

Municipal Emergency Services Authority of Lancaster County

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Eight Pennsylvania Municipalities Form First-of-its-Kind Regional Municipal Authority to Solve EMS Crisis

ELIZABETHTOWN, PA (February 15, 2023) – After a year-long cooperative process, eight municipalities in the northwest region of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, have incorporated a first-of-its-kind regional municipal authority to address the region’s emergency medical services crisis.

The new Municipal Emergency Services Authority of Lancaster County will fund, manage and provide EMS services to member municipalities in northwest Lancaster County. It will be the first rate-setting regional municipal emergency services authority in Pennsylvania. The founding municipalities are Conoy Township, East Donegal Township, Elizabethtown Borough, Elizabeth Township, Marietta Borough, Mount Joy Township, Penn Township and West Donegal Township.

The path to forming the authority began in 2018, when municipalities in the northwest portion of Lancaster County were at a crossroads with the future of emergency medical services at risk.

Many EMS agencies in Pennsylvania are struggling to maintain services in the face of soaring costs, funding shortfalls and staffing challenges. Northwest EMS in northwest Lancaster County, which was recognized as Pennsylvania EMS Agency of the Year in 2020 by the Pennsylvania Emergency Health Services Council, was facing insolvency due to insufficient revenue and rising costs.

“Although Northwest EMS is widely known for outstanding service, less than half of municipal residents contribute to the organization through subscriptions,” said Marc Hershey, Elizabethtown Borough Council President and chair of the committee of municipal leaders who convened to address the local EMS crisis. “The average gap between gross billings and insurance payments was averaging over \$4 million a year. And increasing expenses for equipment, fuel, certifications, trainings and employee benefits were taking a heavy toll. In short, municipalities in our region needed a bold solution to continue to meet their statutory obligation to ensure EMS readiness to answer the call.”

At the start of 2021, the committee began studying and exploring alternatives. Upon conducting a collaborative analysis, the committee arrived at an innovative solution: Creation of a regional municipal emergency services authority under the Pennsylvania Municipality Authorities Act to fund and provide EMS readiness and services on a regional basis.

Over a period of several months, the committee engaged in municipal public meetings, additional public education initiatives and a public hearing on the proposed solution. The process culminated in eight municipalities in the region enacting ordinances to form the Municipal Emergency Services Authority of Lancaster County. The authority was incorporated on February 7.

“This initiative demonstrates how municipal cooperation can solve regional problems,” said Rob Brady, president of ROBB Consulting and consultant on the project. “Bringing municipalities together for a common regional cause is no small feat but, as a group, this committee of local leaders embraced a regional mindset to drive the process. Looking forward, the authority will enable each of the member municipalities to ensure that EMS services continue to be available with readiness to respond.”

The board of the authority consists of a representative from each of the authority's founding municipalities. The board will be responsible for determining the authority's services and fees.

Instead of generating operating revenue through municipal and membership contributions, the authority will set a reasonable and uniform annual fee to property owners, on par with Northwest EMS subscription rates. As a regional municipal entity, the authority will hold public hearings, enabling community members to have a voice regarding any changes to services or rates.

The authority will begin holding board meetings in March. A public hearing is expected to be held in late summer on the Authority's emergency services and fee structure. The Authority plans to be operational and begin providing services by early 2024.

"It is our hope that the Municipal Emergency Services Authority of Lancaster County will serve as a model for other municipalities in Pennsylvania facing an EMS crisis," Hershey said. "Paving a path to this solution took hard work, but there was never a question that a municipal-led solution was needed. EMS is an essential public service. As municipal leaders, we recognized that we not only needed to solve this problem to meet our statutory obligation. We needed to solve this together to potentially save the lives of our neighbors, family members and friends."

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