

12/13/2023

Morrow County Residents,

On December 13, 2023, Morrow County Health District issued a 90-day notice to discontinue ambulance service in Morrow County. This is a very serious matter and we know you will have questions. We have done our best to answer questions below and additional questions can be sent to [community@moco hd.org](mailto:community@moco hd.org).

### **Why has Morrow County Health District given notice to discontinue ambulance service?**

Since September, we have attempted to engage the County in good faith efforts to quickly resolve the ambulance service dispute. Resolving this issue is urgent due to serious ongoing safety issues.

On October 21, 2023, Morrow County sent a draft ASA Plan and draft Ordinance with a request for feedback by October 27, 2023. The email from the County Administrator stated, *"The County asks for your review and comment of the proposed document. Any comments should be submitted by 4:00 PM on Friday, October 27, 2023. These will be reviewed and responded to as appropriate before the proposed plan is submitted to OHA for their review."*

Morrow County Health District responded as requested, submitting significant feedback, comments, and questions. Despite numerous requests for updates, none were forthcoming. On December 11, 2023, Morrow County submitted a revised ASA Plan and Ordinance to the Oregon Health Authority for approval **erroneously** stating that Morrow County Health District was interested in providing services under the new plan. In fact, Morrow County Health District had not seen the revised plan, which did not adequately address questions and issues sent to Morrow County in October. Morrow County made no effort to clarify those questions or issues nor did they respond to Morrow County Health District as promised.

Morrow County Health District has made it clear to Morrow County that we cannot proceed under a new ASA Plan without a mutually agreeable service contract, ASA Plan, and Ordinance in place. This is necessary to protect the tax-funded investments made by Morrow County Health District and prevent future disputes about service provision. Additionally, the ASA Plan and Ordinance contain important provisions related to patient safety, quality of care, and confidentiality, which we believe have not been adequately addressed. Morrow County has made no effort to engage in a contracting process and has not followed their stated processes for drafting an ASA Plan and Ordinance.

Although Morrow County Health District wishes to remain the service provider for all of Morrow County, we do not see a good faith process occurring and we cannot continue to operate in such a risky environment. **We have asked Morrow County to engage with us in good faith to draft a service contract, ASA Plan, and Ordinance that adequately provide for the safety and privacy of our residents.**

## What are the issues with the proposed ASA Plan and Ordinance?

Morrow County Health District provided Morrow County with a red-lined version of the draft ASA Plan and draft Ordinance outlining a number of issues and questions. Morrow County did not respond to these issues or questions and instead made changes to the draft ASA Plan and Ordinance without adequately addressing the issues raised by MCHD.

We believe the original drafts, the red-lined versions from MCHD and Boardman Fire Rescue District, and the current drafts are public records, which can be requested from Morrow County.

Issues with the current draft of the ASA Plan include:

1. In the current draft, Morrow County has awarded the “Northern Ambulance Service Area” to Boardman Fire Rescue District. Morrow County has not followed the processes outlined in the 1998 ASA Plan or the 2022 ASA Plan to replace MCHD as the ambulance service provider for any part of Morrow County. Morrow County has not provided any rationale for changing the ambulance service provider in the Boardman area.
2. Morrow County included a 35-mile boundary between the service area they intend to award to Boardman Fire Rescue District and the area to be served by MCHD with the implied intent of preserving MCHD’s cost-based reimbursement. MCHD requested information about how the boundary was mapped, which does not appear to be within the legally mandated 35-mile range, but Morrow County has not provided that information.
3. Morrow County has not addressed MCHD’s concerns with reduced cross-coverage in Boardman and Irrigon. Currently, MCHD’s ambulances cross cover both areas and a total of four ambulances can be mobilized in a coordinated manner between Boardman and Irrigon.
4. The makeup of the new EMS Advisory Committee does not specifically include paramedics or EMTs. This is problematic because this committee is responsible for overseeing the quality of care provided by paramedics and EMTs. With the exception of the supervising physicians, no other committee members have the appropriate qualifications to oversee the care provided by paramedics and EMTs.
5. Morrow County has failed to specify a process for investigating medically related issues.
6. Morrow County has not sufficiently addressed confidentiality issues related to investigations of medically related issues and chart reviews performed by the EMS Advisory Committee. This is concerning because maintaining peer review protections under ORS 41.675 requires a strict process for maintaining confidentiality of records. The proposed ASA Plan simply states that a process will be developed. Additionally, the proposed ASA Plan allows the EMS Advisory Committee to make reports to public officials and allows public officials to attend executive sessions without specifying protections for confidential information and executive sessions.
7. The proposed ASA Plan includes a provision that requires MCHD to surrender its ambulances and equipment to Morrow County for an unspecified period of time in the event that MCHD vacates the ASA.

Issues with the current draft of the Ordinance include:

1. The first paragraph in Section 7 allows the Public Health Director access to MCHD’s records, but does not provide for confidentiality.

2. The second paragraph in Section 7 mentions levying fees, but not to whom and in what amount.
3. Section 8(A)(1) is not consistent with the proposed ASA Plan with regard to individuals serving on the new EMS Advisory Committee. Reference is made to including community members outside of those designated in the proposed ASA Plan and no provisions are provided for confidentiality and no process is described for how the process would be applied.
4. Section 8(C) is not consistent with the proposed ASA Plan with regard to quorum requirements for the EMS Advisory Committee.
5. Section 9 does not include a reasonable implementation period for new ordinances, resolutions, and orders.

### **Why does Morrow County Health District need a service contract?**

Over the past three years, MCHD has made significant investments in ambulance services, including hiring additional personnel and purchasing new equipment. These investments were made with the understanding that MCHD had been awarded Morrow County as a service area through 2027. Morrow County has since determined that it will not honor the 5-year period of time for which MCHD was assigned to provide services to Morrow County. This makes it financially and operationally impossible for MCHD to continue to provide services if Morrow County can decide at any time, without reason, to reduce or eliminate MCHD's service area. Additionally, the costs to operate ambulance service have risen dramatically over the past three years, largely due to improvements requested by Morrow County at the time the service area was awarded in 2021. We have requested that Morrow County share in the costs to operate the ambulance service because Morrow County is legally obligated to provide for services to Morrow County residents, and MCHD simply cannot afford to continue subsidizing the ambulance service at such an enormous financial loss that will be compounded by the new proposed ASA Plan.

### **What is Morrow County Health District's goal?**

Our goal is to engage in good faith efforts with Morrow County to draft a sustainable service contract, ASA Plan, and Ordinance that adequately provide for the safety and privacy of our residents. We believe Morrow County Health District is the best entity to continue to provide services to all of Morrow County.

### **Will there be a gap in ambulance service coverage?**

Morrow County Health District will continue to provide ambulance services to all of Morrow County through the 90-day notice period. We sincerely hope to reach an agreement with Morrow County within that time. If this is not possible, Morrow County will be responsible for arranging coverage for the county, which might include coverage by other ambulance service providers and/or local fire departments.