

Despite success at polls, work remains in Pittsburg bid for 200 acres of Antioch-controlled land

By Sean Maher
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 11/10/2011 06:35:22 PM PST

Updated: 11/12/2011 09:32:14 PM PST

Pittsburg voters agreed Tuesday to open the door for their city to absorb some unincorporated land near Antioch, but the city's claim won't stand until city officials and the land's would-be developers come up with more answers.

In a city of more than 63,000 people, Measure I passed with 4,314 yes votes, about 79 percent of the ballots cast. It brings nearly 200 new acres within Pittsburg's urban limit line, which is different from the city's official border in that it can include land Pittsburg does not yet officially control but which it has claimed within a "sphere of influence," having set detailed plans for the land's development.

The land that Pittsburg hopes to gain control over is within Antioch's urban limit line, near the southeastern border of Pittsburg on a 194-acre former petroleum tank farm. Measure I's goal, stated within the text of the measure itself, is to "protect the vacant land from being developed in the City of Antioch."

Antioch hasn't raised much of a fuss, but the Pittsburg land grab will still have to go before the county agency that regulates local government boundaries, the Local Agency Formation Commission, or LAFCO, to make the land legitimately part of Pittsburg.

The Seeno family, among the region's most powerful developers and the private owners of the land in question just west of Somersville and Buchanan roads, submitted an incomplete development proposal for the land in 2009, LAFCO Executive Director

Lou Ann Texeira said.

LAFCO will want the Seenos to submit a full, current plan and Pittsburg to provide an environmental review of that plan for the agency to consider shifting control of the land, Texeira said.

"A question we would also ask as part of the application is, 'How much land is within your existing city limits and within your sphere of influence? How much vacant or underutilized land is already in your sphere?'" Texeira said.

At the time of LAFCO's most recent comprehensive report on Pittsburg, dated December 2008 near the beginning of the nationwide economic downturn, Pittsburg's developed borders encompassed 16 square miles, and its sphere of influence almost double that, at 30 square miles. It's an unusually high ratio, Texeira said, but other local cities such as Concord, Martinez and El Cerrito have fairly high ratios as well.

Further, she said, at the time of the report, approved projects for residential development were using only 13 percent of the available, residentially zoned land in Pittsburg's sphere.

Since then, of course, the housing market has suffered nationwide, which draws attention to another aspect of Measure I: It changes the city's general plan to more than double the allowed housing density in developments south of Buchanan Road, with as many as seven dwelling units now allowed per acre.

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A member of the Seeno family did not immediately return a phone call asking about what the developer's plans will be.

Contact Sean Maher at 925-779-7189.

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Parcel tax passes for Doctors Medical Center

By Sandy Kleffman
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 11/16/2011 04:41:44 AM PST

Updated: 11/16/2011 04:42:26 AM PST

West Contra Costa residents delivered a clear message Tuesday: They want Doctors Medical Center in San Pablo to remain, and they're willing to pay for it.

Voters overwhelmingly approved Measure J, a \$47 a year parcel tax that will raise \$5.1 million annually for the financially struggling hospital.

The tax received 23,923 yes votes, or 73.7 percent, easily reaching the required two-thirds threshold for passage. It received 8,546 no votes, or 26.3 percent.

Still to be counted are ballots that arrived in the mail Tuesday or were brought to one of the drop-off locations. But with the tax winning in every city, it is unlikely that the remaining votes will change the outcome.

"West County voters understand the importance of Doctors hospital and want to save the hospital," said county Supervisor John Gioia, who heads Doctors' governing board. "Now we need to take the confidence they've expressed in us and implement a plan to make the hospital financially sustainable."

The tax will be in addition to a \$52 annual levy that voters overwhelmingly approved for the hospital in 2004.

Measure J supporters argued that Doctors would likely shut down if the tax failed. That would result in longer ambulance rides for West County residents and longer waits to be seen at other hospitals, they said.

Doctors operates the only full-service emergency department along the Interstate 80 corridor between Berkeley and Vallejo.

It also is

considered a crucial part of the region's safety net for low-income residents.

Yet despite its importance, Doctors has struggled financially for years. It serves large numbers of uninsured patients and those who are on Medi-Cal, the government-run program for low-income people that pays only a fraction of what hospitals typically get from private insurers.

Doctors currently runs about an \$18 million annual deficit.

Hospital leaders viewed the parcel tax as a way to fill part of that hole, along with expense cuts, debt refinancing and possibly new partnerships with other area hospitals and the county.

No organized opposition surfaced to the measure, and no one wrote a ballot argument against it. The Contra Costa Taxpayers Association decided to remain neutral.

Individuals who opposed the tax said they doubted whether the hospital could solve its financial problems long-term. They also questioned whether it was right to ask cash-strapped voters to approve a second parcel tax so soon after approving the 2004 tax.

The latest tax would automatically expire if the hospital closes, supporters noted.

They raised about \$270,000 for a campaign that



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included mailers and a phone bank to encourage people to return the vote-by-mail ballots.

The largest contribution was \$100,000 from Kaiser Permanente, said Gioia. Kaiser has a hospital in Richmond with a smaller emergency department that is expected to be jammed if Doctors closes.

Other contributions to the yes on Measure J campaign came from physicians, ambulance companies and Richmond Sanitary, Gioia said.

In addition to the \$47 levy for single-family homeowners, Measure J would impose a \$94 annual tax on small multiunit residential parcels.

For commercial and industrial parcels, the annual levy would vary based on size. It would be \$282 for small parcels, \$470 for medium-sized properties and \$940 for large parcels.

Doctors declared bankruptcy in 2006 but remained open after Kaiser gave the hospital \$12 million over three years, and John Muir Medical Center donated \$3 million.

This year, with Doctors again struggling to avoid a second bankruptcy or closure, Kaiser donated \$4.2 million more.

Contact Sandy Kleffman at 925-943-8249.

THE measure j VOTE

Measure J imposes a \$47 annual parcel tax on single-family homeowners in West County to raise \$5.1 million a year for Doctors Medical Center in San Pablo. It requires a two-thirds margin to pass.

Yes: 23,923 votes, or 73.7 percent

No: 8,546 votes, or 26.3 percent



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Mt. Diablo Healthcare District OKs pricey lawyer deal

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 11/18/2011 08:20:50 PM PST

Updated: 11/18/2011 09:22:58 PM PST

The besieged Mt. Diablo Health Care District has awarded its outside attorney an open-ended contract, removing the prior \$5,000 cap on the man they hope will save the little-known agency from extinction.

Sacramento lawyer Ralph Ferguson will earn \$300 an hour with no upper limit in the six-month agreement, per the resolution he wrote and the elected board adopted on a 3-0 vote. Two directors were absent.

The deal drew immediate howls from the Contra Costa Taxpayers Association, the chief force behind a movement to disband a public agency that critics say has outlived its usefulness.

The Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission is expected to release an analysis of dissolution in December.

"The fact that no spending limit was placed on Mr. Ferguson's services is financially irresponsible," taxpayers association Executive Director Kris Hunt wrote in a strongly worded letter copied to the commission.

The attorney called a cap unnecessary in his remarks to the elected board Tuesday night.

"I don't think (a cap) is appropriate given the fluid and changing nature here," he said. Ferguson's duties include recruiting an interim executive director, developing relationships with local organizations and searching for the cash infusion the district needs to stay alive.

The district's five elected board members represent roughly 200,000 voters in Central Contra Costa

County. Formed in the 1940s, the district ran a hospital

in Concord for decades until financial woes led to voter approval of John Muir Health's takeover in 1996.

With no hospital, programs or staff to manage, the district's primary job has been to safeguard the district's interest in keeping the hospital open. Its board also helps John Muir Health spend the \$1 million a year the company donates toward unmet community health needs.

But the district has little money of its own, collecting about \$240,000 a year from its share of property taxes.

Four civil grand juries have called for its dissolution after concluding that it has spent most of its cash on elections, overhead and health benefits for one current and one former board member. The balance has gone toward small grants and programs such as CPR training for high school students.

The district hopes to transform itself into an indispensable operation and deflect the dissolution vote. Health care districts elsewhere, for example, provide senior services, operate fitness centers, lease medical office buildings and make large community grants.

In addition to expanding Ferguson's contract on Tuesday, the board interviewed two interim executive director candidates.

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Applicants included consultant and retired Petaluma Health Care District CEO Daymon Doss, of Kenwood, and DeVry University teacher David Joslin, of Concord.

Both men were aware of the political controversy swirling around the district, and Doss pulled no punches.

"I have no problem coming to you and saying, 'You can't get there from here. You have no support,' " Doss said. " ... What I would say to you or to anyone is not to give up too soon. Once gone, (a health care district) is very hard to get back. Many communities are doing a powerful job with their health care districts, so the potential is here. If it is too late, I'll tell you."

The board is expected to choose an interim director on Monday. No salary has been identified for the six-month job, which could become permanent if the district survives.

Contact Lisa Vorderbrueggen at 925-945-4773, lvorderbrue- ggen@bayareanewsgroup.com, www.ibabuzz.com/politics or at Twitter.com/lvorderbrueggen.

By the numbers

\$300 an hour

Amount lawyer Ralph Ferguson will earn in the agreement with the Mt. Diablo Health Care District, with no cap on the amount he will be paid.

\$240,000

Total yearly revenue for the district.



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Moraga-Orinda fire board continues to evaluate office space options

By Jonathan Morales
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 11/17/2011 04:17:53 PM PST

Updated: 11/18/2011 08:14:22 PM PST

The administrative office options for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District continues to grow and now includes a building the board of directors decided in September not to buy.

Board members continued their search for new space for staff members Wednesday, asking fire Chief Randy Bradley to draw up a "master plan" of improvements needed at Moraga's fire station 41, which houses several administrators, and how and when finding new offices fits into that plan.

The search for new office space began earlier this year, when the district identified replacing Orinda's fire station 43, addressing safety and compliance issues at station 41 and consolidating administrative staff as its top priorities, in that order.

Staff is currently split between the Moraga station and Orinda's station 45, a situation fire Chief Randy Bradley calls challenging.

The district is moving forward with the \$3 million replacement of 60-year-old station 43, and estimates it could save \$500,000 on the work at station 41 if staff members currently housed there move elsewhere. That has led the board to look for other places to put the district's staff.

One option may be the two-story Moraga office building at 1150 Moraga Way that the board in September decided not to purchase, citing budget concerns. It would have cost nearly \$2 million to buy and renovate that property.

An investor has since approached board President John Wyro about buying the building and renting it to the

district, possibly in a lease-to-purchase arrangement.

The owner of a building at 536 Rheem Blvd. has also offered to lease office space to the district, Bradley said.

The district also has a standing offer from the city of Orinda to lease space at City Hall for \$62,000 annually for 10 years. The district has not countered that offer, made in early August.

The district could build a new facility on the station 41 site, which Bradley estimates could cost between \$1.8 and \$2 million, or maintain the status quo.

Bradley will bring the "master plan" for station 41 back to the board on Dec. 28.

The district needs to know at what point during station 41 renovations it will need to consider relocating staff, said Director Frank Sperling.

"It may be step one, and it may be step three," he said. "Without knowing that, I don't feel I can make decisions on what building and at what cost would make sense."

Wyro and board Vice President Fred Weil said they favored owning property over leasing it. Director Dick Olsen suggested the district take Orinda up on its offer for a few years, do whatever work can be done at station 41 and then re-evaluate its office space.

"To the point that rent we pay is down the drain,



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well ... not if you're paying the city of Orinda," Olsen said. "It's going to the benefit of 60 percent of the population of this enterprise."

Contact Jonathan Morales at 925-943-8048. Follow him at [Twitter.com/sosaysjonathan](https://twitter.com/sosaysjonathan).



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Mt. Diablo Health Care District hires director

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 11/22/2011 06:19:29 AM PST

Updated: 11/22/2011 06:19:48 AM PST

A small central Contra Costa health district on Monday hired an interim executive director -- its first since it lost its hospital in 1996 -- in the board's latest move to save itself from dissolution.

The Mt. Diablo Health Care District board voted 3-0 to negotiate a six-month contract with retired Petaluma Health Care District CEO Daymon Doss.

Chairwoman Grace Ellis and directors Jeff Kasper and Nick Adler voted in favor of the hire. Director Frank Manske was absent. Director Roy Larkin abstained, saying he was not present for last week's interviews.

Doss' pay was not discussed, but the outcome of the negotiations will be brought back to the board for a vote. He is expected to start work Dec. 1.

Bringing on board an executive director is the latest in the district's dramatic uptick in activity, including the retention of an outside attorney under a no-cap contract and the launching of a reinvigorated community grant program to spend some of its \$700,000 in reserves.

The agency also cut a deal with former board member and Concord Vice Mayor Ron Leone, who agreed to shift his health coverage to the city for as long as he is eligible. Rather than pay Leone's full premium of \$1,700 a month, the district will instead cover his required contribution of \$580 a month.

The second district board member eligible for health care, Ellis, has qualified for Medicare and has said she will switch. The district would continue

to cover her premiums but it is expected to cost far less than the nearly \$2,000 a month paid now.

The health care district board hopes its actions will

favorably influence a county regulatory agency's expected vote in February on whether to dissolve the district.

But the hiring further aggravated the board's critics.

"Just like it has done in the past, this board is undertaking a flurry of last-minute activities in an effort to appear relevant," said Contra Costa Taxpayers Association Executive Director Kris Hunt. "It is inappropriate."

Four grand juries and the Contra Costa Taxpayers Association have called for the district's elimination, arguing that it spends a high percentage of its tiny budget on elections, overhead and health insurance benefits.

Voters created the district in the 1940s to build and operate a hospital in Concord. When the district suffered financial woes in 1996, voters turned the hospital over to John Muir Health.

The district remains in place but it has little money of its own and few residents even know it exists.

The district encompasses about 200,000 residents in Concord, Martinez, Clyde, Pacheco and portions of Lafayette and Pleasant Hill. It collects roughly \$240,000 a year in its share of property taxes.

Contact Lisa Vorderbrueggen at 925-945-4773, lvorderbrueggen@bayareanewsgroup.com, www.ibabuzz.com/politics or at [Twitter.com/lvorderbrueggen](https://twitter.com/lvorderbrueggen).

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Mt. Diablo Health Care District lawyer billed beyond board limit

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 11/28/2011 04:16:02 PM PST

Updated: 11/29/2011 06:49:55 AM PST

An outside attorney hired to help save an imperiled Contra Costa public health district billed the agency nearly three times more than what was authorized.

Heavily censored invoices obtained through the California Public Records Act show Sacramento lawyer Ralph Ferguson billed the district for 52.3 hours totaling \$14,000 in September and October. The district capped his pay at \$5,000 when it hired him.

It's the latest development in the increasing scrutiny of the Mt. Diablo Health Care District, an agency that lost its hospital 15 years ago but has continued to collect and spend hundreds of thousands of tax dollars. Roughly 200,000 residents in Concord, Martinez, Clyde, Pacheco and portions of Lafayette and Pleasant Hill live in the district.

It hired Ferguson three months ago as its liaison with the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission, which is studying whether to dissolve the agency.

Ferguson lowered his September bill by \$1,690 in order to comply with the \$5,000 limit but charged the agency another \$9,000 for October.

In mid-October, the board asked Ferguson to help find interim executive director candidates but did not raise the spending cap.

On Nov. 15, the board further expanded the attorney's duties and eliminated the dollar restriction, which he then had surpassed by \$9,000.

The action further angered the district's most vocal critics at the Contra Costa Taxpayers Association.

"It's a

betrayal of the public trust," said association activist Wendy Lack. "People expect that when elected officials make a public commitment to fund activities at a certain level, they will honor those commitments."

The board's failure to publicly mention the increase in legal fees until after the bills had accumulated adds to the many reasons regulators should disband the health care district, Lack said.

District Director Jeff Kasper, who made the motion to impose the cap, said the lawyer's charges were reasonable and appropriate.

"My intent when I made the motion for a cap was to make sure that things didn't get into a runaway billing situation, as it can with an attorney," Kasper said. "But I'm confident that these charges are within the scope of what we have asked him to do."

It's unclear to the public precisely how Ferguson spent his time.

Kasper and the board received uncensored invoices, but the district in the public versions replaced all descriptions of the hours billed with the words "redacted" and "attorney-client privilege."

Agencies may block information that reveals an attorney's strategy or other confidential details that qualify as exemptions to the public records law, said Bay Area News Group attorney Carolan Duffy.

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But the general descriptions of Ferguson's duties that Kasper relayed from his full copies appear unlikely to qualify as worthy of secrecy -- attending board meetings, interviewing executive director candidates, meeting with regulators and even an interview with a newspaper reporter.

"This appears to be an over-redaction," Duffy said.

Board Chairwoman Grace Ellis, who said she was following Ferguson's advice, initially withheld the public copies of even the censored invoices in clear violation of the California Public Records Act, which mandates that government agencies provide copies unless deemed impractical.

"I agree that we have over-redacted these invoices, and we need to establish a clear policy for public records," Kasper said. "I believe that our new executive director, if his contract is approved Thursday, will be a big part of improving our procedures in these areas."

The district later this week is to vote on hiring Daymon Doss, the retired director of the Petaluma Health Care District.

Voters formed the health district in the 1940s to build and operate a hospital in Concord. But the hospital was turned over to John Muir Health in 1996.

With no hospital or staff to manage, the district was charged with oversight of the deal it signed with John Muir while it continued to collect its share of the 1 percent tax on property within its boundaries. Its revenue this year is estimated at roughly \$240,000.

Four grand juries have called for its elimination after finding that the district has spent the bulk of its money on overhead, elections and lifetime health benefits for one former and one current board member.

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Editorial: Pull the plug on Mt. Diablo Health Care District

BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Posted: 11/30/2011 03:40:54 PM PST

Updated: 12/01/2011 07:04:52 AM PST

The Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission must act quickly. It's time to shut down the Mt. Diablo Health Care District before it runs up more taxpayer debt.

Health care district directors, led by Grace Ellis, who has treated the agency like her personal fiefdom, are out of control. The district obligations for the health care insurance of Ellis and former Director Ron Leone, now a member of the Concord City Council, and its expenditures on fruitless litigation far exceed the value of benefits it has provided the public in the past decade.

If the district shuts down today, it might have enough money to pay off its obligations. But the directors are spending tens of thousands of dollars on an attorney in a desperate attempt to keep the district alive. The longer this goes on, the greater the debt the district will leave behind.

Whether attorney Ralph Ferguson's bill is legitimate is impossible to determine because he and the board have improperly redacted details that would help determine how his time has been spent. Indeed, the district has illegally stonewalled attempts to obtain public records.

This district, which includes Martinez, Pleasant Hill, Concord and parts of Lafayette, has outlived its usefulness. It was formed in 1948 to oversee the construction and operation of the Mt. Diablo Medical Center in Concord. But in 1997, the board agreed to merge the hospital with the private John Muir system.

Mt.

Diablo directors claim they need to keep the district alive to ensure John Muir doesn't shut down the

Concord hospital. It's a smoke screen. John Muir has spent \$325 million to rebuild and expand the facility. It's not about to close it now.

Meanwhile, the Mt. Diablo directors are frivolously spending precious resources on attorney Ferguson, a new general manager they plan to hire Thursday for a yet-undisclosed sum to manage who knows what, and grants to many programs that have little or no relationship to health care.

This must not continue. Four grand juries have called for disbanding the district. LAFCO has the authority to do so. It has commissioned a study due out in a few days. It then plans a public comment period before taking action. Our message to them: Move with alacrity.

Meanwhile, the District Attorney's Office must keep an eye on what's going on and insist that public records laws are followed. It's the only hope for ensuring that more money is not wasted.

This patient is on life support. For everyone's sake, most importantly taxpayers, it's time to pull the plug.

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Letters to the editor, Friday Dec. 2

BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Posted: 12/01/2011 04:00:00 PM PST

Updated: 12/01/2011 05:58:38 PM PST

Health care district must be dissolved now

Your ongoing coverage of the Mt. Diablo Health Care District is appreciated because without it the public would be unaware of the activities of this invisible agency.

Despite the fact that this district long ago outlived its usefulness, it is throwing money at new staff and attorney's fees in a frenetic effort to avoid extinction.

Let's hope that the Local Agency Formation Commission uses its authority to dissolve this unnecessary district, so that our tax dollars can be redirected to priority health care needs, such as paramedic and other emergency medical services.

In light of today's fiscal realities, we cannot afford to throw money away when so many truly essential services are underfunded.

Wendy Lack

Pleasant Hill

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Mt. Diablo health district names executive director

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 12/02/2011 06:59:15 AM PST

Updated: 12/02/2011 06:59:33 AM PST

CONCORD -- The embattled Mt. Diablo Health Care District hired its first executive director in nearly 15 years Thursday night, inking an offer to pay a consultant \$10,000 a month for each of the next six months or perhaps longer if it can ward off a dissolution threat.

The five-member elected board voted 4-1 in favor of a deal to bring on board former retired Petaluma Health Care District chief executive officer Daymon Doss of Kenwood. Directors Grace Ellis, Jeff Kasper, Nick Adler and Roy Larkin voted for the pact. Director Frank Manske dissented.

If Doss works a full year, his fees will eat up nearly half the district's annual \$240,000 in property tax revenues.

Doss will also receive reimbursement for expenses such as airfare, hotels, meals, entertainment and mileage.

Either side may end the arrangement with 30 days notice, but if the district votes to terminate between Feb. 28 and May 31, Doss will be paid \$10,000.

The contract will automatically renew each month for up to another year unless either side opts out.

Doss' job includes oversight of the district's finances and its part-time secretary, but his primary task is the development of a strategy recommendation by Jan. 31 to build political support and find the district more money.

Manske and Contra Costa Taxpayers Association representative Wendy Lack voiced strong opposition to the hiring just days or weeks before a local regulatory agency is expected to

issue its report on whether to disband the district.

Four civil grand juries have recommended dissolution after concluding that the district from 2000-2009 spent less than 10 percent of its \$2.4 million in property taxes and other revenues on community programs. Instead, its money has gone toward the cost of elections, free lifetime health benefits for one former and one current director, legal costs and other overhead.

"I would suggest we wait until Jan. 1 to consider this," Manske said. "This is no hurry to do this tonight."

District Chairwoman Grace Ellis, however, characterized the decision to bring Doss on board as a positive step toward realizing her dream that the district will serve "the needs of the people who fall through the cracks in our community."

The health care district's boundaries encompass about 200,000 residents in Concord, Martinez, Clyde, Pacheco and portions of Lafayette and Pleasant Hill.

In addition to hiring an executive director, the district retained a lawyer in September who has billed the agency \$14,000 for two months of work. And the district has awarded in the past several months \$142,500 in community grants with requests pending for another \$284,960.

Doss served as the Petaluma Health Care District chief executive officer from 1997 through April. The district contracts the operation of the Petaluma Valley Hospital -- Doss was the hospital's chief operating officer from 1993-1997 -- to St. Joseph



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Health Systems.

After he retired, Doss put out his consultant shingle.

His other client is the new Northern California Health Care Authority based in Healdsburg. The joint powers authority consists of five public health care districts in the northern coastal region that have banded together to find ways to save and raise money.

Contact Lisa Vorderbrueggen at 925-945-4773, lvorderbrueggen@bayareanewsgroup.com, www.ibabuzz.com/politics or at [Twitter.com/lvorderbrueggen](https://twitter.com/lvorderbrueggen).

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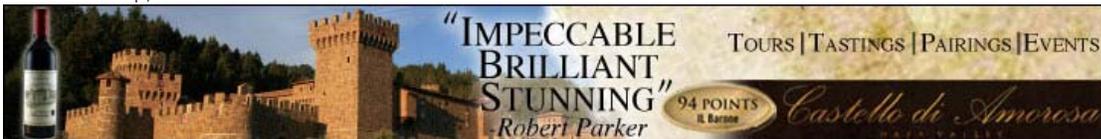
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CoCo Supervisor Mitchoff Disturbed by Actions of Mt. Diablo Health Care District

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Contra Costa County Supervisor Karen Mitchoff said on Friday she is disturbed by the recent actions of the Mt. Diablo Health Care District.

The actions of the District are currently being reviewed at the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), which is considering whether the health care district should be dissolved. LAFCO is scheduled to release its report on this matter this month.

The controversy comes after a 4-1 vote, in which health care district board members voted to hire the district's Executive Director. Board members agreed to a salary of \$10,000 per month, including all expenses relative to mileage, airfare, hotel, meals and entertainment, according to Supervisor Mitchoff.

"I was very concerned by the contract between Mt. Diablo Health Care District and their attorney Ralph Ferguson," said Supervisor Mitchoff. "And this new contract for an Executive Director is outrageous. I am deeply disturbed by the continued depletion of taxpayer resources, especially while a decision by LAFCO is pending as to whether to dissolve the district."

"The Health Care District was created with the intent to serve the public health needs of our community," said Mitchoff. "However, it appears that the board does not share this priority and is more concerned about preserving itself." The District includes the communities of Concord, Pleasant Hill, Pacheco, Martinez and a portion of Lafayette.

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Consultant finds Mt. Diablo Health Care District dissolution justified

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 12/05/2011 10:04:01 AM PST

Updated: 12/05/2011 10:04:32 AM PST

Dissolution of the Mt. Diablo Health Care District would substantially reduce overhead costs and free up that money for community health programs, an independent consultant has concluded.

The analysis was done for the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission, a regulatory agency evaluating whether to disband the political entity that turned over its hospital to John Muir Health 15 years ago but continues to collect and tens of thousands of property tax dollars.

If the commission eliminates the district, it would be the first LAFCO-initiated dissolution of a public agency in Contra Costa County and probably the first the one in the state. A new law passed earlier this year allows LAFCOs to dissolve districts without holding an election.

The district's five-member elected board opposes the move and has significantly ratcheted up its activities in the past few months in an effort to save themselves from the chopping block.

The Mt. Diablo Health Care District receives about \$240,000 a year in property tax revenues from 200,000 residents in Concord, Martinez, Clyde, Pacheco and portions of Lafayette and Pleasant Hill.

The commission seeks public comment through Dec. 26 on the draft review of the report prepared by Economic & Planning Systems, Inc., and E Mulberg and Associates.

LAFCO will also discuss the findings at its Dec. 14 meeting at 1:30 p.m., 651 Pine St., Martinez.

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ONLINE

View full analysis of Mt. Diablo Health Care District at <http://www.conracoatalafco.org>.

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Tax for fire service on Contra Costa County horizon

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 12/06/2011 06:29:21 PM PST

Updated: 12/06/2011 06:29:22 PM PST

MARTINEZ -- Contra Costa supervisors took a step Tuesday toward asking voters next year to approve a parcel tax for fire services.

The Contra Costa Fire Protection District will pay political consultant Larry Tramutola up to \$115,000 to help develop public outreach for support a parcel tax that could pump as much as \$16.5 million a year into the struggling agency.

The district encompasses an area from Antioch westward, through all of central county and a small portion of West Contra Costa.

Public agencies may not use tax dollars for political campaigns, but they can to conduct educational campaigns.

The fire district has seen its post-recession revenues drop from \$100 million in 2007 to \$85 million this year as pension contributions have risen to cover increased benefits and market losses.

The tax amount has not been decided, although a pollster in February found strong support for a yearly fee of about \$70.

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