

Newsday.com

N. Hempstead studies consolidating ambulance services

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December 12, 2008

Amid calls from state leaders to consolidate local services, the Town of North Hempstead has hired a research firm to study the feasibility of consolidating ambulance and emergency medical services in town.

Town residents now receive ambulance service from a variety of groups, including fire districts and Nassau County.

The \$185,000 study, to be paid for by a state grant, will examine the current practices and identify options for cost savings and increased effectiveness, officials said. "I think it's healthy for us to analyze what exists," said Town Supervisor Jon Kaiman. "Is there a way that we might be doing it in the future that makes more sense?"

The Center for Governmental Research, a Rochester-based firm, has begun interviewing service providers and collecting data. With Hofstra University as a local partner, the firm plans to analyze ambulance operations and develop options for consolidation or reconfiguration of services.

New York State Attorney General Andrew Cuomo yesterday announced a plan to make consolidating local governments in the state easier.

Marc Silbert, a Sands Point Village trustee and chairman of the study steering committee, he hopes the study will provide "several road maps" for service improvements and will not necessarily lead to consolidation.

At a meeting in New Hyde Park Wednesday night, local leaders, residents, and ambulance and EMS providers defended the current system.

"I'm very concerned about comparisons and cost analysis," said J. Leonard Samansky, mayor of Saddle Rock Village. "We want the service ... we're ready to pay for it."

In an interview, Andrew DeMartin, chairman of the board of the Great Neck Vigilant Fire Company and commissioner of the Manhasset-Lakeville Fire Department, said if the study leads to services being scaled back, the town might not be able to handle "a large-scale incident." DeMartin said he is skeptical about the goal of improving cost effectiveness. "You can't financially beat zero, and that's what you pay the volunteers," he said.

A public meeting to coincide with a draft of the study is tentatively planned for June. The final report is due in July.

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