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## **Stamford Paramedics Approved for Darien EMS-Post 53, with Housing on Post Road**

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**Date :** July 12, 2016

The Board of Selectmen on Tuesday approved a proposal to hire Stamford Emergency Medical Services (SEMS) as a provider of paramedics to Darien EMS-Post 53.

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<http://dariente.com> First Selectman Jayme Stevenson said town officials are looking into housing the paramedics at the town-owned house the Darien Community Fund used to use, next to Old Town Hall Homes at 701 Post Road. During a meeting on Tuesday, Stevenson proposed dispensing with the town going through a request for proposals in preparation for bids to provide the service.

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Having in-town paramedics, long a controversial proposal pushed by town resident Walter Casey and criticized by Darien Emergency Medical Services-Post 53 officials, was recommended earlier this year in a report by Illinois consultants McGrath Consulting Group, who were hired by the town.

Dr. Douglas Gallo, medical director for both Stamford Emergency Medical Services and Darien EMS-Post 53, has said, according to the consultants, that in-town paramedics would provide "[no clinical benefit](#) over the existing paramedic arrangement, it would not be cost-effective, and infrequency of paramedic skill usage would result in skill deterioration." In an appearance before the selectmen, Gallo repeated his recommendation directly.

(The town also had an option to hire paramedics as town employees. The McGrath report said the town would have more flexibility in switching paramedics if it finds it doesn't want the ones initially picked to work here.)

Stevenson told the board that in order to dispense with a request for proposals and a bid, the board would have to approve the proposal by at least a 4-to-1 vote. Town Attorney Wayne Fox had informed her of that requirement, she said. (It was unclear Tuesday whether it's a mandate from the town Charter, state law or some other town rule.) When it came to a vote, the board was unanimous, 5-0, to authorize negotiations with SEMS.

SEMS has been working with Darien EMS-Post 53 for 20 years, Stevenson said, and it works closely with Stamford Hospital. "They provide all of the training for Post 53. Stamford Hospital is our designated sponsor hospital for medical services," she said.

With a relationship already in place, hiring SEMS avoids having a "significant transition time for Post 53 to coordinate their services with any other paramedic provider," she said. Norwalk Hospital, with its own ambulance service, is the only other nearby hospital to Darien.

The town will draw up a contract with SEMS that will allow a reassessment of the agreement after one year, in case the town doesn't want to continue it.

Selectman Rob Richards said he's always wanted the best service for Darien, and "SEMS is the gold standard in EMS providers."

Stevenson said Darien EMS-Post 53 officials are very supportive of hiring SEMS.

The town already has paramedics on about 30 percent of all Darien ambulance calls, but they may arrive later than the initial arrival of the Post 53 ambulance.

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Having the paramedics stay at 701 Post Road would "allow for some geographic diversity" in the service, Stevenson said, with Post 53 headquarters closer to Stamford and the paramedics located miles to the east. They would travel to emergency calls in "fly cars" as Post 53 ambulances also rushed to the scene.

Post 53 officials have said they don't have room for 24-hour paramedics at the 0 Ledge Road headquarters near Noroton Heights Railroad Station. Tom McGrath of the McGrath Consulting Group said paramedics at the building would be the best option, even if the paramedics were housed in a trailer in the parking lot. Richards said he had hoped paramedics could stay at the Ledge Road site.

There are some drawbacks to the 701 Post Road site, Stevenson said. "The property needs some attention — that's one of the reasons why the Community Foundation moved out."

The Planning & Zoning Commission would need to approve the idea of having paramedics in the building. Stevenson said that P&Z Commission Chairman Susan Cameron has said her board would likely be concerned about use of sirens and lights that might bother neighbors living behind and to the side of the Old Town Hall Homes site.

Post 53 officials have said there shouldn't be a problem with requiring the paramedics not to use sirens and lights until they're on the Post Road.

*Editor's note: More information on the need for a 4-1 vote was added to this article at 11:11 a.m., Wednesday.*

Update: Here's the Darien TV79 video of the meeting (the discussion on this topic runs from about the 10:30 mark to about 22:00):

[Board of Selectman 7-12-16](#) from [Darien TV79](#) on [Vimeo](#).