

With too few helpers on rescues, Saranac Lake to add full-time EMT

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Posted on: Tuesday, August 28, 2007

SARANAC LAKE — The Saranac Lake Village Board voted unanimously Monday to proceed with plans to hire a full-time paid emergency medical technician for the volunteer fire department.

Fire Advisory Board Chairman Larry Miller and third assistant chief in charge of rescue Vernon James approached the board with the request at Monday night's meeting. Miller, speaking on behalf of the six townships covered by the department, said it was the towns' recommendation to hire a full-time EMT. James agreed, saying that for the last few years, due to an increasing number of calls, a drop in membership and the fact that many volunteers have 9-to-5 jobs, the department has had trouble covering calls during the day.

"It's harder for employers to let their employees go during the day. It's not just coming from the towns; we need better service during the daytime."

James said the department has an average of three calls per day and each call lasts an average of 58 minutes. James said it was time for Saranac Lake to catch up to the surrounding towns. The Lake Placid and Tupper Lake volunteer rescue services hired EMTs several years ago.

The village currently pays drivers of the fire and rescue trucks, but they are not qualified EMTs and cannot provide first aid to patients. James said that according to the drivers' job description, the only thing they can legally do at the scene of an accident is wait for the crew to show up.

"Just because the truck is there, it doesn't mean it is staffed the way it should be," he said.

The board voted to start the process of hiring one full-time EMT with benefits and one per-diem EMT without benefits to fill three other weekday shifts.

"When you have the volunteers come to you and say they are struggling to keep up, you have my ear," Mayor Tom Michael said.

James estimated the starting pay for the positions would be \$13 to \$14 an hour, depending on experience. With benefits, it would cost the village \$51,916 per year at \$13 an hour and \$55,910 per year at \$14 an hour.

In other board news, trustees will be holding a joint meeting with the town of Harrietstown board to discuss shared services at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 5 in the Harrietstown Town Hall board room. Discussion topics will include the sand/salt shed, the future of the code enforcement office and the recommendations of the recreation committee regarding shared services.

At the next village board meeting on Monday, Sept. 10, the board will be discussing restricting parking to one side of Algonquin Avenue at the request of Trudeau Institute. In a letter to the board, Trudeau Director of Facilities Brian Waters said cars parked on both sides of the road make it difficult for delivery trucks, snowplows or emergency vehicles to negotiate the narrow passage. The public is invited to attend both of these meetings.

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