

Irrigon and South MC to be served by Health District, Boardman Fire to serve Boardman

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tee met and reviewed applications on June 12th and June 17th. Both applicants were interviewed by the selection committee on June 21st. The selection committee met again on June 25th and June 26th to finalize scoring.

In his overview at the July 3rd BOC meeting, Jensen said the committee found strengths and weaknesses with both applicants.

MCHD had several strengths in the application and interview process, he said, foremost being the district's 30-plus years of experience in providing ambulance services in the county.

"That gives them a great network of knowledge and resources to pull from," he said, adding that MCHD had a lot of support from the community, as well as a strong network of Quick Response Teams (QRTs).

At the same time, Jensen said he and the committee both had concerns about the health district's consistency of leadership approach and general staffing.

"While their EMS leadership had been consistent and taken care of, there has been some question on turnover rates," said Jensen. He added that the health district said the turnover rate was less than the national average. "But it was a concern that was presented to them, and just leadership decisions on those types of things."

One such leadership decision that weighed heavily, he said, was the decision to cease ambulance operations in March.

"That put the county in an awkward position as we were nearing the finish goal of making these considerations," he said, "and it is a bit of a black eye."

Jensen said the health district also asked for an intergovernmental agreement between all five cities and the county if MCHD did not get the contract for all three ASAs. Jensen said that could prove "challenging," since multiple third parties could then impact the determination of ambulance service providers.

Meanwhile, Jensen said a strength of Boardman Fire lay in its dual-role staffing model, in which firefighters are also EMTs and paramedics. That could provide cost savings if managed correctly. However, Jensen said, that could also be seen as a weakness.

"It works for Boardman because they have the fire department," said Jensen. "In other areas of the county, they don't, so using that staffing model is a challenge."

Jensen also said that a drawback with BFRD is lack of experience with billing and financial projections, which he said the health district "has down in spades."

Another area Boardman Fire came up lacking was in the area of volunteer support such as the QRTs MCHD had established.

"As we look at the rural nature of our county, specifically the extended distances in the Southern ASA, the reliance on QRTs is a lifesaving practice for the county and for EMS," he said.

At the same time, he pointed out that BFRD had stepped in as interim provider over the last three months and had done an "exemplary" job. Also, though several areas of the county have mixed feelings at best about BFRD, support for the fire district is strong in the Boardman area.

Jensen also shared the composite scoring made by the committee. The North-

ern ASA (Boardman) was scored overwhelmingly for BFRD.

"I think that synergy of their model with the fire district there provides some unique options and opportunities," he said, "and a lower cost response for the Northern ASA."

For the Southern ASA, the committee swung in the opposite direction, choosing MCHD by a wide margin.

It was the Northeast ASA, which includes Irrigon and the surrounding area, that proved to be a sticking point. Jensen said the committee was pretty evenly split, seeing value in both, and recommended referring the decision to the BOC.

Jensen said there was a 1.125-point difference between MCHD and BFRD, with favor leaning slightly toward Boardman Fire. Jensen noted, though, that three members of the committee scored BFRD higher, while five scored MCHD higher.

"So, we don't have a majority giving this opinion," he said.

Jensen pointed out that, while Boardman Fire's quoted cost to serve the north end was lower, he had concerns over those projections since BFRD didn't operate the Irrigon fire department. He also said letters from Irrigon community leaders weighed heavily in his decision to recommend MCHD as the provider for the Northeast ASA.

While the work of the ad hoc committee provided the groundwork for the selection of ambulance providers, the decision ultimately rested in the hands of the three county commissioners. As the commissioners questioned Jensen on specifics, Morrow County Commissioner Jeff Wenholtz said he had a problem with MCHD's proposed IGA.

"I don't see how we would enforce it," he said.

"It enters third parties into something that really has nothing to do with having ambulance service," Wenholtz added, saying the proposed 20-year IGA was also a concern when the provider contract was only for five years.

Jensen replied that the health district had stated it would be open to negotiation on the IGA, which could happen before finalizing contracts.

Wenholtz also asked whether there would be a mutual aid agreement between MCHD and Boardman Fire for the Northeast ASA.

"Now, if the Irrigon ambulance is out, what is the solution so that Irrigon isn't without an ambulance?" he asked.

Jensen said mutual aid agreements would be required between all am-

bulance providers in the county, regardless of who was chosen.

"It is a requirement," he said, adding that part of the role of the ASA advisory committee is to make sure such requirements are followed and enforced. "If we have a provider that's not responding to mutual aid requirements, that will put their provider contract into question."

The contracts will also require two ambulances based in each ASA, with one full team staffed and backup available on call.

In other business at the meeting, Jensen reported that the environmental survey for the new circuit court building is underway at the proposed Kinzua mill site. The geotechnical survey was scheduled to be on site July 9th. He said he anticipates both reports coming in around July 23rd.

Jensen said he hopes to have a recommendation on whether the site is feasible for the circuit court building after that, hopefully with a presentation to the BOC by the first of August.

Send in submissions for the MC Fair contest

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tion as possible about the picture.

This photo from Ione area of farmer Ken Nelson, was taken in 1929, and shows the first harvest using a tractor to pull the combine. Norman Nelson, the father of the late Chuck Nelson, and grandfather of Morrow County District Attorney, Justin Nelson, is on the tractor, a model 30 gas Cat. Fred (Alfred Nelson, Jr.), father of Ken Nelson, is standing on the front of the combine. The sack sewer was "Porky" Lyons, and Alfred Nelson, Sr., father of Norman and Fred, is on the separator.

Wheat farmers are encouraged to enter this contest, which hopefully will show the grain harvest through the years in Morrow County. Photography department superintendent, Tina Palmer, says: "Growing up I rode with my dad in a combine with no cab, and now our kids and grandkids, the next generations, ride in an air-conditioned combine and cut more acres in a day than Dad did in a week. Farming has come a long way. It is important that each generation realizes the importance of the family farm in feeding the world."

DEADLINE:
MONDAYS
AT 5PM

MC Board of Commissioners approves ASA awards

Morrow County's Board of Commissioners acted on staff recommendations and approved moving forward with notice of awards for Ambulance Service Areas (ASA) under the new Ambulance Service Plan that will be effective on July 17, 2024. Boardman Fire Rescue District was awarded the Northern ASA while Morrow County Health District was awarded the Southern and Northeast ASAs. Staff were directed to finalize contract negotiations and bring final contracts back to the Board for final approval. It is anticipated that ASA providers will assume responsibility for their respective areas in late July or August, depending on contracts being settled and resources being put into place.

The Board of Commissioners would like to acknowledge the community members that assisted staff in reviewing applications and interviewing the applicants. These individuals represented not only their respective communities but the entire County and provided invaluable insight, comments and questions during the process. Their input was an important factor in assisting staff to make final recommendations. These individuals include Emily Jack (Heppner), Sheila Miller (Lexington), Jerry Rietmann (Ione), Brenda Profitt (Boardman), and Michelle Patton (Irrigon). We also appreciate the assistance of David Anderson, the EMS Chief with North Gilliam Medical District, who provided specific EMS experience and knowledge for the Committee.

Information on the process, including applications, forms, presentation files, and other items, will be made available on the County's website on Friday, July 5, 2024.

Please direct inquiries to: Matthew Jensen, Administrator (541) 676-2529

YOUR AD COULD BE HERE! Call 541-676-9228

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Governor Kotek announces state preparedness in advance of excessive heat warnings

Salem, OR – In advance of excessive heat warnings for most of the state this holiday week from noon Thursday through Sunday evening, Governor Tina Kotek is reminding Oregonians to take extra precautions to stay safe. State agencies are mobilizing resources and standing up the state Emergency Coordination Center throughout the heatwave.

"Oregon will experience record-breaking heat across the state this holiday week," Governor Kotek said. "While extreme heat can be deadly for anyone, certain groups – children, elders, people with disabilities, and people who work outside – face additional risk. Also, remember to check on your neighbors, especially those who might not have access to air conditioning."

"High heat can also be a catalyst for wildfires. I strongly urge all Oregonians to practice extreme caution this weekend, stay cool, and take preventive measures to reduce the risk of human-caused wildfires."

Temperatures across Oregon are expected to reach near record-breaking levels, with the Portland metro area, Willamette Valley, and parts of Southern Oregon expected to hit temperatures in the triple digits. The heat risk levels and what they mean for individuals can be found on the National Weather Service's Heat Risk map at www.wpc.ncep.noaa.gov/heatrisk/

The Oregon Department of Emergency Management has activated the state Emergency Coordination Center in response to the heatwave. Multiple partners including the Oregon Health Authority, the Oregon Department of Human Services office of Resilience and Emergency Management, the Oregon State Medical Examiner, the Oregon Public Utility Commission and the American Red Cross are working with local and tribal emergency managers as they prepare to open cooling centers. State agencies are providing support and resources where requested. The state Emergency Coordination Center will meet throughout the heatwave to monitor the situation and respond accordingly.

The Oregon Health Authority is also encouraging people to take steps to avoid heat-related illnesses such as heat stroke and heat exhaustion as advisories predicting triple-digit temperatures go into effect this week. Oregonians can find more information about local cooling centers from 211 at www.211info.org/summer-and-heat-related-resources

Sign up for OR-alert at (oralert.gov) and get life-saving alerts and instructions during emergencies to help you and others stay safe in Oregon.

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Don't Let Salem Dictate Morrow County's Future!

VOTE NO on Recall!

If Recall is successful Governor Tina Kotek will choose our next County Commissioners

Do the citizens of Morrow County want Salem politicians deciding our future? If this recall is successful, Oregon Law says Governor Tina Kotek will choose our next board of commissioners. And Tina's hand-picked people will serve two-and-a-half years!

Keep Local Control VOTE NO on Recall

Is this what Morrow County wants? Don't let Morrow County's governance in the hands of valley politicians. Keep local control and Vote Down this misguided and unwarranted recall/power grab!