

# Thurman EMS service jeopardized

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THURMAN -- The town could be without an official emergency squad in 2012 as officials from Warrensburg EMS said on Monday they won't accept a \$30,000 decrease in Thurman's subsidy.

Thurman contracted with the Warrensburg squad in June after voiding the Thurman squad's deal. The agreement with Warrensburg EMS paid the squad \$25,000 for the remaining six months of 2011.

But facing a hefty tax hike, Thurman Supervisor Evelyn Wood slashed EMS funding in her budget proposal.

The Warrensburg squad wants to be paid \$50,000 a year to cover emergency calls in Thurman, which is rural and vast.

"We're losing money now," said Warrensburg EMS board member Bob Farrell. "We can't continue to run at a budgetary shortfall."

The squad's proposed 2012 budget is just short of \$520,000, with \$30,000 in funding slated from the town of Warrensburg.

Wood wants to pay just \$20,000 for coverage of Thurman. The \$30,000 difference represents 6 percentage points on Thurman's tax levy, she said.

The Warrensburg squad is largely staffed by paid emergency medical technicians, backed by volunteer drivers.

Farrell said, unless Thurman offers more money or something else in return for services, the squad won't remain the town's emergency provider.

If Thurman no longer had a contracted EMS squad, it would mean that squads from towns like Stony Creek and Johnsburg would join Warrensburg in being called by Warren County dispatch for mutual aid to Thurman.

That could mean that all three squads get shortchanged.

"Medicare or insurance companies won't pay an outside agency without a signed agreement or certificate of need," said Brian LaFlure, the county's Emergency Services coordinator.

Other squads around the state have been driven out of business because they couldn't secure payment for servicing nearby communities, LaFlure said.

"Covering every single call isn't mutual aid and they (Warrensburg EMS) have to pay their bills," he said.

Because of the deal with Thurman, the Warrensburg squad keeps two crews on call instead of one, significantly boosting its payroll, officials said.

"We need the \$50,000," Farrell told the Thurman Town Board on Monday. "We want to service Thurman, but it costs money."

Warrensburg squad officials were especially perturbed because they said they weren't aware Thurman was going to slash the contracted payment, until the information came out at a recent public meeting.

Officials have said Wood intends to use the Thurman ambulance as a bartering chip with the Warrensburg squad.

But the \$93,000 vehicle isn't in town hands, as the Thurman squad is claiming ownership and has refused to return it.

The town paid for the vehicle in 2007 and holds title.

Warrensburg squad officials indicated they'd be willing to discuss a tradeoff that included the disputed ambulance.

"We have to get it back first," Wood said.