

Paramedic chief seeks up-----staffing at Tory Hill

The county's paramedic chief would like to have night staff at the Tory Hill EMS base 365 days a year.

Craig Jones made that request in a report on budget considerations reviewed by the county's EMS committee during its Nov. 11 meeting.

Each department head will submit considerations to council as it begins work on the 2016 budget.

After 11 o'clock at night, we drop to two ambulances, Jones told councillors.

Starting at 11 p.m. each night, there is one staffed ambulance stationed in Minden, one in Haliburton.

As Jones explained, these ambulances get calls to do patient transfers to hospitals in Lindsay, Peterborough and Toronto.

Because these requests are considered emergency calls, they cannot be deferred. When one of the night ambulances is on a transfer call, that leaves one ambulance to cover the 4,000 square kilometres that comprise Haliburton County.

As soon as that ambulance gets a call . . . Jones said. There are instances where there are zero ambulances available.

Jones pointed out the change would also give Algonquin Highlands additional coverage. Currently, the Tory Hill base has an active ambulance until 7 p.m. If the Tory Hill base was staffed throughout the night, an additional ambulance would be stationed in Algonquin Highlands until 11 p.m.

Having a night staff complement at Tory Hill would require the additional of four full-time paramedics and would cost the county some \$372,000 for the year, excluding benefits.

The municipality would be responsible for the costs the first year and then receive 50 per cent funding from the province, should the plan receive approval from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

The price tag made councillors on the EMS committee uncomfortable.

I have a hard time justifying what is basically going to be a \$400,000 increase to your budget, said Algonquin Highlands Deputy-reeve Liz Danielsen.

Dysart et al Deputy-reeve Andrea Roberts agreed. I think that's just too much of a hit all at once, Roberts said, adding she preferred other options Jones had put forward, such as staffing the base at night during the weekends or during the summer, from the May long weekend to Labour Day.

Those options would cost \$150,000 and \$110,000 respectively, exclusive of benefits.

Dysart et al Reeve Murray Fearrey wondered about putting aside some funds for pay of emergency, standby staff.

Jones said not many of the county's paramedics live locally and that it's difficult to ensure someone would show up.

There's currently nobody in the province that has standby pay, Jones said, adding he didn't expect the paramedics' union would be big on the idea.

I'd be interested in seeing the number of times we've been down to zero and specific times, said Highlands East Deputy-reeve Suzanne Partridge.

Council members agreed they'd like more detailed information before making any decision.

We'd like to see more numbers before we could agree to any of it, Danielsen said.

- Chad Ingram