

# Cohoes faces ambulance service crisis

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Cohoes Mayor Bill Keeler delivers his 2023 State of the City address Tuesday Jan. 31, 2023 at the Cohoes Senior Center, Cohoes, N.Y. Kenneth C. Crowe II/Times Union

COHOES – The city will begin paying for ambulance coverage Wednesday after Empire Ambulance Service's operating license was bought by a New York City-based company called Ambulnz, Mayor Bill Keeler said Tuesday.

Empire Ambulance had been running ambulances from the city's Central Avenue Fire House, which Ambulnz will continue to do.

Keeler said the city has agreed to a one-month contract at \$50,000 with Ambulnz while the municipality sorts out what to do, including negotiating a new contract, possibly switching to Mohawk Ambulance or seeking agreements with other municipalities, including Albany County, the city of Watervliet and the towns of Colonie and Guilderland.

"The city is currently attempting to negotiate a contract with a private ambulance company in an effort to improve service to our residents," Keeler said during his State of the City address Tuesday attended by about 80 people at the Cohoes Senior Center.

"I'm particularly grateful to town Supervisors Peter Crummey in Colonie and Peter Barber in Guilderland for allowing their respective squads to serve the residents of Cohoes," Keeler said.

Keeler also has contacted Albany County Sheriff Craig Apple, whose department provides ambulance service, and Watervliet Mayor Charles Patricelli about the situation. Watervliet also has ambulance service through its fire department.

"It's a terrible situation," Apple said about the sudden change in Cohoes. Apple said he has discussed the matter with Keeler and is willing to answer calls from Bethlehem but that would only be applying a short-term patch.

“We need a long-term solution,” Apple said regarding what Cohoes is facing and the difficulties in staffing emergency squads everywhere.

Cohoes was informed of the changes at the close of business Monday, Keeler said. At that time, he said he started contacting other officials and the state Department of Health regarding the city’s changed circumstances.

The Cohoes Fire Department provided ambulance coverage in the 1970s but the city decided to exit the field due to costs, Keeler said.

Empire Ambulance, headquartered in Clifton Park, exits the ambulance business at 12 a.m. Wednesday.

“They purchased our license to operate in New York State,” said Michael Aquino, co-owner of Empire which has been in business for 33 years serving the Capital Region. “We’re completely closed.”

A call to Ambulnz’s New York state operations director led to it being referred to the corporate marketing department which did not immediately respond. Ambulnz operates in 26 states.

Emergency ambulance services will continue to operate in the city, Keeler said. The \$600,000 annual cost that Ambulnz cited for continuing coverage, the mayor said is expensive and the city is looking for alternatives.

Long waits by ambulance crews at hospital and difficulties in hiring paramedics and EMTs worsen the situation, Keeler said.