

Weekly Report Friday, May 13, 2022 – City Manager Jonathan Cannon

## TRY TO KEEP BETWEEN 200-250 WORDS

City Council met earlier this week and discussed ambulance service. They decided to instruct the City Manager to prepare a response to the Request for Proposals (RFP) from the county. In a work session on Wednesday of this week, the City Council reviewed the RFP in detail and gave further instructions to the City Manager.

As City Manager, I will be working over the next two weeks to prepare a submission. Council will review the draft submission and ultimately decide what the final submission includes. Simultaneously, city staff and I are working hard to complete the other important functions of the city operating smoothly. A Fire Department is one component of all that your local government handles, even though it has been in the forefront of what is happening as of late. Thank you to all of our staff who keep things rolling.

There is a lot of information floating around the community surrounding the ambulance service discussion. Some information is accurate and some of it includes complete fabrication. The city has received public records requests for different aspects related to **historical documents**, **financials**, **call responses**, the **callback for service numbers**, and more. To improve access to this data, I have instructed the City Recorder to add a page to our website where documents related to the ambulance service can be reviewed. That page is found **here**. Check back often as we will continue to upload documents.

I realize many of you may have reached out to me via phone and email. I have responded to many, but the number of calls coupled with my responsibilities makes it impossible for me to speak to everyone individually. I apologize if you did not get a response from me.

In an effort to clarify some common questions I am receiving regarding the issue, please consider the following:

1. **Ambulance Service will not cease.** On October 1, 2022, the ambulance service will continue forward. Baker County is working to select a new provider. So long as the County does its state-mandated job, the ambulances will respond throughout the Baker ASA which includes Baker City. If someone calls 911, an ambulance will respond. Baker County has released a request for proposals (which Baker City likely will respond to) and is scheduled to select a provider in the near future. I am saddened to hear from so many who have called me fearful and concerned that ambulance service will no longer exist in this County. Baker County is working to make sure that does not happen. I am confident they can do this.
2. **The Fire Department will still exist.** The Fire Department is not going away. It will still exist and it will still have adequate staff to respond to fire calls. The department will still be able to perform life-saving rescues in structure fires. Baker City responds to approximately 300 fire calls annually. The target staffing model is designed to handle the anticipated call volume. The staffing model is similar to other cities of similar or slightly larger populations and was explored as a staffing model in 2016. The other cities we have looked at actually run more calls than we are projected to run. 300 calls per year is less than 1 call per day. Most of our calls are what we refer to as smells and bells. In other words, someone smells smoke and our department responds to check it out or an alarm is going off and the department responds again to check it out. We average approximately 14 structure fires a year which vary from small to large.

3. **Insurance Rates are not going to skyrocket.** Our initial discussions with the officials providing ISO ratings to fire departments in the state indicate that we are not likely going to see a change to our ISO ratings. ISO ratings are in part what insurance companies use to determine fire risk for Baker City residents. We do not anticipate that our ISO rating will change at all. This will be confirmed in the near future as Baker City is up for review. The change to a fire response focus will be part of that review.
4. **SAFER grants are for fire not paramedics.** Baker City consistently pursues fire department grants. Fire Chief Sean Lee currently is working with finance on two applications for grants which are in process of review. Since I have been here with Baker City, the city has applied for grants and will continue to do so. We consistently receive fire department grants and anticipate that trend will remain. A common grant of discussion is the SAFER grant. It provides for fire personnel and requires staff to be assigned to fire apparatus 51% of the time. It is not designed to provide for ambulance personnel. The city can and has pursued the SAFER grant, but it is not a source to fund ambulance services. Baker City received a SAFER grant and hired three firefighters on that grant in approximately 2017. The grant has expired and there is no funding source to replace the grant. The union was aware of this problem and stated so in a letter from October 2017 located [here](#) on our website.
5. **Baker City pursues past due accounts through collections.** Baker City uses Cam Credits to collect past due accounts. Overall collection recovery rates are 9% for Baker City. The national average according to Cam Credits is 11.1%. Since 2007, Baker City has submitted more than \$2M to collections for the ambulance.
6. **County has an RFP. This will produce a long-term solution for this 31-year-old problem.** The unsustainable nature of funding this service first shows up in a [1991 ASA document](#) produced by Baker County. It mentions the need to establish a sustainable funding source for the Ambulance Service. This issue has been kicked down the road for many years and cannot be pushed further down the road. We encourage the county to complete its process which will establish a long-term solution to this problem.
7. **LifeFlight will still provide lifesaving air transport.** Many of our citizens use LifeFlight. LifeFlight is a private ambulance company that in our area provides air ambulance transportation. They do a fantastic job and save many lives. I am unaware of any changes by Baker County to this vital service.
8. **The City has made cuts in its budget to fund ambulances.** I had a conversation with the newspaper about a month ago. I was asked if the city has had to cut other departments in order to fund ambulance services. My response was something like this. The city has not made extensive and obvious cuts to its budget directly attributable to ambulances. What the city has done over the years, is as expenses continue to increase, the city is forced to trim its budget. This means skipping projects which need to be completed, and foregoing necessary maintenance and upgrades on facilities. The fire department needs a roof, replacement fire trucks, SCBA bottles, and more. The police need important technology updates. Finance needs modernized software and a new cash register. The entire city needed new data servers and up-to-date software licenses. City Hall needs to repair and fix its foundation and install fire escapes. The list goes on. Projects and equipment mentioned have been either perpetually postponed or simply ignored because funding is not available. Projects, equipment, vehicles, and more have been trimmed year after year out of the budget until we arrive at a point where it is difficult to

continue to trim further. The paper reported there have been no cuts, but the reality is that the city has trimmed the budget every year to maintain this service.