

On eve of vote, ambulance service attempts to answer questions

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DURAND - An open house was held Monday night at DVA Ambulance, Inc. to answer community questions about the organization on the eve of a city vote for a requested assessment.

The open house included a tour of the ambulance base, a PowerPoint presentation and a chance for citizens to ask DVA personnel any questions they had concerning the organization.

"Our hope here is if there are any questions in the community, they will come here with an open mind and ask them," said Bob Christenson, president of the DVA Board of Directors. "We want the community to be informed and we felt this would be a great opportunity to facilitate that."

The open house fell the night before an ambulance assessment request for up to \$25 per household goes before city residents, with polls open today from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. at Durand City Hall, 215 W. Clinton.

DVA Director Chuck McGlinchey estimated about \$50,000 would be collected from the assessment annually.

"It doesn't sound like a lot, but every little bit helps," said McGlinchey. "Overall, I look at this vote as more of a sign of community support. It costs us \$200,000 a year just to staff one ambulance, so this is not going to subsidize the ambulance."

DVA currently collects a \$25 assessment from Vernon, Shiawassee and Venice townships. Durand has paid nothing since an assessment request failed by a slim margin during a public vote last year.

McGlinchey said with the response they received from the open house and the information DVA was able to pass on to the attendees, he feels DVA has a better chance of approval this time around.

"Our main focus is public education and with that getting people to understand what the issues (for EMS) are," said McGlinchey. "Whenever I've talked with someone and explained why we're doing what we're doing, it makes sense to them, and that's what we want to see."

Christenson said some of the questions raised during the open house concerned DVA's Advanced Life Support (ALS) services.

"There appears to be some confusion in the community that because we do that, it's a cost burden, when in reality, it's the other way around. If we couldn't provide those services, we would have to pay another service provider that could," said Christenson.

Questions were also raised about why DVA built ambulance bases in Flint. Christenson explained the Flint bases arose from DVA servicing the Swartz Creek area and then being called into Flint through mutual aid. By maintaining bases in Flint, DVA was able to keep an ambulance staffed at the Durand base.

"People question why we branched out of this area - we did it so we could maintain coverage in Durand. By putting rigs in Flint, we've been able to firm up our basic layer of coverage here," said Christenson.

"A lot of people seemed surprised that DVA is doing as much as we are here, especially operating our own dispatch. All many of them know is when they call 911, an ambulance shows up at their door. That was another purpose of this open house - to show the community all that we can do," said McGlinchey.

Whether or not the assessment passes, Christenson and McGlinchey said DVA will not stop servicing Durand, although a failure of the millage may cause the DVA board of directors to examine services.

"I truly hope we're successful with this assessment tomorrow, but if it doesn't pass, that doesn't mean we'll stop providing service," said Christenson. "We may have to reevaluate the level of services we provide, but we have no interest in seeing this area uncovered."