

Ship closer to full-time ambulance

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By Denise Larive, News Writer

Bradley Silcox, assistant EMS chief for Southern Berks Regional EMS, Reading, said on April 21 that the company is negotiating a permanent location in Amity Township where it wants to one day operate a full-time station.

The tentative site is located west of Douglassville, along the eastbound lanes of Route 422.

Southern Berks currently has one truck stationed in Amity Township at Fisher Landscaping, 1096 Benjamin Franklin Highway East, that it operates seven days a week from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The company has full-time stations in Cumru Township (with two ambulances) and in the Borough of Birdsboro (one ambulance).

Silcox said all three stations serve the nine municipalities of Amity, Birdsboro, Brecknock, Cumru, Kenhorst, Mohnton, Robeson, Shillington and Union.

If an agreement is reached on the building, Silcox said Southern Berks EMS would use a rented construction-type trailer on the site until a building with crew quarters and ambulance bays is constructed in October 2011.

Silcox said a full-time station typically requires a call volume of between 1,000 and 1,200 calls per year in order to break even, but is also dependent upon the economy and local donations.

He said the cost of a full time, permanent station and adding another 12-hour shift to their budget would be about \$190,000.

Amity Township doesn't have an ambulance tax, and Silcox said only 25 percent of Amity Township residents are members of Southern Berks EMS.

"A full time ambulance has been favorable with [our] informal poll — all but a tax increase," said township residents Benjamin Blakesley and Richard Dalton to the board.

They asked Silcox what they could do to help bring a full time ambulance to Amity.

"We have a fund drive in May," said Silcox adding, "With more money we're better able to go 24 hours a day."

"We have one unfunded police position," said Yanos during the discussion of implementing an ambulance tax. "Which is more important? A tax is an option. I'm very confused on what we should be doing here. What is the balancing point here —money on a police officer, ambulance, parks and recreation? Our taxes are low compared to the Daniel Boone School District's taxes."

Silcox said Cumru's ambulance tax is .18 mills and there are no "out-of-pocket" expenses for ambulance services up to a maximum of three free per year.

The board unanimously approved hiring the firm of Spotts, Stevens & McCoy, Inc., Reading, as consultant and engineer for its proposed Amity Township Western Industrial Park, Limekiln Road.

Township Manager Charles E. Lyon said SSM has done a project similar to AWIP for the city of Reading that dealt with high water tables, flood plains, and the firm has experience working with county officials including the planning commission and economic development committees.

Yanos said SSM will work with the township to re-zone the approximate 400-acre site to commercial and light industrial, deal with environmental and road improvement issues and help the township position and market the site to be a viable commercial site.

In other business:

- The board voted unanimously to recommend that the previously approved 72-unit, age-restricted Arbour Green development, Old Swede and Pine Forge roads, could be re-designated as age targeted.

Instead of requiring that the buyer of each unit be older than age 55, the units in the private development would be designed for adults without children.

Board members said Arbour Green will still provide the township with tax rateables and virtually no school age children.

"We are still proposing stick built houses with stone fronts, all the living on the first floor, ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) accessible, baths convertible to handicapped, and with no tot lots or any outdoor play areas or equipment," said developer Bryan Hunsberger, Telvil Corp., Harleysville.

"Arbour Green will still provide an increased tax base to the township, private roads with a homeowner's association, and pay \$123,000 in township fees," Hunsberger said.

He said Telvil will widen Old Swede Road and take out the hump at Pine Forge Road at an estimated cost of \$400,000 to \$500,000. It will also pay most of the \$350,000 cost to upgrade the local sewer and install a flashing fire signal at Pine Forge Road.

"There weren't any buyers two years ago for units in the age-restrictive community," said Hunsberger. "We determined that it wasn't the right time to build age restrictive units and to wait. But the time still isn't right. Financing is very difficult and age restrictive is even more difficult because there are now so many of them. Age targeted is relatively new."

"I agree we need further discussion but I agree we need to push this along," said Supervisor Terry L. Jones. "I don't see someone moving into this [Arbour Green] with kids. That isn't my fear, but my fear is being run out of this area by the Daniel Boone School District. We need to get some tax rateables into this township."

Hunsberger said Arbour Green's by-laws could be changed in the future to allow second floor living and outdoor play areas. The change would require a majority two-third vote of homeowners association members. Hunsberger will apply to the zoning board for the designation change that he said will provide him with better financing options because the community would be open to a wider demographic audience. Units would be priced at \$210,000 to \$240,000.