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MAST gets vote of confidence

Council committee urges new contract

By KEVIN HOFFMANN
The Kansas City Star

Despite months of publicly criticizing the Metropolitan Ambulance Services Trust, officials Tuesday cleared the way to continue the agency's long-term operation in Kansas City.

The Kansas City Council's Budget and Audit Committee recom-

\$8.5 million contract with the financially troubled ambulance service. The full council will vote Thursday on the contract.

Going a step further, the Budget and Audit Committee also voted 4-0 to recommend that:

■ The city return to the public utility model that created MAST.

■ Current MAST board members resign and Mayor Kay Barnes appoint a new board.

First glance

■ A Kansas City Council committee decides the city's ambulance service should operate as a public utility, with a board to oversee the system and a contractor to handle day-to-day operations.

■ It is not clear whether the full council must approve the arrangement.

■ The new board recruit and hire a "highly qualified and experienced" executive director.

■ The new board and executive director open new bidding for an operations contractor.

Whether the full City Council will

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evering that she had not reviewed the recommendations. She declined to comment until she had.

At least two MAST board members said they had no immediate plans to resign.

"As far as the MAST board is concerned, we have a job to do and we are not going to abandon that job," said Deborah A. Janisch, MAST's chairwoman.

Under the public utility model recommended by the committee, MAST would act as the ambulance service's oversight authority but would contract out the day-to-day operations. The city's system operated under that structure for more than 20 years before MAST took over complete control last July. At the time, agency officials said they could save money running the system themselves.

Rowland said after Tuesday's committee vote that he did not have much faith in MAST's management or board members, but the city could add safeguards to protect against the financial crisis that has plagued the agency for more than a year, he said.

The fact that it had operated successfully here for quite some

a new operations contractor was selected.

Many MAST workers have told the committee that they feared a new contractor might come in and slash salaries and fire high-paid employees.

"We're disappointed in the recommendation," said Joe Robinette, president of 1-34 of the International Association of Fire Fighters, which represents much of MAST's work force.

Exactly how the process will move forward remains a question. Rowland said the matter did not need to go before the full council, because no legislation is needed. But Councilwoman Becky Nace, who is a MAST board member, said she expected the full council to take up the issue.

She said the council needed to debate the various versions of public utility models. And the full council should vote on the recommendation, such as asking current MAST board members to resign, Nace said.

Nace said she had no plans to resign but would if the mayor asked.

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