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Forks EMS facing review

Process could take up to 60 days. Squad had hoped to restore service but negative review may quash that.

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By SARAH MAUSOLF
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FORKS TWP. | The bad news: The Forks Township Emergency Squad is about \$278,000 in debt and its state license is in flux.

The good news: Supervisors agreed Monday to support the squad's plans to reopen – as long as squad officials meet a key condition.

Supervisors withheld their approval until the Eastern Pa. EMS Council grants the squad a positive recommendation on its license. The council makes recommendations on licenses for squad services to the state Department of Health, which votes on the licenses.

This condition could affect the squad's timetable for resuming operations and, possibly, its ability to do so. Squad officials had proposed reopening Sept. 11.

Everitt Binns, executive director of the Eastern Pa. EMS council, said he plans to recommend today that the department suspend the squad's license.

However, Binns said he could offer a new recommendation, based on a review of the squad's plans to resume 24-hour operations.

Binns said the council will review staffing, vehicles and policies and will offer technical assistance. The review process could span 30 to 60 days, he estimated.

William Keifer, president of the squad's board of directors, said the squad has about \$730,000 in outstanding service bills. The bills date back about 180 days, he said. Although the money is owed to the squad, Keifer said the organization expects to collect about 20 to 30 percent of the funds. He guessed the squad could recover about \$125,000. The squad will face difficulties in collecting the money, such as finding residents who owe and have moved, he said.

The squad submitted an operating budget to the township for the fiscal year ending in 2006. It lists total annual income as \$660,888 and total annual expenses as \$606,309.36, which leaves a surplus of \$54,578.64.

The Forks squad's coverage area includes the township and Stockertown. The squad shut down last month and handed over operations to Suburban Emergency Medical Services in neighboring Palmer Township.

Township police have launched an investigation into the handling of squad finances under the previous administration, Chief Gregory Dorney said earlier. A group of lifetime members of the squad – former volunteers with decision-making power – has rallied to lead the organization's recovery.

Judy Arnold, vice president of the squad's new board of directors, said last week she expects action against individuals who may have wronged the organization.

Supervisors granted their conditional approval for the squad's reopening in a 4-0 vote after asking pointed

questions about finances. Supervisors Chairman David Hoff abstained to avoid a potential conflict of interest. Hoff said his son serves as a part-time paramedic for a branch of Suburban EMS in Stroudsburg.

With the Forks squad still closed, Suburban EMS will continue covering the township and Stockertown from the Forks facility on Sullivan Trail, said Suburban Executive Director Barry Albertson Jr. Suburban has also been honoring residents' subscriptions in that area. With subscriptions set to expire Friday, Forks and Suburban officials say they must meet to discuss how they will handle subscriptions.

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