

## **Guelph Mercury – November 15, 2007**

### **Ambulance report**

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It's misleading to say ambulance wait times in Guelph and Wellington County are better than elsewhere, county Warden John Green said yesterday.

The discussion was spurred by a review of local ambulance service.

Reported ambulance response times are "misleading, because it's taking in urban areas," Green said. "And I will keep harping on that."

The county and city launched the review after the province turned down a request for more money to improve ambulance service to Erin, Puslinch and Drayton, said Lyle Quan, Guelph's deputy fire chief.

"We'd seen a lot of (problems in the service), but thought it would have a lot more credibility to have a consultant look at all the services," he said.

The report recommends large changes to the way ambulance service is delivered. They include:

Posting an ambulance in downtown Guelph before the long-discussed move of the Harvard Road ambulance station to the south end;

Providing scaled-down ambulances -- called paramedic response units -- in far-flung areas to reduce response times there; and

Considering ambulance service in-house instead of contracting it out.

There seemed to be a lot of support at yesterday's ambulance committee meeting for shortening wait times in the county using paramedic response units.

"It needs to be done as quickly as possible," Puslinch Mayor Brad Whitcombe said.

"I'm hoping we look at standard of service as a driving force and then try to fit the budget peg into that."

The units are vans or SUVs with all of the equipment an ambulance has, but they're staffed by a single paramedic and don't transport patients, Quan said.

"It's the first response -- they get on the scene and render medical aid while waiting for an ambulance," he said.

Usually even after an ambulance arrives, it takes time to stabilize a patient before he or she can be loaded in and taken away, he said. Paramedic response units can offer that service while waiting for an ambulance to arrive, reducing wait times in problematic areas.

And because they don't transport patients, their turnaround time is generally shorter so they can arrive faster.

The proposed changes -- without the move of the Harvard Road station, which has been approved separately -- are expected to cost an extra \$1.3 million a year, with a startup cost of about \$270,000.

Part of that will be covered by the province, which is in the process of adjusting its funding so that it pays for half of the service, Quan said.

The ambulance changes are needed in part because the numbers of calls are growing much faster than the population, the consultant found. It's not clear why that is, Quan said.

It could be because the population is aging or because growing traffic means more accidents. People are also more likely to call the ambulance these days than they used to be, he said.

"Why, I'm not sure -- it could be the way we're brought up, which is fine because it's only when the ambulance responds that they can assess," what's going on, he said.

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#### AN AMBULANCE IS ON THE WAY

Expect to wait nine minutes and 25 seconds on average for an ambulance in Guelph-Wellington.

Ninety per cent of calls are responded to within 14 minutes and 13 seconds -- better than the 14 minutes and 55 seconds mandated by the province.

Average ambulance wait times:

Mapleton: 14:08

Minto: 6:43

Erin: 14:50

North Wellington: 7:19

Puslinch: 12:49

Guelph-Eramosa: 10:51

Centre Wellington: 6:04

Guelph: 6:36