

The estimated total amount of revenue to be collected from this tax is **$14,000,000** over a period of **four (4) years**.

This tax shall be in effect for a period of **four (4) years**, commencing as provided by law following voter approval.

☐ **FOR the county sales and use tax**
☐ **AGAINST the county sales and use tax**

Report to FCAG: Background and Rationale for a Dedicated ½% Sales Tax for Ambulance Services in Fremont County

Introduction

Fremont County is facing a long-term structural funding problem for ambulance services. The current system is expensive, uneven across geography, and increasingly difficult to sustain through the county general fund alone. At the same time, public support for any new tax proposal is shaped by voter distrust following the prior optional economic development sales tax, which many residents believed lacked transparency and directed too much public money to private business projects rather than clearly defined essential services. Any new proposal for ambulance funding must therefore do two things: first, clearly document the current need for stable ambulance funding; and second, distinguish this proposal from the other by making its purpose narrow, transparent, and accountable.

Background: Current State of Ambulance Services in Fremont County

Over the past decade, Fremont County's ambulance system has shifted away from a largely volunteer-based public model into a more structured, subsidized system under private management. According to the FCAG Joint Committee's 2025 working report, the 2014/2015 transition moved the county away from traditional public oversight and toward a hybrid Advanced Life Support/Basic Life Support model operated under private management, while the county continued to carry major infrastructure responsibilities. The same report states that Fremont County currently subsidizes ambulance service at approximately $1.8 million annually from the general fund, while the estimated true annual cost of running an effective countywide ambulance system is closer to $3.5 million to $3.8 million per year.

The funding gap has real service consequences. FCAG's report found that after the transition to private management, volunteer-staffed ambulances in places such as Jeffrey City, Shoshoni, Dubois, and Pavillion were discontinued. Residents in those areas became dependent on ambulances responding from Riverton or Lander, leading in many cases to response times of 30 to 45 minutes or longer. The report specifically notes that this has increased emergency risk and eroded public confidence in the system.

County 10's reporting on the FCAG process in late 2025 likewise quoted committee leadership saying the current cost picture is difficult to fully discern because revenues collected on behalf of ambulance services are not fully transparent to the public, calling that uncertainty a "black box." The same reporting noted that the committee concluded, based on state health data and comparison with other Wyoming EMS agencies, that

Fremont County ambulance operations cost more than $3.5 million annually, while the county budget included only about $1.8 million.

In early 2026, the Joint Committee's public presentations estimated that a proposed three-quarter percent tax would generate about $6.5 million annually, with about $3.5 million intended for ambulance services. Those public discussions confirm the scale of the current ambulance funding need and reinforce that the county's present funding structure is not sufficient if the goal is dependable countywide coverage.

Why the Existing System Is Not Sustainable

The present model relies heavily on Fremont County property-tax-supported general fund dollars, even though ambulance service benefits not only property owners but also visitors, commuters, travelers, seasonal workers, and others who use county roads, businesses, and recreation areas. County officials publicly noted in 2026 that shifting ambulance support to sales tax would spread the burden more broadly because "everybody pays," rather than placing the cost primarily on local property taxpayers.

This issue is becoming more urgent because Fremont County is also dealing with broader revenue pressure. Public reporting in 2026 noted concerns about reduced property tax revenue and the resulting stress on county-funded services. In that setting, continuing to fund ambulance operations from the general fund alone creates a crowd-out effect, where EMS competes directly with other core county responsibilities.

Community Distrust: Why Voters Are Skeptical

Any proposal for ambulance funding must acknowledge the political reality that voters recently rejected renewal of the county's prior ½% economic development sales tax. Official county election materials show the 2024 general election results were posted by Fremont County, and contemporaneous reporting stated the renewal failed by a significant margin, with 9,342 votes against and 7,087 votes in favor.

That defeat did not occur because residents rejected all public investment. It occurred, in large part, because the prior tax was viewed by many as too broad and too loosely governed. Under that tax, collections were used for transportation services but also for economic development grants. County 10 reported that since April 2021, 30% of collections went to transportation services and 70% went to economic development projects, and that some community members openly questioned how that 70% had been spent.

Cowboy State Daily reported that the broad "economic development" definition allowed public dollars to be directed to numerous private businesses, organizations, and projects, which caused substantial public backlash. That article specifically described community anger over public subsidies of private businesses and said that outcry drove local governments to rework the distribution formula in 2024.

The Lander Chamber also publicly acknowledged this trust problem, writing in September 2024 that a "negative perception" had developed among roughly half of local voters regarding how the county and municipalities distributed the proceeds to businesses. The Chamber noted that FCAG changed the memorandum of understanding in response to those concerns by reducing the share going to economic development and adding ambulance service as a specific category. It also stated that future criteria needed to be clearer, more transparent, and more purpose specific.

By 2025, calls for greater scrutiny had intensified. Public reporting showed residents were asking for audits or pauses in grant awards, citing concerns about transparency, whether funds reimbursed past expenses, whether some funded projects later closed, and whether there had been overlapping awards from multiple programs. I have not found a public audit establishing illegal misuse, so the most accurate characterization is that these issues created perceived misuse and weak accountability, which in turn damaged voter trust.

Key Distinction: Ambulance Service Is Not the Same as the Prior Economic Development Tax

That history matters because a tax for ambulance service should not be presented as a continuation of the old model. It should be presented as the opposite: a narrowly defined, essential-service tax with a measurable public safety purpose. Ambulance service is a core life-safety function. It is not speculative, discretionary, or project based. Residents may disagree about grants to private businesses, but they understand the immediate necessity of emergency response when a loved one is injured, critically ill, or facing a life-threatening event. FCAG's own committee said ambulance service was the most important of the key services under review and described it as a "moral imperative."

The county's own analysis supports that distinction. The FCAG report framed ambulance service as a countywide public safety need, documented the coverage gaps in rural areas, and highlighted the inequity that occurs when communities are taxed into a system that cannot consistently reach them in a timely manner. A properly structured ambulance tax would directly address that problem by creating a dedicated funding source for one clearly defined service.

Why a Dedicated ½% Ambulance Tax May Be More Defensible Than a Broader ¾% Tax

Public reporting on the 2026 proposal shows one source of controversy is that the newer proposed ¾% tax would combine ambulance service, public transportation, and commercial air service into one ballot question. Even supporters acknowledged that allocation details were not locked into the ballot language, and critics argued the distribution was too vague. Dubois officials, for example, publicly objected that the resolution did not clearly specify how money would be allocated among municipalities and services.

A dedicated ½% ambulance-only tax could be easier to explain and potentially easier for voters to trust because it avoids the baggage tied to airport subsidies, bus funding, and prior economic-development grants. It would also let FCAG make a straightforward case: this revenue is for ambulance operations only, it cannot be diverted to unrelated projects, and the public will be able to see exactly how it is spent. That kind of narrow purpose is likely more responsive to the lessons from the failed 2024 renewal. The public record shows that ambiguity and broad spending authority were central reasons support eroded.

Recommended Principles for Any Ambulance Tax Proposal

To succeed, a new proposal should be explicitly built around the failures of the prior tax. At minimum, it should include:

1. Single-purpose language.
Revenue should be dedicated to ambulance and EMS operations, capital equipment, staffing, training, coverage expansion, and readiness only. It should not be used for general economic development grants or loosely defined projects. This directly addresses the broad spending concerns that surrounded the prior tax.

2. Public accountability and reporting.
FCAG or the county should commit to quarterly public reporting showing revenue collected, expenditures, subsidy amounts, staffing levels, response times, and coverage by area. One of the recurring criticisms of the current system is lack of clear visibility into *revenues and operations.*

3. Geographic equity.
Voters in outlying areas need to know what they are buying. The FCAG report makes clear that service gaps in places like Shoshoni, Jeffrey City, Dubois and Pavillion have damaged trust. The proposal should include specific service expectations for rural and outlying communities, not just Riverton and Lander.

4. Independent oversight.
A citizen oversight board, FCAG review structure, or joint powers governance model should be considered so that ambulance funding is not perceived as a black box. This is especially important given public skepticism about prior grant-making and the current opacity around revenues.

5. Sunset and voter reauthorization.
A limited term with mandatory renewal gives voters leverage and helps rebuild trust. One reason optional taxes can succeed is when residents know they are not permanent blank checks. This also forces future public reporting and performance review.

In addition to establishing a dedicated funding source, Fremont County should evaluate the structure of ambulance service delivery by reopening the Request for Proposal (RFP) process to qualified providers beyond the current Frontier contract. While Frontier has maintained continuity of service, persistent concerns remain regarding coverage gaps, response times in outlying areas, staffing challenges, and overall system performance. As the County considers implementing a new tax to stabilize and expand EMS funding, it is both fiscally responsible and operationally necessary to ensure that the service model itself is the best available option. A competitive RFP process would allow the County to compare alternative models—including public, private, hospital-based, and hybrid systems—against clearly defined performance metrics such as response times, geographic coverage, staffing levels, clinical quality, and cost efficiency. This approach promotes accountability, encourages innovation, and ensures taxpayers are investing in a system that delivers the highest level of service possible. If new funding is to be approved by voters, it should be paired with a commitment to pursue the most effective and sustainable ambulance service model for all communities in Fremont County.

Conclusion

Fremont County's ambulance system has a documented structural funding gap, a history of reduced rural coverage, and growing strain on county general fund resources. FCAG's own work indicates the county is currently funding ambulance services at about $1.8 million annually when a more realistic operational need is likely $3.5 to $3.8 million. That gap is too large to ignore and too important to leave unresolved.

At the same time, voters are not starting from a blank slate. The failed economic development tax left a legacy of distrust because many residents believed public money was spent too broadly, too opaquely, and too often on private or questionable projects. Whether or not every criticism was justified, the political effect was real: trust eroded, and the tax failed.

For that reason, any ambulance funding proposal should be clearly separated from the prior economic development model. A dedicated ½% sales tax for ambulance services can be framed not as "more of the same," but as a corrected approach: narrow in purpose, transparent in administration, equitable in countywide benefit, and accountable to the voters who pay for it.