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New emergency services commission is a good idea

By Tribune editorial board

The city of La Crosse's decision to back away from a controversial ambulance plan is good news.

City officials had sought to buy two ambulances (but only operate one) and train its firefighters, already certified as emergency medical technicians, to become paramedics, a higher level of service.

But there was opposition to that plan. Although there might be merit in having at least one paramedic on a fire department first responder crew, the idea of the city getting into the now-private local ambulance business was not widely supported.

Instead of that, the city has produced a new resolution that simply would support the creation of a new Joint Emergency Medical Service Commission to replace the existing County Emergency Medical Services Board.

That makes a great deal of sense. The new commission would be much broader in scope and membership than the existing Emergency Medical Services Board. The idea for the new board came out of mediation with the city, Tri-State Ambulance and La Crosse County.

Unlike the old board, this commission would have representation from La Crosse's two medical institutions, and the cities of La Crosse and Onalaska. It also would include town and village representatives, along with two physicians who would be nonvoting members. County officials might yet propose some changes to give the commission one less city representative.

Even so, the new commission would be much more regional in scope, at least in terms of the county, and that makes sense because emergency services don't stop at municipal boundary lines.

The resolution could be voted on during the Common Council's September cycle of meetings.

Having a more representative board provide oversight for emergency medical services would be a positive step forward. This new commission deserves support by both the city and county government.

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