



Lou Ann Texeira
Executive Officer

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June 8, 2011 (Agenda)

**June 8, 2011
Agenda Item 9**

Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO)
651 Pine Street, Sixth Floor
Martinez, CA 94553

Fire Service Update – East Contra Costa County

Dear Commissioners:

BACKGROUND

This report is in response to the Commission’s request for an update regarding fire service activities in East Contra Costa County.

On March 9, 2011, the Commission received an update regarding the ongoing dialogue with fire service officials regarding fire service issues, including service models, funding and sustainability. The update also included a report on meetings with Citygate Associates to explore a possible study to address service, fiscal and sustainability issues, specifically in West County. There was little interest among the fire service officials in pursuing a study, as agencies are currently working to address their local issues, and would rather devote funding to critical services. Further, it was uncertain whether any new service or fiscal options or models will materialize as a result of such a study.

The Commission accepted the fire service update in March, and requested that fire service agencies provide updates at the September 2011 LAFCO meeting or earlier in the event of any significant activity (e.g., success/ failure of any June ballot measures, any revenue enhancement successes/failures at the local level, pursuit of any alternative service configurations, etc.).

In the past few months, there has been notable activity relating to fire service in East County. Discussions are currently underway among East Contra Costa Fire Protection District (ECCFPD), the cities of Brentwood and Oakley, San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District (SRVFPD), Cal Fire and other interested parties, which could potentially lead to a significant change in the delivery of fire and emergency medical services in East County.

DISCUSSION

ECCFPD was formed in 2002 in conjunction with the consolidation of three rural fire districts. The District was governed by the Board of Supervisors until late 2009, at which time the District Board was restructured to include representatives from the cities of Brentwood and Oakley and the unincorporated County. The ECCFPD is the primary provider of fire service in far East County. The District has a boundary area of 240± square miles, extending from Bethel Island and the City of Oakley in the north to the Contra Costa-Alameda County line in the south, and from the Contra Costa-San Joaquin county line in the east to the City of Clayton in the west (see attached map). Areas within ECCFPD include the cities of Oakley, Brentwood, a portion of the cities of Antioch and Clayton, the unincorporated communities of Bethel Island, Byron, Discovery Bay, Knightsen, and other unincorporated areas. In addition, ECCFPD responds to calls outside its jurisdictional boundaries to areas including Jersey and Bradford islands and Webb Tract.

As with most local agencies, ECCFPD faces increasing costs and decreasing revenues (i.e., property tax). Under the current service model, the District's FY 2011-12 expenditures are estimated at \$11.2 million, with projected revenues of approximately \$8.5 million. Over the past few months, the District Board has discussed various budget scenarios, staffing models, and funding options to address its nearly \$3 million budget deficit.

Recently, the District retained a consultant to prepare a Fire Suppression Assessment Engineer's Report. At its meeting on May 2, the ECCFPD Board rejected the Engineer's Report and proposal to form a benefit assessment district as a means to raise additional operating revenue. As discussed at the Board meeting, absent a new revenue source, the District will be unable to sustain the current level of service.

Also at its May meeting, the District Board considered several budget scenarios, including 1) *interim staffing*, 2) *balanced budget staffing*, and 3) *current staffing* models. The *interim staffing* model provides for a combination of reduced service levels/staffing and partial use of reserve funds over the next 18-36 months, and would afford additional time to consider long-term models and revenue possibilities. The *balanced budget staffing* scenario includes significant cuts to service/staffing, and would support a service model of three stations staffed with three firefighters, in lieu of the current model which includes six stations, four of which are staffed with three firefighters and two stations are staffed with two firefighters. This model would also cancel the Cal Fire contract (Sunshine Station) and would result in increased response times and reliance on auto/mutual aid to provide day-to-day emergency response. The *current staffing* model maintains the existing six stations and staffing levels and retains the Cal Fire contract. This option would utilize \$2.8 of the \$3.4 million in reserve funds, leaving an estimated \$600,000 in reserve funding. The Board expressed support for the status quo model, and directed District staff to return to the Board on June 6 with a proposed FY 2011-12 budget. At this meeting, the Board will also discuss revenue options, including a possible parcel tax.

The potential for severe budget cuts or insolvency of ECCFPD has caused constituent communities to discuss and explore alternative fire service options. In May, the Brentwood City Council discussed its concerns and need for a fire service back-up plan. The Council directed City staff to prepare the necessary paperwork to apply to LAFCO for a Brentwood-only fire service option and return to Council for review. The Brentwood City Council is expected to receive and consider this information in June. Also in May, the Oakley City Council considered a similar plan, and instead voted to continue to look for ways to keep ECCFPD solvent.

Further, some of the Marsh Creek/Morgan Territory (MCMT) residents are concerned with the future of fire service and have initiated discussions with SRVFPD regarding possible service through that district.

The MCMT is served by the Sunshine station located on Marsh Creek Road, east of Clayton. The Sunshine station is staffed 24 hours a day, year-round. ECCFPD currently contracts with Cal Fire for continual operation of the Sunshine station during the wet season at a cost of \$366,000 annually; Cal Fire directly finances staffing the station during fire season (May – November). In October 2010, the ECCFPD Board voted to discontinue the contract with Cal Fire. The affected residents expressed concern and objected to the Board's decision, noting increased response times (20-60 minutes), increased public safety risk, and insurance problems as many residents received notices of doubling/tripling of insurance rates and/or cancellation of insurance policies. Consequently, the Board rescinded its decision and voted to continue the contract with Cal Fire. However, recent budget issues have resurrected these concerns. The SRVFPD Fire Chief reports that he recently met with MCMT residents and with Cal Fire officials, and that SRVFPD is doing its due diligence to explore fire service options. The Chief noted a number of challenges including variation in service levels (i.e., number of staff on an engine, Basic Life Support vs. Advanced Life Support staff, remote location, insurance ratings, auto/mutual aid, etc.), but will continue to review service options.

Additional information regarding far East County fire service issues will be available following the ECCFPD's meeting on June 6, and following the City of Brentwood's consideration of pursuing a Brentwood-only fire service option later this month.

RECOMMENDATION

Receive report and provide input and direction as desired.

Sincerely,

LOU ANN TEXEIRA
EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Attachment – ECCFPD Map

c: Distribution

East Contra Costa Fire Protection District and SOI

**By LAFCO action on 10/14/2009
East Contra Costa Fire Protection
District boundary and modified
SOI were approved.**

