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Boone water rescue squad not dead yet

By Kevin Eigelbach
Post staff reporter

The Boone County Water Rescue squad may be spared from the budget-cutting ax.

"Right now, the big question is how well I do restructuring the budget and every line item in it," said Dale Appel, captain and founder, after meeting Thursday with Boone County Administrator Jim Parsons to discuss the squad's fate.

"I feel confident I can give the county something they'll be pleased with," Appel said.

Parsons also said he felt optimistic that he and Appel could work out something to keep the squad alive.

He and Appel plan to meet again in two weeks, along with Parsons' boss, Boone County Emergency Management Director Dan Maher. Appel plans to present a proposal for substantial cuts in the squad's \$200,000 budget.

As they've prepared their budget for fiscal 2003-2004, county officials have talked of eliminating the squad or contracting with other groups to do its essential functions -- recovering bodies and finding evidence underwater.

On Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, members of the 35-person squad also patrol 60 miles of shoreline from Big Bone Creek on the Ohio River to Locust Pike on the Licking River. Trained as emergency medical technicians, they assist boaters in trouble.

No other local government provides such a service. County Judge-Executive Gary Moore said he felt obligated to the taxpayers to see if the county can get the same service for less cost.

Parsons said he has a target amount for cuts to the squad's budget, but he would not say what it was. Appel said Parsons didn't share it with him either.

"They didn't throw out a target number," he said. "I know they want some considerable cuts. I'm trying to cut back to the bare minimum" while safely providing the same service.

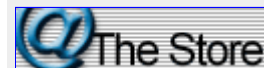
He hopes to make cuts in the expense of maintaining the squad's three large and three small boats, which amounts to about \$79,000 or almost 40 percent of the annual budget.

He had proposed replacing the two engines on one of the smaller boats, which would cost \$40,000. He may suggest replacing them with rebuilt engines instead of new, he said.

Fiscal court will vote on a final reading of the new budget on June 24.



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Appel, who founded the squad 36 years ago after his best friend drowned, would hate to see fiscal court dissolve it. He still feels it's something the county needs.

"But I have to make a lot of people happy, and in order to do that I have to do some challenging work, budget-wise," he said.

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