



December 15, 2023

**- PRESS RELEASE -**

Morrow County is committed to the safety of its residents and visitors to the County. This commitment is the center of the ongoing review of the County's Ambulance Service Area Plan and designation of Ambulance Service Providers. Two primary goals include; first, to reassert that, by Oregon law, the County is directly responsible for establishing ambulance services and, secondly, to have an independent Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Advisory Committee provide oversight for the conduct of all ambulance providers and allow transparent consideration of ambulance services in the County.

The County has engaged with Morrow County Health District (MCHD) and Boardman Fire Rescue District (BFRD) on a draft Ambulance Service Area Plan (ASA) to achieve these goals. These groups provided input and comments on the draft; most of which were included or adapted into the document. While this input was valuable, it is still the County's ultimate responsibility to prepare the Ambulance Service Area Plan for the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to review. On December 11, 2023, a draft was submitted for an initial review by OHA, and the County is in the process of providing additional documents before OHA moves forward with their review. This was not a final document as it still needs to go through public notice, consideration, and adoption by the Board of Commissioners.

On December 13, 2023, MCHD provided a 90-day notice that it would discontinue providing ambulance service in Morrow County. This was alarming as the County had planned on a continued partnership with MCHD for these services, and the County has had substantial ongoing communications with them and BFRD. In the notice, MCHD lists several issues that need to be addressed. The submitted ASA documents are attached for public review and the following points are provided for specific clarification:

- **Ambulance Providers** – Neither MCHD nor BFRD are listed as initial providers. The ASA is crafted to allow up to three providers (if practical) to operate in the County with initial providers determined through an application process, review, and recommendation to the Board of Commissioners. While MCHD has offered a preliminary proposal at this time, no proposal has been requested or submitted by BFRD, but BFRD has indicated a desire to apply.
- **Composition of EMS Advisory Committee** – MCHD currently utilizes the EMS Advisory Committee as a forum to review individual case issues and as a peer review platform. The current EMS Advisory Committee membership is overwhelmingly filled by MCHD employees. Under the new ASA document, the EMS Advisory Committee would be reviewing the ambulance providers' overall operations rather than individual worker performance. As such, the submitted ASA pulls from an external pool of first responder experts (appointments from all fire districts) and other medical and first response professionals to provide external review to improve transparency and accountability.

- **Confidentiality Issues** – MCHD has asserted that confidentiality safeguards and the process of investigations have not been fully outlined. All pertinent state and federal laws will be followed. The removal of sensitive peer-review information from the EMS Advisory Committee function and a focusing on OHA compliance reports and general operations also alleviates these concerns.
- **Lack of a Service Contract** – MCHD has operated ambulance services in the County for decades without a service contract. The draft ASA will require a service contract whether there is a single or multiple ambulance providers. This protects the County, the providers, and our residents and visitors.
- **Communication Failure** – In this, there was a misstep or perhaps misunderstanding. The County agreed to respond, if appropriate, before filing, but the County and the County’s Consultant had incorporated many of the substantive changes sought, and felt it was important to move the process forward by submitting the draft for review and comment by OHA. The County and the County’s Consultant had discussed the need to further communicate on the comments by MCHD and BFRD, and expected to do so while the draft was under review by OHA. Unfortunately, MCHD was expecting a response that was not adequately provided due to a communication error on the County’s part. Staff and the County’s Consultant take full responsibility for that and apologizes for the discrepancy.

Again, Morrow County is dedicated to the safety of its residents and visitors. The County is working to complete the Ambulance Service Area Plan and to ensure proper ambulance coverage under the new plan. MCHD’s notice to discontinue service is regretful and Morrow County still invites MCHD to participate in the new process. Until then, Morrow County will review all options to maintain an appropriate level of ambulance coverage during any possible transitional period. More details will be provided in the future.

Please direct inquiries to:

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