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La Crosse, Tri-State Prepare for Ambulance Mediation



There are two sides to every story.

When it comes to the discussion between the City of La Crosse and Tri-State Ambulance on ambulance service and emergency response, both sides are hoping to clarify their positions.

"What started out as simple discussions and talking has kind of blossomed into something more than I anticipated," says La Crosse Fire Chief Gregg Cleveland.

When the city requested a mediation session with Tri-State, they say they did not want to offend anyone. "We don't have any preconceived notions of putting people out of business, whether that be Tri-State or anybody else," Chief Cleveland says. "Is the system working or can the system be made better?" asks La Crosse Mayor Mark Johnsrud. "That's what we're trying to find out with an overall mediation process."

"We want to go into this mediation process as exploratory," Chief Cleveland says, "So that we can kind of sit down and say, 'what would work and what wouldn't work?'"

One possible end result is a fire department-based ambulance service in La Crosse. "I already have four fire stations in the city of La Crosse, and I've got over 100 full-time firefighters, the vast majority of those are EMT trained firefighters," Mayor Johnsrud says. "They're all emergency medical technicians," Chief Cleveland says, "And they can operate defibrilators and do limited medications."

"It just seems logical that if, in fact, we're sending firefighters out there who are EMS trained, that there's no reason the firefighters couldn't be paramedic trained," Mayor Johnsrud says.

Tri-State says its major concern is that the quality of care could be compromised, but Chief Cleveland disagrees. "To make a carte blanch statement that paramedic of quality of care is going to go down, I think that's a far reach."

Sharing emergency response between private and public businesses isn't uncommon in Wisconsin. "It's unusual for a city our size to have a single private providers as an emergency medical transportation business," Mayor Johnsrud says.

Despite speculations about what could happen, the city says they will keep an open mind. "It doesn't do any good to say, 'we're gonna do this or we're gonna do that,' until we understand what it is that we want to do," Chief Cleveland says. "We owe a responsibility to our citizens to take a look at this issue and say, 'what strengths can the fire department bring to the system.'"



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