Chester fires its volunteer ambulance corps

Mobile Life Support takes over after town ends 64-year relationship with corps

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By Hema Easley
CHESTER — Town and village residents calling for an ambulance will now be served by a contracted commercial service.

On Wednesday, the town severed its 64-year relationship with the Chester Volunteer Ambulance Corps to provide emergency medical care. The service will now be provided by Mobile Life Support Services, which provides ambulance support to Goshen and Monroe.

“There was no notice or warning that the town was considering such drastic action,” the ambulance corps said in a statement.

Andrew Mayer, vice president of the corps, said he was trying to get information from the town.

But Chester Town Supervisor Alex Jamieson said the decision was months in the making, and town officials had several rounds of talks with the ambulance corps. The town was forced to make the tough decision because of complaints from seniors, residents, and police and fire officials about missed calls by the ambulance service, he said.

Jamieson also alluded to financial issues and communication problems with the volunteer ambulance corps. He said the town board’s liaison to the corps was not allowed to attend the volunteer agency’s meetings. He declined to elaborate further.

“There possibly could be litigation,” said Jamieson. “There have been ongoing issues with the corps for eight to nine months.”

Though Chester ambulance corps is a volunteer agency, it contracted with Care 1 EMS to respond to emergencies between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. Volunteers took over in the evenings and overnight, and during weekend.

In August, Care 1 EMS, was bought out, Mayer said, leading to a slowdown in responses. Two months ago, the corps contracted with another agency, and Mayer said the response improved.

“Once we had our own paid crew, we rebounded,” Mayer said.
However, by then the town had already decided to end the relationship. But it delayed the implementation because of a change town leadership and in leadership and a new administration.

For the last couple of days, Mobile Life Support ambulances have been parked outside town hall and are ready to respond to emergency calls. The ambulance corps will vacate its building on Laroe Road by Feb. 1, which will then house Mobile Life Support Services.

Mayer predicted that residents using the ambulance service would now be stuck with a bigger bill. But Jamieson disagreed. The change from a volunteer ambulance corps to a commercial one would have no impact on residents because the cost of an ambulance ride would still be paid by insurance companies, he said, just as it was paid when the service was provided by volunteers.

“Honestly, the service will be better,” he said.