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Mansfield not currently considering similar measure

By Linda Martz
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MANSFIELD — City officials say they'll watch closely to see how Galion fares if it starts charging insurance companies for accident investigations by its police department.

But Mansfield has no plan to seek similar reimbursement, at least at this point.

Mayor Lydia Reid said she'd be reluctant to do anything that might cause insurance companies to pass on additional charges to customers, although rates could rise anyway if enough cities begin charging.

For a couple of years, Mansfield's fire department has billed insurance companies for "mechanical" services at auto accidents — such as using the Jaws of Life, disconnecting batteries, or spraying foam around spills, Reid said.

And the city charges insurance companies for traffic reports to recover copy costs, she said.

Reid also said she will take note if Galion starts billing for accident investigations.

"I'll be interested in seeing what they put together," she said. "Let them try it for six months, and we'll see how they're doing. ... If they're successful with it, we may look at it. They'll be the guinea pig."

Service-Safety Director Ron

Kreuter echoed much of Reid's comment.

"We haven't considered it and don't know that we will at this point," he said.

Kreuter said the fire department began charging for procedures such as cutting accident victims out of vehicles because those jobs were not part of firefighters' traditional duties.

Kreuter said traffic crash reports, typically about four pages, include lots of details a police officer doesn't need to deal with if the case goes to court, such as direction of travel and angle of crash.

Insurance companies use part of the information, he said, but some is there for the public good, such as data the National Transportation Safety Board collects to improve traffic safety.

Chief Phil Messer said the police department considered a list of possible fees a few years ago when city finances were tight, among them traffic investigation fees and red-light cameras to catch traffic violators.

At that time, many cities had begun charging insurance companies as much as \$200 for traffic investigations.

The city did increase the charge for copies of traffic reports from 3 cents a page to \$4 a report. Insurance companies balked at first, Messer said, but "everybody now has accepted

it." Traffic investigations cost money, tying up officers for at least an hour and a half, even when the collision isn't that complex, Messer said. "When we are investigating a traffic accident, we sure aren't patrolling a neighborhood."

But city officials decided not to implement accident investigation charges. Messer said he found the idea troubling, because police would investigate even if insurance companies never asked for a report.

"I think at some point it is an ethical question, because we are already being paid to do something. The question is: Are we being paid enough?" he said.

"It's kind of a new era when government begins to look at ways that they can generate revenue," he said. Red-light cameras could both generate revenue and increase traffic safety, he acknowledged, "but the goal has to be not so much generating as much money as we can, as to reduce accidents at a location."

First Ward Councilman Mike Hill, who heads up council's safety committee, said he hadn't heard about the Galion proposal, but on first reaction would oppose doing that here.

"Personally, I don't think they should," he said.

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