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Town council in favor of an updated EMS and Ambulance Ordinance

By Vera Kochan

Moraga Police Chief Jon King's presentation to the town council requested an adoption by Reference Division 48, "Emergency Medical Services," of the Contra Costa County Code, with regards to EMS and ambulance operations after waiving the First Reading. His Jan. 11 staff report noted that "the purpose of this addition is to create uniformity with the County and other cities in ensuring that ambulances that are operated safely and in accordance with established standards and allowing the Contra Costa County Emergency Medical Services Agency to enforce the updated ordinance within the Town of Moraga." The council's decision was unanimously in favor.

The original county ambulance ordinance was adopted by Moraga in 1975. An updated procedures ordinance was approved by the County Board of Supervisors in 1983 and adopted by Moraga in 1991. After another 10-month updating process in June 2022, that involved stakeholders and endorsements by the county's executive fire chiefs, the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the most recent version of Division 48 of the Contra Costa County Code.

According to King's staff report, the necessity for an update was to take into consideration the many advances in the emergency medical field and ambulance operations within the past 30 years. "The updated ordinance addresses these changes, enhances patient and prehospital personnel safety by clarifying the EMS Agency's regulatory authority and oversight, provides additional oversight of EMS operations, special event medical standby services and ambulance operations; and improves the process for permitting ambulance service providers that operate within Contra Costa County."

Some of the updates include the following: "Authorizes the County to contract for emergency ambulance services with a fire agency that will provide those services in conjunction with a private ambulance subcontractor; requires criminal history background checks on ambulance owners, including live scan fingerprint checks; requires special event standby services to be permitted, employ only certified and licensed prehospital personnel, have a multi-patient plan for events, have coordinated with local public safety emergency responders and have propose business licenses and liability insurance; requires ambulance personnel to take an approved emergency vehicle operations course; enhances security by requiring ambulance operators to secure their vehicles to prevent theft of the vehicle, equipment and uniforms; requires operators to supply their personnel with specified personal protection equipment (PPE) and have an infectious disease control plan; improves transparency and consumer protection by requiring ambulance services to publicly post their fees, certificate of operation and licenses at their place of business and website; and provides a clear and transparent appeal process for all administrative actions taken relating to ambulance service providers and establishes specific criteria for the approval or denial of a Certificate of Operation for an ambulance service."

King noted the excellent EMS and ambulance services that the town currently receives from the Moraga-Orinda Fire District's personnel along with other private ambulance operators. While MOFD is not required to obtain certificates of operation, the private ambulance operators must, and both entities are expected to comply with the provisions of the ordinance.

A Public Hearing for the Second Reading of the ordinance is scheduled for the Jan. 25 town council meeting.

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