



February 9, 2011 (Agenda)

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

Fire Service Report

Dear Commissioners:

BACKGROUND

In 2009, LAFCO completed a countywide Municipal Services Review (MSR) covering fire and emergency medical services provided by three cities and eight special districts. The MSR report provided a comprehensive overview of fire/emergency medical services; identified resource sharing and showcased best practices relating to services; identified service, infrastructure, fiscal and other challenges; provided a basis for sphere of influence (SOI) updates and future boundary changes; and served as a catalyst for ongoing dialogue.

In conjunction with the MSR, LAFCO formed an ad hoc fire committee. The committee held five meetings to facilitate discussion and receive additional public input regarding the governance and SOI options identified in the MSR report. LAFCO also hosted two fire workshops, the outcomes of which resulted in a list of pressing issues and potential opportunities.

Local agencies, labor and the general public have provided LAFCO with valuable input regarding fire service issues. For the past few months, discussions have focused on funding and fiscal sustainability. The decline in revenue, namely properties taxes, has forced fire service providers to take severe measures, including closing/ browning out fire stations, eliminating positions, modifying service delivery, reallocating staff, deferring expenses (e.g., capital outlay), increasing fees and depleting reserves.

These issues are not unique to Contra Costa County. Fire service challenges and discussion of alternative service models and other cooperative solutions are being discussed throughout the State and have been at the forefront of CALAFCO's educational program for the past 18 months.

DISCUSSION

In November 2009, the Commission discussed their thoughts and ideas about short, mid- and long-term goals and next steps. In addition, the Commission directed staff to contact Stewart Gary of Citygate Associates regarding future assistance with assessment of fire service issues in Contra Costa County.

On January 12, the Commission received updates from the fire and emergency medical service providers in Contra Costa County. Many of the service providers continue to struggle, and are considering alternatives and options to sustain services.

Following the service provider updates, Mr. Gary presented some options and ideas relating to a process to redesign fire service for regional stability (Attachment 1).

Following discussion with the members, the Commission suggested that Mr. Gary and LAFCO staff meet with representatives of fire and emergency service providers to develop a scope of work to continue to explore ways to sustain services.

On January 31, representatives of Citygate Associates, agency representatives and LAFCO staff met to discuss these ideas (Attachment 2). The consultant team presented fire study scope points dealing primarily with service and revenues (i.e., current and desired levels, realignment of services and revenues) and sustainability. There was interest in developing a framework focusing on West County. The Citygate representatives offered to revise the study scope. The group agreed that representatives of the West County fire agencies and LAFCO staff will meet to review and provide input on the revised scope, cost sharing and timeline, and report back to the Commission in March.

Please contact the LAFCO office if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

LOU ANN TEXEIRA
EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Attachments



FIRE SERVICE MEETING

651 Pine Street, Room 108
January 31 2011 (10:00 – 11:30 am)

AGENDA

- I. Welcome and Self Introductions

- II. Review of how "study points" (see attached memo) can be shaped into a scope of work

- III. Discussion/refinement of scope

- IV. Reach consensus on study partner agencies and possible study cost sharing

- V. Adjourn



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Process to Re-Design Fire Services for Regional Stability

Conduct a detailed fiscal capacity study – gather the facts about what tax and fee money is being generated in the various fire districts and jurisdictions. Understand the relationship of that money to funding fire services and identify alternative ways of funding a re-designed fire service based on principles of coverage equity. Understand the likely ability to fund changes. Consider incremental step-by-step approaches to regional funding if financial burden equity can't be achieved in one step.

Conduct a macro regional level deployment study to match risks, to desired outcomes and likely growth.

Develop the costs for various, likely feasible, alternative jurisdictional combinations.

Prepare a briefing document to describe the as is situation, the desired service needs and the options to achieve it.

Hold meetings of elected officials to describe the current level of service - what it is and what it is not in terms of risk and response times. Describe a picture of what risk and response times would look like at alternative levels of service and funding commitment.

Hold a round table meeting(s) on the viability of governance alternatives.

If alignment of vision can be obtained on service, funding and governance strategies, begin phased implementation, including as necessary, voter approved revenue measures.

Control study costs using both agency staffs and consultant/coaches. Use outside neutrals to work with and between the stakeholders. Shuttle diplomacy is necessary.