

Scappoose Fire 10/4/25

Columbia County
JUN 4 2025
Board of Commissioners

Good morning, Commissioners Garret, Magruder and Smith,

I am here before you today because I believe it's crucial that you recognize the importance of working collaboratively with our existing fire-based EMS providers in Columbia County. Moving to a contingency plan due to a contract dispute—without a clear and collective understanding—is not reasonable, safe, or wise. It's not in the best interest of our taxpayers and the citizens we serve and care for.

For nearly 75 years, fire-based EMS has been a cornerstone of emergency response in Columbia County. We have a proven record of reliable, quality service—services that have not only been consistent but also meet or exceed standards set by the State of Oregon and neighboring jurisdictions, including Multnomah County. To date, there have been no performance issues. There have been no failures or shortcomings, and the community trusts us.

It would be irresponsible at this moment to consider abandoning this trusted system—especially when the current providers have demonstrated such adequate performance. The county's own timeline, which was supposed to be six months, has been largely consumed by delays from the county attorney, who did not deliver the second draft until March 25th—taking more than three months of the six-month extension deadline. This hampered our ability to meet the original schedule and plan effectively.

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Furthermore, shifting to a private for-profit vendor—who recently lost a contract in a nearby county—is not a move based on the best available data. Their level of service will be significantly less than what is currently provided. During most of the week, we comfortably have ten ALS ambulances operating between Clatskanie and Scappoose. From what we have been told, the private company can only provide six ALS ambulances. Given the high demand for emergency services, especially during peak times, this reduction in ambulance services would severely compromise our response capabilities.

Most importantly, a hasty, unilateral decision to prohibit fire-based EMS from transporting starting July 1st would endanger our community. The 911 dispatch center, who has not been included in any discussion, cannot build run cards in advance; they must do so on the day of the changeover, and will likely take more than a week to fully coordinate. Additionally, Washington County, the backup 911 center, would need to undertake the same process simultaneously. This lack of foresight and failure to plan is exactly what the proposed agreement warns us against—that is, rushing decisions without proper planning and coordination.

One of the key areas of agreement among all fire-based EMS providers is the importance of making data-driven decisions. Our current system relies on response data to inform service levels, deployment strategies, and response choices—ensuring we meet the needs of our community efficiently and effectively. The proposed contingency plan, however, lacks any data or analysis to support its efficacy. Making such a fundamental shift without understanding response patterns, community needs, or operational impact would be irresponsible.

Let me be clear: our fire-based EMS services are proven, reliable, and overseen by an elected five-member board. Our ambulances and personnel are licensed, certified, and held to rigid standards through multiple state agencies. There's no need for additional regulation or oversight; we have demonstrated competence and accountability.

For the betterment of all citizens in Columbia County, I urge you to continue to work with us, not against us. But most importantly, in excluding the voice of our community and their representatives, you risk making a decision that's not in the best interest of anyone.

The voters spoke clearly in the last election. In May, our levy passed with a 76% approval rate. The levy funds go toward staffing ambulances. The community trusts fire-based EMS to serve their needs. To take this choice away without thorough collaboration, planning, and transparent discussions is not responsible governance.

Let's put politics aside and do what's right for Columbia County. Let's work together, unify our efforts, and keep our community safe.

Thank you.