Medic flights at issue for town

Colonie rethinks contract to place its EMS workers aboard State Police helicopters

By JIMMY VIELKIND, Staff writer

Last updated: 11:10 p.m., Thursday, July 10, 2008

COLONIE -- The Town Board Thursday night scheduled a public hearing to consider renegotiating a contract to provide paramedic services aboard State Police helicopters.

A similar agreement which has stood for 15 years was rescinded earlier this week by Supervisor Paula Mahan, who cited liability and cost issues in her decision.

Thirty uniformed members of the Colonie EMS Department lined the walls of the meeting room and stated their opposition to the cancellation, which will take effect Sept. 1.

``We don't understand what's going on here,'' said Gary Favro, an organizer with the union that represents Colonie EMS workers. ``It's a win-win situation. The level of care the medics bring to the Town of Colonie is phenomenal, because it's a higher level of training.''

The Lifeguard Air Rescue Program has placed Colonie town paramedics on State Police helicopters to respond to severe trauma, burn and rescue calls within the greater Capital Region since 1993. Supporters of the program said it has led to a higher level of training and care without seriously sapping town resources. The crews staffing helicopters also respond by ambulance to emergencies within Colonie.

Favro said the program generated more than $160,000 in revenue for the town in 2007. But Mahan said that...
revenue is far outweighed by the expense of training, equipment and overtime. She also was concerned about the potential liability in the event of a mishap.

``Our first obligation is to residents in the Town of Colonie,'’ Mahan said, noting that most of the 108 Lifeguard calls were not within the town. Neither Town Board approval nor a public hearing were required to cancel the contract, and some board members were concerned they were not adequately consulted in the decision.

The meeting started almost an hour late, but the EMS personnel waited. After an hour of public comment (all but one of those who spoke on the issue supported the program) a verbal resolution was introduced by Town Board Member Nicole Criscione-Szesnat that would require the cancellation of ‘‘any whole program’’ to be subjected to a public hearing and board vote.

The ambiguous resolution was eventually approved after a 30-minute recess in which Town Attorney Mike Maguilli advised board members against moving on the ambiguous resolution without greater consideration.

It was immediately rescinded by another resolution. The board then passed the resolution calling a public hearing on re-entering into an agreement for Lifeguard service on Aug. 14 at 7:05 p.m.

Three hours after the scheduled start time, the board then began to consider an agenda of 29 resolutions.

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