

EMS splits vote on Del Norte Ambulance agreement

June 5, 2023



The North Coast Emergency Medical Services governing board split its three member votes in support of initiating a competitive bid process for ambulance service in Del Norte County.

Del Norte and Humboldt counties voted in favor in initiating a competitive bid process. Lake County voted against the process. Lake and Humboldt will make no changes in its ambulance services.

Members considered three options:

- Option one, make no changes to the agreement which runs through June 30, 2027.
- Option two, proceed with plans to conduct the requested and planned non-competitive exclusive operating area process with Del Norte Ambulance, also referred as a grandfather clause.
- Option three, initiate a competitive bid process.

At the May 18 meeting, by a 2-1 vote, members selected option three.

Ron Sandler, principal of Del Norte Ambulance expressed his disappointment with initiating a competitive bidding process for three reasons.

“The EMS system is not broken. Del Norte Ambulance has performed well for almost four decades,” Sandler said. “Are we perfect? No, but any of the few miscues we’ve made over those almost 40 years of service have been acknowledged and corrected.

“The cost of conducting a Request for Proposal (RFP) is considerable. Estimates to conduct an RFP in lightly populated Del Norte County could range from \$50,000 to \$150,000. Stability of ambulance service is vital. Changing the successful model to a competitive process poses serious concerns over services.”

Executive Director of North Coast EMS, Larry Karsteadt, concurs about costs and the preparation of the RFP, though Karsteadt will adhere to member direction.

Karsteadt shared, “This item is much larger than any typical RFP North Coast EMS has experienced. Del Norte County will need to reimburse North Coast for all costs and services. It’s all new work.”

Fifth District Supervisor Dean Wilson indicated his support for the grandfather option has not changed. Wilson called for additional scrutiny on Del Norte Ambulance oversight, noting response time, time of arrival, call, and rollout.

“It would be untruthful for anyone to underbid Del Norte Ambulance as it already possesses the existing infrastructure,” Wilson said