

11/29/22

An Open Letter to Morrow County Residents:

Over the past several months, Morrow County Health District has been largely silent about the conflict around EMS services due to the District’s ongoing participation in mediation efforts. Recently, the District became aware that mediation efforts had stalled out and determined it was time to provide additional important information to the public.

For more than 30 years, the District has provided ambulance service to the entire county as one ambulance service area. We do this because it allows the District to receive enhanced federal funding when the ambulance service is associated with our critical access hospital. This enhanced funding is key because the District heavily subsidizes EMS services in all communities. Currently, the District has seven ambulances in service – two in Boardman, two in Irrigon, one in Lone, and two in Heppner.

In 2021, the District’s board approved a new staffing model for EMS in which each dispatching location (Boardman, Irrigon, and Heppner) is staffed by two EMS personnel at all times working 12-hour shifts. This plan was approved with a three-year phase-in. Boardman went live in 2021, Irrigon in 2022, and Heppner is slated for 2023. This model has already resulted in improved response times in Boardman as shown below:

2022	BOARDMAN (TIME IN MINUTES)					
	899 (First Out Ambulance)			898 (Second Out Ambulance)		
	Dispatch to En Route	Response Time	Number of Runs	Dispatch to En Route	Response Time	Number of Runs
January	1.0	5.1	51.0	0.5	6.5	2.0
February	1.2	5.0	48.0	5.2	7.0	2.0
March	1.0	4.7	46.0	0.1	3.1	1.0
April	1.0	3.8	34.0	0.5	3.7	10.0
May	0.6	4.0	46.0	0.0	0.0	1.0
June	0.6	3.7	38.0	1.1	2.7	8.0
July	0.9	5.0	48.0	1.0	5.0	4.0
August	0.5	2.7	7.0	0.5	3.8	31.0
September	-	-	0.0	0.8	5.2	49.0
October	0.5	2.4	25.0	0.3	4.0	17.0

Dispatch to en route means the length of time between when the ambulance is dispatched to when the ambulance leaves the garage. **Response time** means the length of time between the notification to the ambulance and the arrival of the ambulance at the incident scene. Note that response times are not adjusted for miles traveled and in some instances include non-emergent transfers.

The licensing of a competing ambulance service in Boardman will jeopardize the current levels of service provided in all cities in Morrow County, including Irrigon, Boardman, Heppner, Lexington, and Lone. A competing service in Boardman will eliminate the District’s eligibility for enhanced federal funding across the District’s entire ambulance service (not just in Boardman). Given the high rate at which the District currently subsidizes EMS services (approximately \$550,000 per fully staffed location), a decrease in funding puts existing services in serious peril in all locations.

With the high rates of subsidy, one might wonder why Morrow County Health District wishes to retain EMS services across the entire county. EMS services have long been a core part of MCHD's mission to serve the county. Most ambulance providers will not bid to provide services in a region in which they expect to take a loss. Because no other entities are eligible for enhanced federal funding, other entities cannot provide this service in a more cost-effective manner than MCHD. As a public entity, the District considers this a core public safety service, which must be preserved even when that requires a significant subsidy.

The District does not oppose the addition of more resources to support EMS anywhere in the county. If another ambulance provider can work in tandem with MCHD to supplement services, we would welcome that. Any such arrangement must safeguard the District's current funding, which is necessary to sustain EMS across the entire county. The best way forward if another ambulance provider wishes to operate in Morrow County is through a contract with MCHD. The District is open to considering all such contracts that are in the best interests of the public.

For the past two years, MCHD has attempted to partner with Boardman Fire Rescue District to find a mutually agreeable solution to incorporate BFRD into the ambulance service system in Morrow County. At this point, we feel EMS services across the county are in jeopardy if we cannot reach an agreement that does not eliminate MCHD's federal funding.

We call on all Morrow County residents to support MCHD to preserve and enhance critical ambulance services. All residents in Morrow County have the right to high-quality ambulance services. Please consider contacting your local representatives, be that County Commissioners or elected board members, and encourage them to support MCHD and our efforts to provide ambulance services to everyone in Morrow County. This issue is too important to ignore.

Sincerely,

Emily Roberts
Chief Executive Officer
Morrow County Health District