

AMBULANCE TAX REFERENDUM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is an ambulance tax being proposed?

Milford enjoyed the benefit of all-volunteer BLS (Basic Life Support) Emergency Medical Service until the 2020 pandemic began; however, with a consistently dwindling number of volunteers, we have been heading down the path toward employing people to continue this service for some time. In early 2020, there were just 12 volunteers working in 2-3 person groups to handle ambulance calls in Milford. Mutual aid was covering 12 hours of 24, more often than not, not just as backup when our ambulance was out, or a call required more than one unit. Relying on mutual aid for service means longer response times and draining resources from other area departments.

When the pandemic put a temporary but complete stoppage to volunteer service and full reliance on mutual aid, the Milford Fire Department and EMS sought the help of area municipalities to address this situation through staffing agencies. This crisis shined a spotlight on the need to supplement our volunteer force with paid workers. Federal funding is being sought through Pike County to cover the cost of the supplemental paid service through the end of 2020. Beyond that, other measures must be taken in order to provide adequate coverage to ensure that ambulance calls are answered in a timely fashion in Milford.

Why is Milford having a hard time getting adequate volunteers to continue an all-volunteer EMS service?

This problem is not unique to Milford. This is a nationwide problem that we must respond to for our community. There are many reasons including a general shortage of EMTs due to paying positions, and higher wage positions in the medical field, drawing volunteers away; training requirements; and volunteering competing for individuals' time that can otherwise be spent on vocation, family or other pursuits.

Why is this being put forth as an ambulance tax rather than a regular tax increase?

The Board of Supervisors chose to ask the voters to approve this as an ambulance tax so that the use of the funds will be restricted to only this critical service.

How much will the tax cost me, if approved?

The proposal is a 2 mill tax. One-half a mill was approved already by the Supervisors for implementation with 2021 tax bills, a requirement before the referendum could go forward. An additional 1.5 mills can be implemented for 2021 if the referendum passes. To calculate how much the 2 mills will add to your property tax bill, use your property assessment (the combination of the land and improved value as applicable and shown on either your most recent property tax bill or on your property information from the pikepa.org GIS/Tax Administration Office tool, gis.pikepa.org) and multiplying that value by .002. For example, a property with a \$33,155 assessment* (land and improvement combined) would pay \$66.31 in ambulance tax ($33,155 \times .002 = 66.31$). Overall, from Milford Township, the total amount raised will be approximately \$56,000. *According to the Pike County Tax Administration Office this is the Median assessed value of the 664 taxable residential properties in the Township.

Will the non-residential property owners have to pay the tax too?

Yes, all property owners will pay the tax, including commercial businesses and landowners. In fact, because of the often higher assessment values of commercial properties, though the tax rate is uniform, the dollars and cents cost to a business will generally be higher than that of a typical residence. For example, the main Econopak property of 21.93 acres on Rt. 6 & 209 has a current assessed value of \$684,800. Using the formula, $684,800 \times .002 = \$1,369.60$ equals the property's annual ambulance tax under this proposal.

Are Milford Township taxpayers going to be the only ones contributing tax dollars for this?

No, Milford Fire and EMS also receives funding from several other municipalities it serves, primarily Milford Borough and Dingman Township. Milford Borough is also moving forward with an ambulance tax referendum. Dingman Township is considering increasing its existing ambulance tax but because of the differences in the community's tax base as compared to Milford Township or Borough, it can raise much more money without exceeding the one-half mill the law allows for ambulance tax, without a referendum.

Why is the tax proposal for two mills?

The Board of Supervisors opted for 2 mills because this is a service shared largely with the Borough, which has a similar tax base and population, and by law the Borough cannot levy more than 2 mills of ambulance tax. The Supervisors chose not to propose putting a greater burden on Township taxpayers than our neighbors in the Borough would bear for this shared service.

What can ambulance tax money be used for?

The tax can be used to "support ambulance, rescue and other emergency services serving the Township." Under the Second Class Township Code, revenue generated can be used to acquire, operate and maintain motor vehicles for the purposes of conveying persons to and from hospitals, to appropriate monies towards ambulance and rescue and life-saving services, and make contracts relating thereto.

How much service can be provided with these funds?

In short, we do not know the exact information yet. Currently, \$500 per day is being spent to provide 12 hours of paid service. During 2020, because of the COVID-19 emergency declarations, normal public bidding requirements for emergency spending are suspended and bidding requirements have not yet been triggered. Whether public bidding will be required will depend on how the paid service is facilitated. These proposed details are being put together between the Milford Fire Department & EMS and the various municipalities involved.

We do know that the proposed 2 mill tax will definitely not provide anywhere near enough funding for 24 hour a day paid coverage 365 days a year. It is a supplemental measure, inadequate to replace the dedicated volunteer force but necessary to support it. Longer term solutions are being sought.

How are other communities addressing this crisis, locally?

Hemlock Farms, Lehman Township and Lackawaxen are already paying for supplemental ambulance service. Tafton also had paid service already in place. Westfall Township started paying Port Jervis to supplement its volunteer force. Dingman Fire Department is currently considering utilizing a staffing agency for supplemental assistance.

Can the funds be restricted for paying the cost of manpower?

The Board of Supervisors can appropriate up to one half of the tax revenue generated for the costs of employee salaries, benefits and compensation of employees of the ambulance, rescue or other emergency service.

How many ambulance calls are made to Milford Township each year?

According to reports from the Pike County Public Safety Department there were 158 ambulance responses from January 1, 2020 through September 13, 2020 just in Milford Township. In 2019 according to the Public Safety Department's reports, there were 206 responses in Milford Township.

Doesn't the cost of an ambulance call get reimbursed by insurance?

No. Insurance reimbursements are wholly inadequate, nationwide, to cover the cost of ambulance response. This shortage is compounded by reimbursement rates that are not designed for areas like ours where travel distances are more extensive to get to the hospital. The mileage reimbursements only cover the miles that include having the patient in the ambulance, not in transit to pick up a patient or to return to base after delivering a patient to the hospital. Further, if the ambulance is called but a trip to the hospital is unnecessary or declined, no reimbursement can be obtained. Insurance does not contribute to the cost of readiness, having personnel standing ready to go out. In addition, not everyone has insurance coverage or pays any outstanding bill.

The Milford Fire/EMS bills insurances for reimbursement and utilizes those funds to aid in the cost of equipment and equipment maintenance, insurance, supplies, volunteer support and maintaining a space for housing the ambulance in its facility.

How much money did Milford Township budget for EMS in 2020?

Milford Township budgeted \$10,000 to donate to EMS services for 2020.

How much is the referendum going to cost?

By putting the referendum forth for the general election in November, the Pike County Board of Elections states there are no costs passed on to the Township. If the referendum went forward at a special or primary election, the Township would have to bear associated expenses.