

Casa Grande Dispatch

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Details are being worked out to provide an ambulance that would serve only Casa Grande, eliminating situations where Southwest Ambulance is busy elsewhere and has to call a unit from as far away as Chandler or Mesa.

Fire Chief Scott Miller told the City Council at Monday night's meeting that an agreement between Southwest and Casa Grande would bring a new ambulance, replacing the city's aging, malfunctioning unit known as Rescue One and to be housed at Fire Station No. 1 at Florence Boulevard and Florence Street.

Southwest would buy the ambulance, Miller said, "and the ambulance attendant driver, which is an EMT, would be a Southwest employee and the paramedic firefighter on the unit would be from the Casa Grande Fire Department, so it

is truly a partnership.”

Miller said the agreement will mean an ambulance always available in the city.

As the situation now stands, he told the council, “Southwest Ambulance currently staffs four 24-hour paramedic ambulances in western Pinal County — one in Coolidge, one in Florence, two in Casa Grande. They also have what they call a “flex car” which comes up in Casa Grande approximately 10-12 hours per day to meet peak demands.”

When a call comes in to the city’s emergency dispatch system, Miller said, dispatchers send the closest paramedic fire truck, then notify Southwest, which sends its closest ambulance.

“That usually takes anywhere from one to two minutes before we’ll hear them come up on our frequency and say that they’re enroute. If Southwest is in quarters, we’re looking at anywhere from another two to five minutes; if

it's in the outlying area of the city limits, maybe another seven minutes.

“So we're looking anywhere from seven to nine minutes to get to the scene with us.”

A problem, Miller said, “is if for some reason they happen to be coming from what they call midpoint, which is 11-Mile Corner, the fairgrounds area, that means we have one ambulance in western Pinal County and they're covering Florence, Coolidge, Casa Grande.

“If that happens, then we're looking at anywhere from a 10- to 14-minute response time after we've made notification to them.

“If they're all out on traffic, then the next closest is coming from either Chandler or Mesa, and by the time they're hitting our city limits we're talking 20 to 35 minute response time.”

In cases where the Southwest unit is at 11-Mile Corner, Miller said, the Fire Department sends one of its rescue unit for quicker travel to the Casa

Grande Regional Medical Center.

“In calendar year 2002, we responded to 3,621 calls for service for the Casa Grande Fire Department,” Miller said. “Out of that, 2,684 calls were reported as emergency medical calls. That's 74.12 percent of our calls as medical related.

“Over the last three years our average is 74.34 percent, so we're staying pretty consistent to the 74 percent mark.

“In calendar year 2002, Southwest Ambulance transported 1,674 patients within the city limits and Casa Grande Fire Department transported 54 patients within the city.”

Rescue One, a Ford F-350 rescue ambulance bought in 1986, is in poor shape, Miller said, having continual mechanical problems, such as air conditioning in the patient area, brakes and transmission.

“This rescue unit/ambulance does not meet the current federal standard for ambulances and does not meet the Arizona department of Health Services

guidelines for transporting a patient,” Miller said. He told the council that replacement of Rescue One would cost about \$95,000, including equipment and radio.

“Southwest Ambulance, in concept here, has committed to replacing Rescue One with a Southwest unit,” probably a top of the line model, Miller said.

“It would be red and white and would carry the Southwest Ambulance logo and the Casa Grande Fire Department logo,” but would still be designated as Rescue One.

The new ambulance would provide a higher level of service at advanced life support rather than basic life support, Miller said, meaning the new rate for the department would be \$65.

That is the amount the city would be paid by Southwest for each run, taken out of the \$500 or so that Southwest charges a patient.

Miller said Southwest would also pay about \$200 a month rent to the city for being housed at Fire Station No. 1.

Another financial benefit to the city, Miller said, is that if the department had to replace Rescue One it would be about \$25,943 per year for the lease-purchase and associated costs. Revenues from use of the new ambulance would be about \$108,300 a year, Miller said.

The department would have to hire three additional firefighters, he added, because to staff on a 24-hour basis means three eight-hour shifts.

That cost would be about \$143,550, he said.

“So what I'm saying here,” he told the council, “is if you stay status quo and replace Rescue One we're looking at about a \$25,943 expense.

“If we enhance our level of service and have a dedicated paramedic unit in the city, the cost is about \$35,200.

“Thus, the difference for an enhanced level of service is around \$9,257.”

The council authorized negotiating the formal contact with Southwest,

something Miller said he would like to have finished by July.