

Board votes to approve ambulance service through competitive bidding

January 15, 2023



In a marathon meeting, the Board of Supervisors narrowly approved a resolution to seek competitive bidding to provide ambulance service throughout Del Norte County.

The vote was 3-2 with supervisors Darrin Short, Valerie Starkey and Joey Borges supporting competitive bidding. Supervisors Chris Howard and Dean Wilson voted no.

Del Norte Ambulance has provided ambulance service without an exclusive operating area for almost four decades and requested the EOA.

For the past several months, spanning two separate boards, the Special Ad Hoc Committee, consisting of Supervisors Short and Starkey, researched the DNAMB request for exclusivity, conducted multi-level interviews with Del Norte fire chiefs and the Northcoast Emergency Medical Services and recommended the full board adopt the resolution for outreach competitive bidding. The cost for this request for proposal is estimated between \$50,000 and \$150,000. It is unclear at this time whether the RFP costs will be born by Del Norte County.

Fire Chief Kevin Carey though openly expressing his support for Del Norte Ambulance, stated he saw no value in granting the EOA to Del Norte Ambulance.

On his first official meeting, Borges initially expressed his concern in embracing the grandfathering of the EOA.

Along with Howard, he felt this decision could be deferred for a period of one year while the board looked at specific concerns from the fire chiefs.

Howard also expressed deep concern in "...throwing the baby out with the bathwater."

Supervisor Wilson shared his 35-year law enforcement experience in supporting Del Norte Ambulance request for the EOA. Supervisor Starkey reiterated her support for competitive bidding which was conducted with oft-times limited factual data but an abundance of anecdotal information. Supervisor Short, a volunteer battalion fire chief, concurred with the fire chiefs in going the RFP route.

Del Norte Ambulance principal Ron Sandler expressed his disappointment with the Board vote.

"For 37 years, we've provided excellent service to this community and we will continue to do so. It's regrettable the full Board did not fully understand our role in serving Del Norte County. We're not perfect but every issue brought to our attention has been addressed and satisfied," Sandler said. "I'm sorry the fire chiefs did not come forward to us earlier with their issues, rather than waiting for the last moment to address the Board. That's regrettable."

Northcoast EMS director Larry Karsteadt, on behalf of his agency, recommended Del Norte Ambulance's request for the EOA be grandfathered in. Karsteadt reiterated the grandfather cause would not prevent additional scrutiny should cause be shown to withdraw the EOA. With the vote, the grandfather clause has been withdrawn. DNAMB currently operates on a contract with the County through 2027.

The 3-2 vote is advisory only.

In April, the full NCEMS Board will decide direction.