



Coburg Fire District

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Commissioner Heather Buch
District 5, East Lane County
Lane County Public Service Building
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December 5, 2022

Re:
Row River Fire Response
Fire Safety and Response Row River Valley

Commissioner,

As the Lane County Fire Defense Board Chief, I am concerned about the situation in southern Lane County Row River Valley. The mission of the Fire Defense Board is to develop area fire service plans that have provisions permitting departments to respond with mutual aid forces upon request of another department in the district.

As you are aware, there is a small community east of Cottage Grove that includes the unincorporated towns of Dorena, Disston, and Culp Creek that is not part of a legally recognized Fire/EMS service district and therefore not a part of the Lane County Fire Defense Board. Additionally, there are two schools within this community. **The lack of a timely response for Fire/EMS services in this area greatly increases the risk of a catastrophic fire disaster, increases the risk of personal injury or morbidity in medical emergencies, and generally makes the community less resilient, all of which are detrimental to the community, and contribute to increased service demands by our current responding agencies, (South Lane Fire and Rescue, Lane County Emergency Management, and other resources), during times of disaster.**

A group of community members from this area are in the process of organizing a Fire/EMS department initially as a 501C3 non-profit with the ultimate goal of forming a Special District Fire Response Organization in accordance with ORS Chapter 198 and 478. The group has formed a 501C3 Non-Profit entity, Row River Fire Response, and is working with the Special District Association of Oregon, as well as multiple other agencies to realize these much-needed services for the *Public Good*.

I am writing to express my support for Row River Fire Response for the following:

Formation of a Special District Fire Response Organization.

Because this community is not in any governmentally recognized existing Fire District, *the current ultimate **financial responsibility** for a large fire response coordinated by the Lane County Fire Defense Board would be the responsibility of Lane County.* A fire of this magnitude can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars per day for fire mitigation. If, however, this community became a Special Rural Fire District in accordance with ORS 198 and 478, then the newly formed organization could execute mutual aid agreements with the Lane Fire Defense Board who's combined resources of personnel, expertise, and equipment would be brought to aid the district in the unfortunate instance of a large disaster in their area. The Rural Special Fire Protection District would operate and be funded similar to other fire districts in Lane County, by property tax levies on the community members of the district, however there would be essentially no cost for the mutual aid from participating districts in the unfortunate instance of a fire or disaster; all districts operate in the spirit of reciprocity, aid, and helping their neighboring districts when called, as we witnessed in the recent Holiday Farm Fire. So, not only does the community and Lane County benefit from a local Rural Special Fire District by improved service and response times, **there is a significant financial benefit to Lane County if a new Rural Fire Protection District is formed in this community because once mutual aid agreements are in force, large incidents are not the sole financial responsibility of Lane County.** Thus, it is in Lane County's best interest to expedite the formation of a Special Rural Fire Protection district in this community as quickly as possible for the aforementioned financial reasons and because the area is designated: 'high' and 'extreme' wildfire risk by ODF; the community resides within the urban/wildland interface; the area has narrow, steep, and chimney like topography which allows rapid spread of fire, and has limited evacuation routes or safe-space sheltering—all of these conditions make this area a potential fire disaster in the making.

Formation of a Fire/EMS service for the community in operation as soon as feasibly possible.

Because forming a Special Rural Fire Protection District is a lengthy process, community members spearheading the Fire/EMS service for this community realized early on that following the special district process would result in a significant delay in implementing a fully operational Fire/EMS service, possibly for several years. For this reason, the committee is in the final stages of organizing *Row River Fire Response, a 501C3, with a mission to create a safe community through prevention, preparedness, and effective fire, medical, or other emergency response.* This is a common way for Fire/EMS departments to develop and the committee envisions this step as a stop gap measure until the Special Rural Fire Protection District is approved. **As the Lane County Fire Defense Board Chief, I strongly support this measure which will create a 'boots on the ground' Fire/EMS service as quickly as possible, and I urge Lane County to**

support this organization to the fullest. The fact is, that there is essentially no timely Fire/EMS service in the community so creation of this service will benefit the community, Lane County, and lessen service demands on other emergency services in the County.

This committee of dedicated and informed community members have a vision for a more resilient, safe, and healthy community with a logical two step path; an organized, effective, and well-trained Fire/EMS service in operation as quickly as possible, as well as the longer-term vision of a Special Rural Fire Protection District ultimately sustained by tax levies on property values within the community. To get to the short-term need of an operational Fire/EMS service and beyond to the long-term district formation requires a transitional period of funding through fundraising, donations, and support from the greater community of Fire/EMS services, as well as Lane County and State agencies. All are stakeholder agencies that benefit from obtaining these goals which are worthy of our support. I urge you to support this community's efforts—efforts that leave a legacy of resiliency and investment in the future of Lane County.

Chad Minter



Coburg Fire &

Lane County Fire Defense Board