

Opinion: 2024, Fire Chief Carey Threw Del Norte Ambulance Under the Bus, Now Suddenly Mute

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Opinion

For over a year, the local community has waited for the Crescent City/Del Norte County Fire Chiefs to explain why they injected themselves into the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors (BOS) decision 3-2, Del Norte Ambulance was not to receive an exclusive operating area (EOA) permit to provide emergency services within the County. At the time, the Board was given to understand the Fire Chiefs claimed inadequate service was the reason given for their opposition to an EOA for Del Norte Ambulance and resulted in the Board's subsequent denial.

Since the original complaint of "inadequate service" was lodged by Supervisor Short and the County's fire chiefs prior to the 2024 vote, the complaint was found to be at odds with all other parties involved with emergency services. In a recent 2025 Board meeting County Supervisors have undertaken the Request for Proposal(RFP) to competitively seek an emergency service provider once Del Norte Ambulance's current contract expires in 2028.

Recently calls from the public have again asked Chief Kevin Carey and the County's Fire Chiefs to explain themselves as their ever-evolving story continues to collapse in the face of reality. For all practical purposes, Del Norte Ambulance has lived up to the terms of four decades of emergency services to Del Norte

County in exemplary fashion. So why now, when the competitive process for determining who will provide emergency service going forward, has Crescent Fire and Rescue/Crescent Fire Protection District (CCFR/CFPD) Chief Kevin Carey suddenly decided to become mute, and distance himself and the other fire chiefs from the process they were instrumental in initiating?

Perhaps a little bit of explanation is in order at this juncture. Fire departments' calls over the past several decades for fire service have dwindled to the point fire departments are rarely called to put out structure fires. The enormous costs to provide only fire service has caused many fire departments to transition to more comprehensive emergency service that include fire, rescue, and ambulance services. This is a transition many, particularly those in rural settings, cannot afford to make.

Our local CCFR/CFPD led by Chief Carey claims over 2,000 calls per year. The sad fact is less than one percent are calls for structure fires and only a few more are for fires in general. 75 to 80 percent of the remaining calls are for "health related emergencies" where fire personnel are for the most part unnecessary. Private Ambulance services such as Del Norte Ambulance and the Sheriff's department Search and Rescue eliminate the need for most of current fire department responses.

Calls for a restructured local fire department leveled at CCFR/CFPD have fallen on deaf ears. CCFR/CFPD under Chief Carey's leadership continue to live in 1925 rather than 2025, thousands of dollars to be spent on yet more unnecessary new fire vehicles. A new tanker truck recently ordered costing a minimum of \$500,000. There are plans of expanding the Washington Street station with a bigger kitchen, dining facilities, and accommodations for fire personnel to live on site.

The larger question becomes not whether or not we as a community can afford such grandiose plans, clearly we cannot, but should we jettison the current ambulance service and shoulder the cost of a replacement competition when it has become clear the CCFR/CFPD has eyes on ambulance services for its future relevance in Del Norte County before its fire service responses for structure fires evaporate completely.

Now the search for a new emergency service provider is well in hand, the original complaint by Chief Carey which initialed the competitive search to either replace or retain Del Norte Ambulance needs an explanation which we are NOT receiving from Supervisor Short or Chief Carey. This is unacceptable behavior from the Chief and Supervisor Short!

Both the County's Board of Supervisors and the Crescent City Council clearly are dealing with matters above their collective comprehension and will not ask the obvious questions. If either Short or Carey are unable or unwilling to explain themselves to the public, it is imperative Del Norte Ambulance's request for an EOA be revisited. Up to you Chief Carey, you started it, please explain!