

Commission agrees to have ambulance officials prepare feasibility plan for review by State Department of Health

A study to consider the feasibility of a paramedic unit in Port Washington will be undertaken in the coming months.

A committee of ambulance officials will conduct the study and create a plan for the State Department of Health, the Port Washington Police and Fire Commission agreed last week.

“I’ve already had several positive comments about the idea of becoming a paramedic unit,” Commission Chairman Rick Nelson said April 12.

The committee consists of Fire Chief Mark Mitchell, Deputy Chief Jim Riley, emergency medical technician Mari Beth Barbuch — who is training to become a paramedic — and commission member Bruce Becker.

Currently, the Thiensville Fire Department has the only paramedic unit in Ozaukee County. Mequon is also exploring the concept of adding paramedic service.

Riley said he has been looking at other department’s paramedic plans, noting that they vary from a 300-page document to the 12-page report Thiensville submitted.

The study would includes an inventory of staff, vehicles and equipment, expected training and scheduling as well as input from the public. Mitchell said.

“There’s an awful lot of behind-the-scenes, administrative stuff that needs to be put into motion,” he said.

“We’re not reinventing the wheel. There are a lot of these (plans) that have been done before that we can draw on. And we’re fortunate we’re EMT-I (emergency medical technician-intermediate) certified already so we’re not making a quantum leap.

We’re at the second-highest level trying to become the highest level.”

A public hearing on the feasibility plan must be held before it is submitted to the

Committee to study Port paramedic plan

Written by Kristyn Halbig Ziehm
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state, Mitchell noted.

The committee will meet with Tom Dietrich, the county's director of emergency medical services, to discuss the concept with him, Mitchell said.

Dietrich, who wrote the protocols for Thiensville's service, has already said he backs the idea, Mitchell said.

The committee will also look at the financial implications of a paramedic service, he said.

"What is the total cost going to be? I don't know," Mitchell said. "But I don't see the cost being on the taxpayer but on the users."

To determine how much revenue could be realized by a paramedic unit, the committee will meet with LifeQuest, the company that handles ambulance billing, he said.

The cost of the program is not expected to be excessive because the city already has much of the equipment needed and paramedics are likely to be paid, on-call volunteers just like the current firefighters and EMTs are, Mitchell said.

"That's where we're saving a lot of money," he said, noting many paramedics are seeking part-time work. "They're chomping at the bit. Every week I hear from some more paramedics."

Approximately a dozen paramedics have expressed interest in working with the department — including three of its own EMTs who have paramedic certification and two others who are nearing the end of their training — Mitchell said.

Mitchell estimated the feasibility study and plan could be completed by the committee in May and sent to the state by July 1.

"I'm not going to carve that date in stone," he said, adding he's not sure how long the state review will take.

He would like to see the program operating by late this year or early 2011.