By KRISTIN SHAW

Town will honor local EMS contracts

Posted Tuesday, December 30 at 11:30 a.m.

SCHODACK—Despite entering into a "closest car" agreement with State Police, the town will not consider a similar contract with the county for ambulance services.

Supervisor Beth Secor wrote to Michael Dailey, chairman of the Regional Emergency Medical Advisory Committee, expressing the town's objection to the proposed advanced life support/EMS utilization plan.

"Therefore, the members of the Town Board are the commissioners of the district," she explained. "In this capacity, the board contracts with the Castleton Volunteer Ambulance and Nassau Ambulance for emergencies."

In turn, the ambulances contract for paid daytime crews and ALS from Empire ambulance.

"As the Empire personnel and vehicles are housed in these two facilities, their response time is second to none," said the supervisor. "It is my belief that we have experienced no issues of delayed response or inadequate patient care.

"Additionally, Rensselaer County has a countywide mutual aid plan if any agency is unable to respond and/or there is a mass casualty incident that would require many ambulances, EMTs and paramedics. Both basic life support agencies are an integral part of the county 911 system and mutual aid plan."

More importantly, according to the supervisor, Empire allows each host ambulance to bill for services rendered. If a patient has no insurance to cover the services, there is no further billing or expense to the patient.

"The Empire has worked closely with both ambulances to establish this type of billing policy to ease the financial burden on our residents and to assure the highest level of care," she said.

Mrs. Secor noted that patient care protocols promulgated by the state often require ALS as part of the EMS response.

"This type of care can be several thousand dollars. Our residents who finance, through their tax dollars, ambulance services should not have this additional burden placed on them by the county," she said. "Additionally, if our contracting agencies are forced to respond to other areas of the county, our residents will not receive the patient care they pay for and deserve."

Earlier in the year, Mr. Dailey representing the emergency medical services system council of the Hudson Mohawk Valley's, Inc., that services Rensselaer, Columbia, Albany, Greene, Saratoga and Schenectady counties wrote to County Executive Kathleen Jimino, to discuss concerns that were brought to the attention of the REMAC.

"As we have discussed in the past, EMS care in much of rural Rensselaer County is a fragmented process of small Basic Life Support EMS agencies," said Mr. Dailey. "As a result, Rensselaer County currently has more territory without primary ALS response than any other in the REMO region, yet the county has significant ALS resources."

The REMAC reiterated a standard level of care for the region in a memo to providers at the beginning of last year. This expectation is concurrent dispatch of ALS if the Emergency Medical Dispatch determinant was of high priority, "Charlie", "Delta" or "Echo."

"This has led to an interesting situation. BLS ambulance agencies entered into individual contracts with commercial providers to obtain coverage for ALS calls under the premise of mutual aid. In some cases, the result has been long responses past other potential ALS responders as these BLS ambulances await their contracted provider. In some of these situations, the patient could have had advanced care more quickly.

"The medical advisory committee respectfully suggests that this is not a mutual aid situation, but is actually advanced life support first response. Currently there are three entities authorized to provide advanced life support first response to the citizens of the outlying regions of Rensselaer County, excluding the cities of Troy and Rensselaer and the towns of East Greenbush and Brunswick."

Mr. Dailey explained that Empire Ambulance, Mohawk Ambulance and Northeast ALS each hold an operating certificate for this territory. Any of the three can be dispatched by county 911 dispatchers to calls throughout these regions.

He said there are two reasons the committee believes that the closest available ALS agency be dispatched.

"First and foremost, the patient deserves advanced level care in a timely manner. Second, the most dangerous part of public safety is emergency vehicle operation. A lengthy response is incredibly dangerous for the paramedic responding, as well as to the community at large."

"We suggest that the Rensselaer County EMS coordinator, representatives of these three agencies and other appropriate parties develop a plan that will allow and assure the closest ALS first response," he said.

According to Mr. Dailey, the council will respond to each high priority call in these areas. Associated with this, he said, there should be a plan to assure reasonable compensation from agencies that bill patients for EMS care, as well as reexamination of a mutual aid plan for ALS care that includes all the available ALS agencies in the county.

"We believe the county has the means and the authority to correct this situation by altering current dispatch procedures and dispatching ALS first response," he said.

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