

Backers of ambulance referendum cry foul

By SAMANTHA MARCUS | smarcus@lacrossetribune.com

Activists behind a campaign to keep the city of La Crosse out of the ambulance business are accusing city leaders of orchestrating a conflict to keep a referendum off the April ballot.

“There’s no doubt in my mind that this is intentional,” said council member Jim Bloedorn, who penned the petition’s first signature in October.

“If there’s ever been a situation where the public is being ignored and in fact democracy is being made a mockery of, this is it,” Bloedorn said Wednesday.

The city attorney advised Tuesday that the referendum interferes with existing legislation that creates an emergency medical services fact-finding commission and restricts the council from taking action on anything EMS-related while the commission meets.

Before the council formed the fact-finding commission, council member Dorothy Lenard, who like Bloedorn is challenging Mayor Mark Johnsrud’s re-election bid, warned the language in the legislation could preclude a spring referendum.

“I think it was intentional, and that’s why I cautioned people on it,” she said Wednesday.

Bloedorn and dozens of activists spent a month circulating the petition for Citizens

for Responsible Government-La Crosse County, collecting more than 3,500 signatures.

CRG President Dave Drewes said he hoped the council could clean up the mess and said he wouldn’t comment until after tonight’s meeting. Council President Bill Harnden initiated the commission and said Tuesday the conflict wasn’t deliberate. He also said he is working with the city attorney to straighten it out.