

News

# Galway residents vote against property taxes to fund ambulance squad

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By PAUL POST, The Saratogian

GALWAY — Town residents have defeated a plan to fund Galway's ambulance squad with property taxes, meaning it might have to reduce service and hours.

Voters on Wednesday turned down the proposal by a roughly 2-1 margin, 258-124.

Galway Emergency Medical Services must now find a new source of revenue or it will run out of money sometime next year.

"People want the ambulance, they're happy with service, but they can't afford more taxes," Capt. Mike Jazwinski said. "Who can?"

At present, the squad contracts with the towns of Galway and Charlton and the village of Galway. The town of Galway pays the largest figure, \$51,700 per year.

The squad also gets about \$100,000 from billings and does considerable fundraising. However, its budget is \$316,000, so revenues have fallen far short of expenses in the past few years. Since 2006, the squad has had to use \$162,000 worth of savings. It has about \$100,000 left, which could be depleted by early or mid 2011, President Beth Ruman said.

The squad's future?

"It's uncertain," she said.

At present, the squad is certified by the state to provide advanced life service (ALS). As such, a paramedic and driver must respond to all calls, every day, around the clock.

Only a few years ago, the squad had 22 volunteers, but it now has just seven. "That's a nationwide trend," Jazwinski said. "Most families need two incomes to make ends meet. People don't have time to volunteer."

The squad has had to make up for fewer volunteers with more paid staff. Last year, professional paramedics were paid \$157,000 — almost half the squad's budget — up from \$113,000 in 2008.

Most paid staff have full-time jobs elsewhere and work part-time for Galway's rescue squad. For example, a Saratoga Springs fireman might cover a shift in Galway on his day off from the fire department.

If the squad runs out of money, it won't be able to provide 24-hour coverage and would have to be downgraded from ALS to basic life service, Ruman said. She said Galway would have to rely on mutual aid from places such as Saratoga Springs, Amsterdam and Ballston Spa, resulting in longer waiting times.

The squad plans to study its options and perhaps schedule a meeting to see what the public wants. No meetings are planned yet, however.

Supervisor George Hargrave said the town can't afford to give the squad more money. Sales tax revenue was lower than expected last year, prompting the town to impose a tax hike in its 2010 budget.

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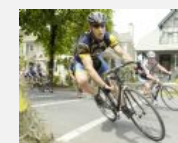
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Hargrave said he wasn't surprised at the outcome of Wednesday's vote.

"With the economy the way it is, you could almost foresee this was going to happen," he said.

### Comments

*The following are comments from the readers. In no way do they represent the view of saratogian.com.*

**highpointe8** wrote on **Apr 30, 2010 7:18 AM:**

" First, I am not a citizen of Galway, second, this is a dangerous. Even though I am not for higher taxes, I do feel that my life is far more valuable than the additional \$125 a year on my tax bill. For everyone that voted against the increase, I hope you don't need the services of a paramedic or EMT. If they have to come from Ballston Spa, Saratoga Springs or Amsterdam, you will more than likely be dead by the time they arrive. If you doubt this, let me tell you how mutual aid works, Galway will get the "tone" for the call, if after 5 minutes they do not acknowledge the call, they are "re-toned", and if they do not acknowledge in the next 5 minutes, then it goes to mutual aid, and the same scenario repeats with a "tone" to Ballton Spa, Saratoga Springs, ... so by the time they acknowledge and get on their way to Galway, tack on another 10 minutes in the best driving conditons. Of course, someone could be at the Galway station and immedialtely acknowledge there is no crew available, but then you still have to deal/wait with the extended drive time from the agency providing the mutual aid. So like I stated earlier, if you have a life threatening emergency, you will be dead before anyone shows up. Again, is your life worth more than the \$125 they stated in a previous article that your taxes will go up? Mine certainly is. "

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**Frodo** wrote on **Apr 30, 2010 7:54 AM:**

" I don't pretend to be an expert on the GEMS issue but I have to believe that when a vote like this gets defeated 2-1, there is more to the story.

If I were to base my vote strictly on what I read in this article, I would've voted FOR it, too. So why then would I be in the bottom third of voters?

I think many of the local EMS services need to start thinking about merging. There is quite a bit overlap in costs that could be mitigated by merging. Also, if I recall, this tax district, it was thought, would have certain towns pay more than others. I think that has something to do with the voting result.

I would love for the Saratogian to find out what convinced 2/3rd of the voters to vote against EMS services, especially for \$10/mn average increase in taxes. There HAS to be another side to the story. "

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**latenight12** wrote on **Apr 30, 2010 8:05 AM:**

" Here is the other side of the story Frodo , the taxpayers cant take anymore on their backs. Just another 10.00 bucks here and there, and everybody is digging into the taxpayers pocket.

Look at Wilton, they get a nice f 350  
pick up truck, raise rates 27% and no one says anything until rates are out of control and wilton will have to

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put a town tax in place.

Just like school budgets , just another 15 a year etc, taxpayers cant pay anymore , albeit needed services, it is the end of the line for free spending "

**Galwaygirl** wrote on **Apr 30, 2010 8:38 AM:**

" I think you all need to re-read the articles at hand. The \$125 was based on an AVERAGE home being assessed at \$150,000. The increase would have been 84 cents per thousand. We are being taxed to death. If the ultimatum is they go back to a volunteer status with only a BLS, then so be it. It worked for years and worked well. No reason for them to have to go to an ALS, with all types of certifications mandated by the State, costs of payroll, benefits and additional cost that they now realize they cannot afford. "

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**jh4327** wrote on **Apr 30, 2010 8:54 AM:**

" this almost seems like the same thing thats going on in Saratoga. Taxes are high, revenue is just not there to support the residents needs and the emergency services are inefficient. Im a big believer in combining fire depts and ambulance services into one entity, it seems more effecient and could hopefully keep taxes under control while providing adequate service and hopefully not cutting any jobs "

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**Frodo** wrote on **Apr 30, 2010 10:02 AM:**

" Thank you, Latenight and Galwaygirl for providing a bit more insight.

I am not suggesting that increasing taxes is a good idea. My point was that the proponents of the tax district should have had an "easy sell" convincing people to vote for a \$10/mn average tax increase to keep GEMS operating. Obviously it was a much tougher sell, which tells me that there's much more to the story.

It sounds like there's been some changes over the past few years that have increased the costs of running GEMS. Seems to me that those changes were mistakes that GEMS now wants the taxpayers to pay for. Is that about right? "

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**Upthehill** wrote on **Apr 30, 2010 11:44 AM:**

" The taxpayers cannot support another average "\$125 per year". It never stops there & few homes are assessed that low in Galway. Next they will need a new this or that. The reason they are low on volunteers? We are all working, working, working to pay our taxes! No time to volunteer! Also agree strongly that these small, rural towns need to go back to consolidating services. When and if things turn around, for everybody, and town populations increase so as to create a demand for duplicated services, so be it. As a resident of an adjoining rural town, when I chose to live in such a remote location, I accepted the fact that an ambulance may not be on my doorstep. That's my choice. This is not a "downtown" or "city" location, people. Stop trying to provide all the creature comforts of such. If you need or desire immediate emergency service response times, move closer to them! "

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**rural resident** wrote on **Apr 30, 2010 4:47 PM:**

" I agree we are being taxed to the hilt. Maybe GEMS should curb their spending habit. Did they really need that new, big building with all those bays for ambulances, sleeping quarters, workout area, etc. My question is how much is their Captain being paid yearly? Maybe the Captain should be a little more flexible and not chase off members with his attitude and they would not need to have so many paid staff members instead of volunteers. "

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