



**TETON VALLEY
HEALTH CARE**

Partners in Health for a Lifetime

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Opinion Editorial by Teton Valley Health Care Board of Trustees

When it comes to matters of life and death, it's very difficult not to become impassioned about proposals for change that could negatively impact our community. However, our Hospital Board of Trustees unanimously believes that a logical approach is necessary to resolve the ongoing discussion about the Fire Department's proposal to take over Teton Valley Ambulance.

The Hospital Board of Trustees wants to make our position very clear: we want Teton County to have an ambulance service that best serves our community. We want excellent service which is efficiently operated and meets appropriate standards. Whether that is through a combined Fire and EMS service or a stand-alone ambulance service (with Fire Department support -- the current model) should be based on what's best for our entire community.

The Ambulance District collects tax dollars, but does not run the ambulance service. Instead, the District asks other firms to submit bids to operate this service through a County bidding process. The last bid request was in 2008. Each bidder had to provide an estimate of the expenses for running the Ambulance District in the first year -- FY 2009. The Fire Department bid was \$921,415 and the Hospital's bid was \$674,000. Although the Fire Department submitted a bid proposal, they declined to go further, stating they could not be ready by the operational date (October 1, 2008). The Hospital was awarded a five year contract. This contract expires September 30, 2013.

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The Request for Proposal that the Ambulance District issued contained detailed data on the prior five year's history of ambulance calls; including their location, type of support rendered, time from call receipt to dispatch, time to get to the site, etc. Bidders were expected to use that data to construct the proposed services and realistic budgets.

We are concerned with the current Fire Department proposals because none of that detailed data seems to have been used to propose the service. In addition, the fire protection impacts caused by combining fire and ambulance personnel are discussed, but again the underlying data (e.g., number of calls, locations, types of fires) needed to arrive at reasonable conclusions is not present.

We believe it would be advantageous to the community if there was an independent fact-based analysis of how best to provide Fire and EMS services in Teton County. The impact of a poor decision is huge. Providing Fire and EMS services in rural areas like Teton County presents unique challenges. We know that we do not have an unlimited budget to use to solve these challenges.

Other rural communities in Idaho and across the nation are faced with similar issues, and they have opted to perform such analyses. There are templates we can follow and independent experts that are familiar with the issues we are now discussing. The process is not lengthy. We can perform it now or wait for the conclusion of the current contract with the hospital when it would be done as part of the normal bidding process. The current ambulance service as administered by Teton Valley Hospital has a record of excellent service, therefore taking the time to research the best and most cost effective method of providing fire and ambulance service for our community will not jeopardize public health or safety.

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In addition, we believe it is imperative that we establish a committee of citizens to help guide the analysis and to set the levels of service that we should realistically expect for all emergency services including fire and ambulance. Our community is entitled to pay reasonable and realistic costs for their families to obtain quality emergency services.

Over the past four years, Teton Valley Health Care has reduced its annual tax levy from \$1.4 million to \$1 million to zero, while improving the quality of care offered. Furthermore, the governing board and hospital administration are reducing risks to the taxpayers through a business model conversion to a private non-profit, strengthened by a management agreement with Bingham Memorial Hospital. We understand and support our citizens' desires for fiscally responsible tax-supported services. It's our objective to constantly improve the service we provide to the community. We believe that a fact and logic-based approach, guided by concerned citizens, will help us all achieve that goal.

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