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City to end ambulance service Sept. 1

Council expected to vote on resolution Monday

By Joanne Beck
jbeck@batavianews.com

Friday, January 23, 2009 10:55 AM EST

BATAVIA — City Council has agreed to end the city's ambulance service by this fall.

After months of talking about what to do with the service, council came to the decision during its budget talk Thursday evening. The group is expected to vote on a resolution during its business meeting Monday at City Hall.

The resolution will authorize the city to first enter into agreements with area municipalities Monday and then officially terminate the agreements as of Sept. 1. That will mean no more city ambulance service for all residents of Genesee County, including the city.

Seventeen of 18 Genesee County municipalities have indicated they'd like to extend the current ambulance service agreement another year. City Manager Jason Molino said. Pembroke Fire District did not renew its contract by the Jan. 15 deadline. The city must first "execute an extension and modification

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Photo

City Council is expected to vote Monday to end city ambulance service Sept. 1. (Daily News file photo)

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agreement" to continue offering the service before it can then notify those municipalities of the city's termination clause, Molino said.

[Pembroke at odds with city on agreement. See related story.](#)

"What it means is we're not going to provide ambulance service as of Sept. 1," he said. "We'll be working very closely with the county and the hospital as to how the area will get ambulance service after that."

Some council members want to make it clear that their decision is not just about halting the service. There has always been a financial burden for the city to offer it.

"If we're making money, none of us would want to give it up," Councilman Frank Ferrando said. "I think we want to provide this service, and it's an excellent service, we just can't foot the bill. We can't foot the bill for the whole damn county."

City officials have previously attempted to work with Genesee County on a solution to ambulance service, Council President Charlie Mallow said. The city got nowhere.

"County legislators wouldn't even add it to one of their subcommittees," he said. "Everybody wants to set a date; we need to have a date."

Councilman Tim Buckley suggested giving municipalities until Dec. 31. Others, including Councilman Rose Mary Christian, said that the city has to give at least six months notice, so Sept. 1 is fair. Council agreed, by straw poll, to go with the earlier deadline.

Molino said the city will have to answer many questions over the next several months, including how to handle current ambulance personnel and equipment. It's likely that a central company, agency or a consortium — suggested by Ferrando — will handle future ambulance service countywide, Molino said.

In his 2009-10 budget message, Molino predicted a five-year outlook that includes increases of 10 percent for health insurance, 5 to 10 percent for retirement, 5 percent for transportation and 3 percent for other miscellaneous expenses in the ambulance fund. As of last year, the ambulance fund owed more than \$1.2 million of inter-fund loans to the general fund because ambulance expenses exceeded revenues.

Another big consideration is the cost of medical benefits for retired employees, he said. The first payout would begin in 2018 for the first eligible employee and would last until 2044 when the youngest employee would reach



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65 and the benefit would discontinue.

"Either method of funding post employment benefits exceeds an accumulated \$2.9 million," his message says. "The proposed budget does not include any funding to support post employment benefits because the projected revenues would not be able to meet the added expense."

In other words, ambulance service doesn't make enough money to be self-sustaining and future retiree costs would be a multi-million dollar liability for the city.

The city is not alone. A study of Western New York's retirement liabilities for the nine largest local governments showed a combined \$3.7 billion in "unfunded obligations" over the next 30 years. Hard choices must be made to proactively deal with that problem, the study from the University at Buffalo Regional Institute said.

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creep wrote on Jan 23, 2009 7:04 AM:

" more taxes, less services...maybe we should stop plowing the roads also...eliminate garbage pick-up, fire and police depts. Wait!! lets get a new, unqualified building inspector.... Why can't our city ambulance service make money? Many private sector ambulance companies make a profit. Who's not paying? Why did we choose a Syracuse company to collect outstanding bills instead of using the LeRoy company that does the same thing? "

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doginyou wrote on Jan 23, 2009 8:37 AM:

" It's a shame that you have to be so negative. It seems like you have an agenda and are creating a list of half truths. Are you running for office creep? "

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creep wrote on Jan 23, 2009 9:12 AM:

" I'm just saying this service is funded by city taxpayers. Why is it required to make a profit? Are the fire, police, dpw depts. making a profit? If it's in a deficit situation because other towns aren't paying for the service, STOP GOING THERE!! Will this decision affect what the city brings to the table for the city/town merger? "

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doginyou wrote on Jan 23, 2009 9:22 AM:

" It seems to me that the issue isn't that the city has to pay for its own service. It's the fact that we city taxpayers have to pay to subsidize the service for the other towns in the county. From what I'm reading it looks like council has tried to work this out with the county and they are unwilling to help. The city shouldn't be running a business and this sounds like council is making the right move to finally set this wrong right. "

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creep wrote on Jan 23, 2009 10:27 AM:

" Creep for Mayor !! "

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WhystayinNY wrote on Jan 23, 2009 10:36 AM:

" Doginyou-creep is right that the city taxpayer is taxed to no end but they are losing services left and right. How long will it be before the fire department and police department are also gone? How do you put a price tag on life and safety? Why in the world would the Town want to consolidate with a sinking ship? This isn't a soap box this is reality. How much are you willing to keep paying to find that the box is empty when you get home? "

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doginyou wrote on Jan 23, 2009 11:00 AM:

" If a private company is willing to provide a service for free, why would we want to pay for it with our taxes? Do either of you work for the city? "

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