

Paramedic calls are a tax on beach cities

By Andrea Woodhouse Staff Writer

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Facing an increased need for emergency medical services, Hermosa Beach wants the Beach Cities Health District to offer more funding for paramedic services in coastal communities.

The City Council agreed Tuesday to solicit help from Manhattan Beach and Redondo Beach in pushing the district to ante up more funding or services that could offset the costs of rising paramedic calls.

"We need to get some more funding," City Councilman Pete Tucker said. "Most of our Fire Department calls are for paramedics. We're getting overburdened with this, and we need them to help us pick up the tab."

Requests for paramedics by far exceed the number of fire-related calls beach city fire departments receive every year - hovering around 70 percent for each of the three cities in the last three years.

And with the district's hospital - South Bay Medical Center - closed since 1998, beach cities paramedics must take patients to more distant medical facilities, further taxing the fire departments' equipment, time and resources, Tucker said.

"I've felt for years that they need to help us out a little more because paramedics calls have overburdened our resources," he said. "The hospital closed and it became more of an outpatient resource, but we still pay."

Facing a budget gap and an understaffed fire department, Manhattan Beach would support appealing to the district for more assistance, City Manager Geoff Dolan said.

"With our financial situation as it is, we would appreciate any help, particularly in the Fire Department, where we're looking at staffing issues," he said.

Tucker suggested several ways the district could assist the paramedic programs in the beach cities.

"I feel that we need to get equipment and things like that, Band-Aids, and maybe every now and then a new ambulance," he said.

In the years following the closure of its hospital, the health district redirected its focus to preventative care, offering classes and programs designed to keep people out of ambulances.

And its attention is likely to stay there, though the district would welcome discussions with city officials, Chief Medical Officer Lisa Santora said.

Property taxes from beach city residents help fund the district, which provides programs and classes for residents in return, as well as \$1.8 million in grants for health programs offered by local agencies.

By district calculations, for every tax dollar it receives, it provides \$4.79 in community services and programs.

Santora said the district already provides about \$100,000 in support of the three beach cities' paramedic services.

"The mission of the district is to improve health in the community through prevention," she said. "We really value the work of the firefighters in the communities, but we're focused on preventative efforts."

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