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SAMANTHA MARCUS: City-run ambulance plan raising alarms

By Samantha Marcus | La Crosse Tribune

If what I'm hearing is any indication, a zealous opposition is building against the La Crosse mayor and fire chief's plan for a city-run ambulance.

The grand unveiling of the proposal Wednesday unleashed the usual suspects but looks to have caught even the attention of the relatively less engaged: The first-time callers.

I've checked with some council members in the last few days to get a sense of what they're hearing — and to state and restate the obvious, people aren't impressed.

The public and some aldermen who haven't been in the inner circle, so to speak, want to know what the compelling reason is for the move. If they were aware of a flaw in the current service, they might find the purported fix much more palatable.

"By and large, they don't believe the service will be any better," council member Jim Bloedorn said. "And they're convinced it's going to cost more money. As am I."

Bloedorn, who represents the swath of La Crosse south of La Crosse Street and west of 11th Street, said he received just a few phone calls from people in favor of the service.

He qualified each of those was a firefighter.

Despite being a freshly appointed alderman, Lorraine Decker said she has received several calls, all adamantly opposed to the plan.

"I'm listening to my constituents and gathering information," she said. "I want what's best for the community as a whole."

Council member Dick Swantz said he's taken about a half-dozen constituent calls.

"No one thinks this is a good idea. They have real, genuine concerns about whether we should do this or not," he said.

Andrea Richmond said a steady stream of calls came in from her North Side district Thursday and Friday and started up again Monday.

"I haven't had one person call that was in favor of this," she said. People even are stopping her on the street, she said, adding, "The more, the merrier."

Of the aldermen I spoke with, Audrey Kader proved the exception. The southwest La Crosse council member said she was surprised not to have received any calls.

"Apparently, my district is not up in arms," she said.

Council President Bill Harnden said he got a "flurry" of objectors calling before Wednesday's meeting but now they've subsided.

He told the callers he'd call them back after last week's meeting, thinking the session would change their minds or at least ease the tension.

"It's not getting into the business just for the sake of getting into the business," Harnden said. "Ours compared to others is good, but I just want to make sure we're getting the very best. And if the argument is to stay out of business just for the sake of getting out of business, you have to get past it."

Samantha Marcus can be reached at (608) 791-8220 or smarcus@lacrossetribune.com.

Comments »

fortsa123 wrote on Aug 13, 2008 2:16 PM:

" I thought I saw in the paper an open invite to all members of the public for the first public meeting. So people that are in favor of the city ran ambulance service had just as much right to be there as people in favor of Tri State. Mayor pull your head out of Cleveland's butt. Mayor keep on digging your self a bigger hole. "

dfib wrote on Aug 12, 2008 10:59 PM:

" The Real Paladin: Or maybe he's a La Crosse resident with the comprehension of simple math and whole cost accounting. \$2.9 Million in the hole after five years. Look at my commentary on NCA.

Keep up the calls and letters. Let's make this such an "untouchable" issue we don't have it brought up again for years.

On the positive side tell your reps you support Tri-State and the formation of their version of the EMS commission. (Balanced and without political agendas) "

common-cents wrote on Aug 12, 2008 10:54 PM:

" They could use the ambulances to haul away ash trees in five years. I figure loses could add up to at least \$500,000 in 4 years, then the city could use the ambulances as trucks. I can see it now Big Ash Bore beetle signs on ambulances. Call them ashborelances. "

Insightful1 wrote on Aug 12, 2008 10:13 PM:

" In a WIZM interview aired tonight, the Mayor stated that all the calls to council members opposing the City's plan are Tri-State employees, or those sympathetic to Tri-State. "Tri-State is to blame for the calls." If that is true, all the employees of Tri-State should be congratulated.

This seems like a similar statement made by the Mayor at the Public Hearing last week when he stated that the room of 300+ people was all Tri-State or Gundersen employees - then more than 3/4 of the attendees rose stating they are not affiliated with either.

Keep the faith people - support those who are "knowledgable" and looking to do the right thing for the people of the region and those who may someday need the services of a well skilled and appropriately integrated EMS system - excellent 1st Responders and Tri-State paramedics. "

Insightful1 wrote on Aug 12, 2008 10:06 PM:

" Folks - let's keep this focused on the main issues and not personal attacks. The facts are:

1. The City's plan in an unnecessary duplication of services that places the patient and taxpayer at risk.
2. The Mayor expects to steamroll this through the Council despite hundreds of phone calls to Council members.
3. People living in the Tri-State service area need to be very concerned about the city getting it's foot in the door and following the examples in Eau Claire, Oshkosh, Marshfield and other cities who's effective and efficient EMS systems have systematically been dismantled costing the taxpayers millions of dollars.
4. We need a binding referendum to prevent clinical and fiscal catastrophe.
5. We need a true leader to fight city politics. "

nocityambulancecom wrote on Aug 12, 2008 8:17 PM:

" The Real Paladin: Whether my agenda is job preservation, financial security, nut-job fear mongering, or even none of the above, the fact remains that this proposal is NOT about better clinical care, it's NOT about controlling health care costs, and it's NOT about whether Tri-State does a good job. What this IS about is protecting firefighter jobs (as a political favor?) at the expense of the taxpayers of La Crosse and the citizens of the greater La Crosse region. City after city in the State of WI has proven that fire-based EMS IS NOT COST EFFECTIVE and in some cases, NOT CLINICALLY PROFICIENT. What's your agenda? "

The Real Paladin wrote on Aug 12, 2008 7:58 PM:

" RE: NCA, "About NCA:

This site was created by a concerned citizen of the greater La Crosse area with over eight years experience in Emergency Medical Services. This site IS NOT sponsored, endorsed, or supported by Tri-State Ambulance, Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center, or Fransiscan Skemp Medical Center."

So, your agenda is you're either a paramedic who fears for his job, you have some sort of financial interest in Tri-State, or you're a fear mongering whacker. Which is it? "

Myturn wrote on Aug 12, 2008 6:38 PM:

"Its not getting into the business just for the sake of getting into the business", "Ours compared to others is good, but I just want to make sure were getting the very best", "if the argument is to stay out of business just for the sake of getting out of business, you have to get past it"? If you cannot figure this one out taxpayers, you deserve your tax bills! They want it to go to the Council. They have the votes! This is about job retention, and shrinking budgets nationwide. Because fire calls are shrinking along with Fire Departments all over the country. They just want to get their foot in the door. That's all they need! "

Myturn wrote on Aug 12, 2008 6:23 PM:

" Does anybody want to hear the 8 votes for this Plan at Council? Or, do you already know who is in the Mayor's pocket? Regardless of what the issue is. Or we could be like Councilman Gamroth and vote 'yes' because the Mayor wishes it? "

Dirty Little Secrets wrote on Aug 12, 2008 5:15 PM:

" OOPS, should have been "garbage" "

Dirty Little Secrets wrote on Aug 12, 2008 5:14 PM:

" Re: NoCityAmbulanceCom

I just visited your website for the 1st time. VERY INFORMATIVE!! I would encourage all the bloggers out there to visit that site. Seems to me to be a whole lot closer to the truth that the gargage Mayor SkidMark and is Fire Chief are trying to pull over on us. "

NoCityAmbulanceCOM wrote on Aug 12, 2008 4:05 PM:

" DirtyLittleSecrets...please contact me at admin at nocityambulance . com "

Dirty Little Secrets wrote on Aug 12, 2008 12:45 PM:

" Just talked to my aunt who just got off the phone with Ms Kader, who remarkably didn't have much to say when confronted about her statement. "No one in her district has contacted her". Keep the phones ringing. Lets give her tendinitis in her shoulder from holding the phone to her ear constantly. "

Dirty Little Secrets wrote on Aug 12, 2008 12:31 PM:

" Audrey Kader is a filthy LIAR. My aunt lives in her district and has spoken to Ms. Kader. The fact that she is that bold to go on the record in the paper and say she has not been contacted takes a lot of brass!!! Flood her phone with calls. This rubber stamp for the Mayor Skidmark has to be held accountable!! "

Senior Advocate wrote on Aug 12, 2008 11:22 AM:

" People need to wake up and get the word out in order to kill this. If the public is not worked up this will pass. "

Myturn wrote on Aug 12, 2008 8:53 AM:

" Counting votes now it appears the vote is '8 to 8'. To 'fast track' this Plan through the Council Chambers. You can make a difference here. Look, the Mayor has a nucleus of votes continually ready for his wishes reflected in past votes. Given the time we will pull these voting records, and share along with the number and percentages of closed doors meeting throughout City Committees and Boards. This is not representative government. "

Myturn wrote on Aug 12, 2008 8:48 AM:

" Council Pres harnden-"He told the callers hed call them back after last weeks meeting, thinking the session would change their minds or at least ease the tension." The problem is that this nucleus of power brokers in our City Council depend on 'public apathy'. There is a long line of examples where they have counted on amnesia, or plain not caring, enough! It dissipates and they go on to the next. People, this should be the last straw, take a stand here, and at least call your Councilman or the Mayor himself. "

Myturn wrote on Aug 12, 2008 8:41 AM:

" "The numbers (numbers shown at City PowerPoint 1st and only meeting) have been determined by Chief Cleveland and the Fire Department and have been determined by studying other Fire based Systems around the State of WI. Although we cannot obtain how those numbers were derived? Voodoo economics, by a person that fights fires? These numbers and their sources will be scrutinized and that report will be distributed to the taxpayers. Count on it!!! "

theman wrote on Aug 12, 2008 8:13 AM:

" This situation is laughable. Let's imagine that you are rich. A friend comes to you with a business proposal. He wants you to invest 1.2 million dollars and promises a return - AFTER 5 YEARS - of \$5,000. What would you say? You'd laugh him out of the room. If his numbers are off by less than .5% it becomes a money losing proposition. Only a moron would propose this and only fools would accept it. "

medic193 wrote on Aug 12, 2008 7:30 AM:

" Please get the word out about <http://www.nocityambulance.com> There is a wealth of information about the true costs of a fire-based ambulance/paramedic first response program are. Most importantly, you need to CALL ELECTED OFFICIALS TODAY to voice your opposition. "

ryeguy wrote on Aug 12, 2008 6:57 AM:

" I just read the letter by Dawn Michaels (8/12) and it has occurred to me that there must be lots of hospital-specific training for paramedics and switching or adding a new bunch of paramedics could greatly add to the burden of the hospital staff. (For instance, stroke protocols, heart attack protocols, closed head injuries - I suspect each hospital has ongoing training or orientation requirements). Has anyone considered this? I am one of those "damn liberals" but I fail to see the compelling need for the move to city service. Didn't La Crosse specifically dump city ambulance service 25 years or more ago? "

wdjs wrote on Aug 12, 2008 6:53 AM:

" With the new ash tree disease, will there be added expense to the city budget to remove these trees? How can we afford another service such as ambulance when unexpected expenses crop up such as tree removal? Let's be prudent for a change! "

Im Still Jackson wrote on Aug 12, 2008 5:39 AM:

" Its okay Krusty! Joker mark and the fire cheif just made some career decisions with this one. "

Krusty wrote on Aug 12, 2008 3:11 AM:

" It doesn't matter what the people say or want...our boneheaded mayor is going to do what he wants...Not a day goes by that I don't kick myself for voting for this doofus "