

Comment for the June 1, 2020 Council Study Session

When I started attending the Cost Review Ad-Hoc Committee meetings, I believed from its charge that it would involve a robust conversation about the PERS and health care costs associated with City employees. In the five meetings I attended, I heard very little discussion of those issues. Instead, it became obvious that the Committee's focus was on cutting the ambulance service from the fire department.

Now that the council is considering privatizing our ambulance service, I feel compelled to say a few words. Our current drought and the COVID19 pandemic both heighten our reliance on our first responders, especially our firefighters and paramedics (ambulance service). While we as a community have a great deal of information to digest if the City Council truly intends to hold this discussion, I want to offer three points I believe are critical as you listen to the Fire Chief's presentation at the June 1, 2020 study session.

First, the county commissioners are rewriting the Ambulance Service Area (ASA) plan. Here is a link to the map - <http://www.jcems.net/docs/JacksonCountyASA.jpg>

The City of Ashland should be providing input to that rewriting, yet we appear not to be doing so. It is in our best interest to do so. (pg.8 of 34)

Second, everyone should read John Lotts' Incident account. If you think you may never need an ambulance, think again. When I've needed one, I have been thankful that the professionals who arrived at my house to care for my family knew Ashland's geography and could easily call on additional assistance quickly. I believe that if put to a vote, the citizens in Ashland would overwhelmingly support our career-quality ambulance service over Walmart-quality service from other providers. (pg.21 of 34)

Third, this is too significant a decision for the City Council to make. Citizens' lives depend on the Fire Department and ambulance service. We pay for it. Let us decide. Council must do an excellent job of providing transparent and objective information about the background, current issues, and alternatives to every citizen and through a vote or other effective means, find out what people prioritize. City surveys consistently show citizens giving the fire department/ambulance service 90% + ratings. Council, take the time to do this right. Our lives are at stake, as are yours! (pg.34/34)

Dr. Carol Voisin
Ashland, Oregon