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Utica's ambulance service profitable, but city must show need

About 200 attend public hearing

By **BRYON ACKERMAN**

Observer-Dispatch

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UTICA — If the city can't prove a need for its ambulance service, it could mean the elimination of a revenue source that has generated an average annual profit of about \$540,000.

Such a loss would be devastating to what already is looking like a challenging budget the city is putting together, Utica Councilwoman Lorraine Arcuri, D-at-large, said.

Arcuri's evaluation came as a state board considers an application from the city that would allow it to continue to respond to medical emergencies or return to a system where private ambulances are called.

Even taking into account costs such as equipment, training and the replacement overtime and stipends firefighters receive for

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Russell Brooks said.

Some

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passed off to someone from Kunkel or another service.

There also have been times when all city and Kunkel ambulances were in use at the same time, and the city had to call in outside help, Brooks said.

Utica owns four ambulances and keeps three in service at a time, Brooks said. One of the city's ambulances has equipment unique to the area – a bariatric lift that can handle up to 1,600 pounds, he said.

The competition

Kunkel said his service has 10 ambulances – two more than it had when the city operation started.

But revenue and the number of employees has decreased since the city service started, Kunkel said.

The service's calls per month decreased from 1,600 to 2,000 calls before to 1,000 to 1,200 calls now, he said, but he wouldn't release further specifics of changes in revenue, the number of employees or total calls per year.

When residents call 911, they can request Kunkel be sent. Otherwise, a city ambulance is dispatched, unless they all are in use.

The city used to respond to almost all of the calls and go through many of the same costs, while allowing Kunkel or another ambulance service to make the revenue, Utica Comptroller Michael Cerminaro said.

"This is the first and only substantial new revenue the city of Utica has had in years," Cerminaro said.



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