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## EDITORIAL: Ambulance concerns

Jul 5, 2019

Baker County Commissioners have an obligation to try to ensure their constituents who live outside Baker City have access to ambulance service that meets both their needs and their ability to pay.

But in trying to fulfill that obligation the county has put Baker City's Fire Department — the agency that operates ambulances within the city limits and for more than half the county — into a potentially perilous position.

As prescribed by state law, county commissioners establish ambulance service areas and choose their allowed providers. When the county recently sent a letter of interest to 21 potential providers, it received four responses — one from Baker City and three from private providers.

The county will next send a formal Request for Proposals. Baker City Manager Fred Warner Jr. said last week that he's confident the city will make a compelling case for continuing to serve the ambulance service area. And County Commissioner Mark Bennett said the city has "provided excellent levels of service."

But because the county expects to ask voters next year to approve a new fee or tax to help pay for ambulance service, Bennett said he believes the county needs to consider all potential options.

That's reasonable.

But the prospect of the county choosing a provider other than the Baker City Fire Department is troubling. Without ambulance service, which makes up the majority of the Department's work as well as generating about 44% of its revenue, the city would have to severely reduce its

paid fire staff, which would affect its ability to respond to fires.

Bennett emphasizes that the county does not intend to harm the city's fire department, and his sincerity is not in question.

But Bennett and his fellow commissioners, Bill Harvey and Bruce Nichols, need to keep in mind the ramifications of their decision. Until Baker City is officially retained as the ambulance provider, the Fire Department's future will be a bit hazy.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor