

## Fresno County supervisors will wait to expand dispatch center

By Marc Benjamin



The Fresno County Emergency Medical Services center on the southern edge of the Fresno Fairgrounds dispatches ambulances for Fresno, Madera and Kings counties and also manages dispatch services for nine fire departments.

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- *Plans for a new Fresno County dispatch center delayed by supervisors*
- *Contract for ambulance services looms in decision*
- *Work costs less if a private firm finances the project*

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Fresno County needs a new Emergency Medical Services center and American Ambulance, which oversees ambulance services for Fresno and surrounding counties, is willing to build it.

But the county's Board of Supervisors decided Tuesday to wait on possibly taking American Ambulance up on its offer. American's contract with the county runs through 2017 and supervisors worry that allowing American to build the emergency communications center would give the company at least the appearance of an inside track in the selection process.

American Ambulance officials say they are willing to take the risk that they would not win the bid to build a \$7.5 million 15,925-square-foot project. The proposed building would be more than double the size of the existing site, which is on

the southern edge of the Fresno Fairgrounds.

General Manager Todd Valeri said American could lose the right to provide ambulance service, but the company that earns the business would still require a modern setting for dispatchers and office space.

“I am absolutely willing to commit to this project, but it has to be the will of the county and what’s seen as best for this Emergency Medical Services system and that’s really your decision,” he told supervisors Tuesday.

Supervisor Henry R. Perea said the county has been trying to get the project under way for four years. He favors the plan for American to build as soon as possible. Perea said the center needs to expand, the cost will only continue to rise and American can do it for half what the county would have to pay because of prevailing-wage laws that weigh on government work.

Supervisor Brian Pacheco said he supports Perea’s concept, but the timing isn’t right since the county will soon ask for bids for ambulance services.

Dan Lynch, Fresno County Emergency Medical Services director, said waiting was necessary to assure greater transparency in the process.

Those arguments won out; the board voted 4-0 to put off the decision on a new building.

In the meantime, Lynch said, the existing center can be expanded for training for about \$170,000. “We have a lot of work done” in preparing for the expansion, Lynch said. “That work can be used going forward and save us valuable time.”

Lynch estimates it will be two years before discussion of the new building can begin again but the county can look at all its options, including having a private company build it. Lynch said he thinks the cost would be sliced by a third if a private company financed it.

The center dispatches ambulances for Fresno, Madera and Kings counties and also manages dispatch services for nine fire departments.

In other action

- Supervisors approved a contract for the Fresno County Prosecutors Association that will give the 100-member unit a 5% raise beginning Monday and a 3% raise that starts in July 2016. The prosecutors association won a decision before the state Public Employment Relations Board on an unfair labor practice last year dating back to 9% pay cuts in 2011.
- Supervisor Andreas Borgeas participated in the morning session of the meeting by telephone from Nagorno-Karabakh where he was serving as an election observer. The time difference is 11 hours. He didn’t participate in the afternoon session, which lasted until about 4 p.m.

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