

Regional EMS idea revised in Lake Region

By Peter Becker

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PALMYRA TWP. (Wayne) – Plans for a region-wide ambulance company envisioned for the Hawley Lake Wallenpaupack area are being narrowed to Wayne County, specifically Palmyra Township-Wayne, Paupack Township and Hawley Borough.

The matter was discussed at Palmyra-Wayne’s supervisors’ meeting Tuesday, Sept. 8, at Hawley Council meeting the next night and Thursday night, Sept. 10 at the Paupack supervisors’ meeting.

At each municipality, they voted to allow their respective solicitors to join with the other two to discuss and recommend the strategy for organizing an authority board for the regional ambulance service.

Bob Boogertman, Assistant Fire Chief for Lakeville Fire Department as well as a Paupack Township supervisor, proposed a regional service about a year ago. The idea was to find a way to improve ambulance response in a time of a lack of EMS volunteers.

Originally, the plan included six or seven municipalities in the greater Lake Wallenpaupack area, in both Wayne and Pike Counties. Monthly meetings with municipal representatives to discuss the concept began last October, coordinated by both Boogertman and Gary Shephard, President of Tafton Fire Company.

“Then we got shut down by COVID,” Boogertman said. “We’ve met two times since March.” In that time, he said, Pike County municipalities were looking in a different direction, and now the regional plan is starting over.

The broader regional plan also included possible participation in Pike County by Palmyra-Pike, Blooming Grove and Greene Townships, and possibly Lackawaxen although this township already has a paid ambulance service.

How the authority would operate and the ways the ambulance service would be funded are yet to be seen.

That’s why they need the three solicitors, Ronald Bugaj from Paupack; Jeffrey Treat from Palmyra- Wayne and Robert Bernathy who represents Hawley, to discuss the matter. Boogertman said that Palmyra-Pike’s attorney, Anthony Waldron, already laid some ground work on the proposed authority, which may be able to be used.

Boogertman said they may work with existing ambulance companies providing Basic Life Support (BLS) primary response within these three Wayne County municipalities- Commonwealth Health (Paupack and Hawley) or Hawley Ambulance (Palmyra-Wayne) or they could look at other companies or form something new.

An authority would enable them to seek grants and do fund-raising, Boogertman said, adding, “no one wants to hear about raising taxes.”

The initial plan was to establish a paid BLS service dedicated to the participating governmental entities, with Advanced Life Support (ALS) as well. What it would cost local taxpayers has been a big topic in the meetings since last fall.

Pete Steffen, Chairman of Palmyra Township-Pike, said at their meeting that he felt creating a regional entity in Wayne County the better way to go. He made the motion to authorize their solicitor to take part, adding, “Palmyra-Wayne to take the lead.”

Boogertman said they would not necessarily be locked into these three municipalities, Palmyra-Wayne, Paupack and Hawley, but would be open to include others.

He stressed that they are not looking to take away from any existing ambulance service, but to add to what the local population has to serve their needs.

A related topic raised at the regional meetings is that some townships in Pike County have talked about sending a bill to another township or borough if the ambulance company in their jurisdiction answers a call for mutual aid.

Boogertman said he doesn't necessarily disagree with this concept, but added local municipalities, he thinks, do not have the budget for that. "There's other avenues to look at first," he said.

He said he is hopeful that by creating an authority, they can find the best solution. Boogertman said they's like to continue meeting with Pike County municipalities, but feels it "makes sense" for the three mentioned in Wayne to go in in their own direction.

They can reassess this later on and adjust it, he added.