

February 2, 2024

PUBLIC RELEASE

We received a copy of Morrow County’s strongly worded press release concerning the proposed ambulance service contract. To provide clarity to the public, we have addressed some questions below.

We hope the County will engage in the negotiation process until the service contract is mutually agreeable, as Morrow County Health District did with both the Ambulance Service Area Plan and the Ordinance.

Why is the agreement an “exclusive” agreement?

Each ambulance service area (ASA) can only have one ambulance service provider responding to 9-1-1 calls. This is by design in the State of Oregon to prevent ambulances from racing to scenes and to prevent issues on scene that come up with multiple providers try to respond. MCHD has provided service to the entire county as one single ASA for the past thirty years. We believe a countywide approach makes the most efficient use of resources and is the safest way to serve our communities.

Why is MCHD asking the County to pay for ambulance services?

As a taxing special district, an essential part of our mission is to bring healthcare services to our area, which would otherwise not be sustainable or available. Our base tax and our levy tax are both intended to support all operations at the District. Neither is intended specifically for ambulance service. Our combined base and levy tax rate is \$0.995 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. This is lower than the base tax rates of all other special districts in Eastern Oregon providing similar services. Even if we used all of our tax funds from both the base and levy tax on an annual basis, it would not fully cover the cost of providing ambulance services. These tax dollars go to support all of our services, including the hospital, four clinics, home health and hospice, and ambulance service. We cannot dedicate all tax dollars received to a single service.

Morrow County is the entity that has the regulatory obligation to provide for ambulance service, so it makes sense for them to offset the financial losses. This is common practice in other areas.

Health District Permanent Rates	
Rounded Per \$1,000 of Assessed Property Value	
Blue Mountain Hospital District: Grant County.....	2.13
Lake Health District - Lake County	2.03
Harney County Health District.....	1.93
Wallowa County Healthcare District.....	1.05
Morrow County Health District.....	0.61

The County's press release states, "...the County cannot give MCHD a contract which the county has no authority to terminate under any circumstance." Why isn't there termination language in the contract?

The contract contains termination language as follows:

If COUNTY elects to terminate services under this Agreement, COUNTY shall notify PROVIDER of such decision by formal written notice at least eighteen months prior to the scheduled end of the term of the Agreement currently in place.

and

Early Termination. This Contract may be terminated by the County and Provider by mutual written agreement at any time and upon proper notice as described in the Agreement.

The County would be welcome to draft additional termination language.

We strongly believe that executing this service agreement is in the best interests of Morrow County residents. We hope the County will come to the table to immediately begin negotiations.

Questions can be directed to community@moco hd.org.

A copy of the draft ambulance service contract is available here:

<https://www.morrowcountyhealthdistrict.org/public-information-concerning-ambulance-services-in-morrow-county>