

City paramedic service remains on hold

Written by Kristyn Halbig Ziehm
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Port officials anxious to begin program that was expected to be operating Jan. 1 but still requires state approval

Although Port Washington officials had hoped to offer paramedic services starting Jan. 1, paperwork has stalled the initiative, officials said this week.

“I was hoping we’d have this done and we’d be up and running,” Fire Chief Mark Mitchell said.

Instead, he said, the department is in a wait-and-see mode as the state continues to review its paperwork.

“We’re just chomping at the bit,” he said. “We’re ready to go. We’ve got people who are frustrated. They’re ready to go when we get the green light. They want to use their expertise.”

On Monday, Mitchell told the Police and Fire Commission that the department was still waiting for the Wisconsin Department of Health to accept the city’s feasibility study — the first step in getting the paramedic program approved.

“Right now, they’re still sitting on the feasibility study,” he said. “We’ve jumped through every hoop. I don’t see why they haven’t moved on it.”

But on Tuesday afternoon, the state notified him verbally that the feasibility study had been accepted, Mitchell told Ozaukee Press.

Now, he said, the department must submit to the state its operating plan and application for paramedic status.

“We’ve had them ready to go,” he said, adding he plans to submit them as soon as possible.

The fire department worked on its feasibility study for months, crafting it to fit the template requested by the state, then submitted it for review in September, Mitchell said.

The department waited until September to submit the application because officials knew the state would be inundated with relicensing applications at the end of June, Mitchell said.

“We figured by September they’d be beyond that,” he said.

The state sought revisions to the study after it changed its template, and those were submitted in November, Mitchell said.

Since then, he said, the department had heard virtually nothing from the state.

The department has four paramedics ready to staff the service once it is approved, Mitchell said, and it has received inquiries from other paramedics who are interested in working for the

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department on a part-time basis.

Even though some department members have paramedic certification, they cannot operate as paramedics in Port because the state hasn't approved paramedic status for the ambulance service, he noted.

Both EMTs and paramedics provide significant care for patients, but paramedics are able to conduct more advanced procedures and administer many more medications, including those for pain and cardiac care.

Paramedics, who spend hours of training for cardiac cases, can also use medications to treat these patients, and that makes a big difference in their care, Mitchell said.

The city plans to phase in its paramedic program over two years.

Initially, the department will offer paramedic services from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Fridays. The hours will be expanded until paramedic services are offered around the clock.

Other than the state approval, all that's needed to get the program started are the medications that paramedics can administer. Mitchell said these won't be purchased until the service is ready to go.

If approved by the state, Port Washington would be the second municipality in Ozaukee County to offer paramedic services. The Village of Thiensville has been operating a paramedic service for the past six years.