

Story originally printed in the La Crosse Tribune or online at www.lacrossetribune.com

Published - Thursday, June 07, 2007

County invites mediator to start discussion between city and Tri-State

By DAN SPRINGER | La Crosse Tribune

La Crosse County will bring in a mediator to help spark talks between city officials and Tri-State Ambulance about possible changes to the county's emergency medical services system.

County Administrator Steve O'Malley said in a letter to the Tri-State Ambulance Board that the county has hired Madison attorney and mediator Howard Bellman for a half-day session Tuesday to help guide early discussions.

La Crosse Mayor Mark Johnsrud proposed hiring a mediator to assist in finding ways to enhance the EMS system and determine if the La Crosse Fire Department should begin a city ambulance service.

While Tri-State, owned by Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center, and the city have agreed to mediation, the two sides are so far apart it might be impossible to successfully mediate an agreement, O'Malley said.

"Right now it's like chasing phantoms about what (Tri-State) might consider and what (the city) might oppose," O'Malley said. "We're not getting anywhere."

Johnsrud, who was at Wednesday's board meeting, repeated his pledge that the

city only wants to improve the existing system and does not want to harm Tri-State, La Crosse County's only ambulance provider.

Talks need to start soon and must be as brief as possible if the sides are to reach any consensus, O'Malley said.

"I don't think there's much to be gained by a six-month or 12-month or perpetual mediation that may never come to a result," O'Malley said. "It's better to have (Bellman) come in, to set some reasonable expectations and see if mediation has any options for us."

The Tri-State Board agreed to take part in the session, but Johnsrud said he must discuss the proposal with Common Council President Joe Ledvina before responding for the city.

Franciscan Skemp Healthcare also was invited to take part in talks, O'Malley said.

The county will pay Bellman \$250 per hour plus expenses. O'Malley said having Bellman mediate these sessions doesn't mean a different mediator or state representative can't guide future talks.

Dan Springer can be reached at dspringer@lacrossetribune.com or (608) 791-8269.

All stories copyright 2000 - 2006 La Crosse Tribune and other attributed sources.