

**UMATILLA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

Administrative Meeting  
August 16, 2019, 10 a.m.  
Milton-Freewater Public Library  
Albee Room  
Milton-Freewater, Oregon

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**Commissioners Present:** Chair George Murdock, Vice-Chair John Shafer, and  
Commissioner Bill Elfering

**County Counsel:** Doug Olsen

**Members and Guests Present:** Milton-Freewater Ambulance Area Health District, Board members Dan Kilmer (chair), George White (treasurer), Wes Koklich; City of Milton-Freewater: Linda Hall (manager), Leanne Steadman (city recorder), Steve Irving (city councilor); Milton-Freewater citizens: Sherri Widmer, Linda Maughan, Dennis Rakestraw, Patsy Buroken, Charles Danforth, Brian Steadman, Kaila Gibson, Orrin Lyon, Ed Chesnut; Phil Wright, East Oregonian; Emily Thornton, Walla Walla Union Bulletin

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**CALL TO ORDER:** Chair Murdock called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

**Pledge of allegiance.**

**Public meeting.** Chair Murdock reminded those present that the meeting is a public forum, and minutes will be taken. It is being audio recorded. Comments will become part of the meeting record. If persons wish to speak before the Board, please stand, identify yourself and state where you live in order to be heard on the record – also note if you are speaking on behalf of others.

**Additions to the Agenda.** None.

**Business Items**

1. Milton-Freewater Ambulance District – public hearing. Chair Murdock called the hearing to order at 10:01 a.m. Doug Olsen gave the staff report. This is the second hearing for the proposed district. Request is made by the existing board of the ambulance area district to form a new district with a permanent tax rate by submitting to the voters. The proposed rate is \$1.40/\$1,000; the existing rate is \$.25/\$1,000. The first public hearing established boundaries. Today’s hearing is to further consider the district and to allow public testimony. Items submitted: 1) request for formation of a district. 2) request a permanent tax rate; and 3) dissolve the current district.

Chair Murdock clarified Board action is to consider placing the item on the ballot for election in November. Neither Commissioner Elfering nor Shafer had anything to add to the staff report.

Chair Murdock asked for those in favor to come forward.

Dan Kilmer, 311 SW 6<sup>th</sup>, M-F. He clarified the “new figure is \$1.10” on ballot proposal vs. \$1.40 noted (the proposed rate was changed last night). Commissioner Shafer pointed out at the last council the amount was \$1.40. Mr. Kilmer advised action of the ambulance district on August 15 was to reduce the ask to \$1.10. Commissioner Shafer then read a summary of the ambulance district recommendation/proposal.

Chair Murdock noted for the record, from the initial proposal, changes are for the dollar amount and also the name of the district. Clarification: the modified total rate would be \$1.10/\$1,000 and the name would be Milton-Freewater Valley Ambulance District. That is now a matter of record.

Charles Danforth, 225 Maple Avenue. He talked about service of ambulance – what is needed. It is not sufficient now – they need two paramedics in back and a driver, plus maybe a fireman – they really need three medical people for something like a heart attack. This is still a minimum ambulance service. The increase would be \$200/household/year. He feels the upgrade is reasonable and feels it needs to go to the voters. It is also important to have proper the description for the ballot measure.

Chair Murdock asked for those in opposition to come forward.

Linda Maughan, 229 SE 20<sup>th</sup> Place. She asked what is this going to give us? More manpower? More ambulances? She also has question from someone else noting they already pay \$60/month – is that still in effect?

Chair Murdock pointed out questions would need to be answered by those in the audience (ambulance district board, city representatives).

Wes Koklich, 2088 S. Walnut responded to questions -- he is on ambulance district board. Cost increases have come about over years, nothing different things have to be purchased. In addition, Medicare reimbursement is decreasing. Funds are needed to just maintain the ambulance service. Until funding is figured out, expenses are increasing, and the ballot measure would be to cover expenses. He advised that costs will be a certain amount per household. At this time, more people are getting a ride in the cart vs. pulling it. He also mentioned state unfunded mandates. Proposed funds would be to try to cover expenses. The current rate of \$.25/\$1,000 has been insufficient for a while (about 7 years now).

In response to Phil Wright’s question, Mr. Koklich advised records show about 1,000 calls/year.

George White, 829 Jacquelyn Street, treasurer of the ambulance district. Not in opposition. He provided some background and statistics. Wear and tear on ambulances is difficult to handle – and expensive. The newest ambulance is a 2014 model and the oldest is 1995. Cost to buy a new one is about \$250,000. And, the old ones are only worth about \$10,000 due to hard use. Charges vs. collections estimate of about \$500,000 vs. estimated \$355,000. A lot of people don’t pay for the service.

Asking for \$1.10/\$1,000 is more reasonable [than the earlier suggested \$1.40] and is needed to subsidize the ambulance contractors. Increased funds are needed to survive.

Dennis Rakestraw, 415 Parkview. Why did the district wait so long to come forward? Versus coming out every 1-2 years? He is concerned with a big jump in cost especially for fixed income individuals (like his mother). He would like to see books if possible. Mr. White said yes. He added he's only been on the board for 1 ½ years and agreed it should have been pushed earlier.

Mr. Koklich noted this is the process for asking for an increase in a permanent tax rate.

Linda Hall, City of Milton-Freewater asked for a point of clarification – has the ambulance board made a decision to not own ambulances? Mr. White responded the board feels they don't want to own ambulances and would still desire to contract with the current provider (Sager, under contract).

Ed Chesnut, 812 Jacquelyn Street, a city councilor, wanted more discussion of who will own ambulances. He understands the district doesn't want to own the equipment, but perhaps accrual of funds would be in their oversight to go to reserve funds to buy ambulances and replace needed equipment. As a public official, he likes the idea of the district holding funds in reserve and to be sure they go where they are intended.

Kaila Gibson, 83926 Hwy 339, a teacher. She talked about life and death situations – there is urgent need to have ambulance service in Milton-Freewater – it must happen.

Mr. Danforth responded – this proposal is for minimum service – they would like to have more, but the district needs to research wages for paramedics vs. funds only going to equipment. He talked about his experience and history (from Los Angeles). Manpower can also come from fire department/volunteers.

Ms. Hall expressed concern about audience hearing about the level of service. Commissioner Shafer, as a prior Dispatch supervisor with experience, advised currently it is advanced life support – not basic support. He clarified and agreed with Ms. Hall that at this time, the current contractor provides advanced life support.

Chair Murdock asked Mr. Olsen what would happen if the ballot fails? Mr. Olsen responded it would revert to the current funding level. The district would still need to find a provider if the current provider can't or won't provide the service. Discussion ensued about other possibilities for funding, responsibilities, options, etc.

Mr. White advised that Walla Walla and Athena have said they won't come (make a run) for \$.25/thousand. Mr. Koklich added the current contract is up June 30 of 2020 (or 2021?). If that happens, the district would have 90 days to put out for bid. However, there are no takers at the current rate.

There was more discussion about contract and term. Mr. Olsen clarified the district could then issue a request for bids if the current contractor does not submit a bid.

There were no more comments. Chair Murdock closed the hearing at 10:40 a.m.

Commissioner Shafer asked Mr. Olsen about needed revisions in the resolution, Order No. BCC 2019-060. Mr. Olsen advised the Board can act today and changes will be incorporated to rate and district name. **Commissioner Shafer moved to adopt Order No. BCC 2019-060 and forward the matter to the voters. Seconded by Commissioner Elfering -- with comments** – the district needs

to cover all issues and suggested having a series of town halls / meetings for discussion. Commissioner Shafer also commented about importance of constituents knowing about the reduction of the “ask” to \$1.10/\$1,000 vs. \$1.40 as discussed earlier. Commissioner Elfering commented about options, voter rights and knowledge. Chair Murdock echoed those comments and noted the importance of understanding consequences. Voters need to genuinely know what they are voting on with full explanation. **Motion carried, 3-0.**

The meeting adjourned at 10:43 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Melinda Slatt*

Executive Secretary, Umatilla County Board of Commissioners