

East County fire agencies review report on consolidation

Tony Kukulich, Correspondent - July 1, 2021



The East Contra Costa Fire Protection District, alongside Cal Fire, responded to a quarter-acre vegetation fire ignited in the hills east of the Deer Ridge neighborhood in Brentwood, Calif., Tuesday, May, 11 2021. The cause of the blaze is under investigation by Cal Fire. (Melissa van Ruiten/The Press)

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In preparation for that decision, the ECCFPD Finance Committee – consisting of directors Joe Young and Stephen Smith – got its first look at the preliminary findings of the annexation study during a June 21 committee meeting. While the preliminary findings were summarized in a concise 13-page report, the full phase two study planned for release in mid-July is expected to run several hundred pages, leading both Smith and Young to comment that the summary report contained less detail than was expected.

“This is intended to really prime the pump in some degree, to be able to help the board get prepared for the conversations that will be happening in July,” said ECCFPD Fire Chief Brian Helmick at the start of the committee meeting. “These conversations are not new. These are continuous conversations we’ve had starting back in August of last year where it brought us to the point where we had a phase one study. Now we’re starting to introduce the findings of the phase two feasibility study.”

Despite the report’s brevity, it is evident that no impediments to consolidation have been identified.

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Other findings in the report pertaining to the ECCFPD include: an assertion that all personnel will be absorbed into ConFire and no personnel will be laid off; Station 55 in Oakley will be manned and made operational; a new ladder company will go into service; and paramedics will be added to each apparatus.

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AP Triton Consulting, LLC, a Sacramento-based consulting firm specializing in the study of fire and emergency services, was engaged to complete study of the feasibility of consolidating ConFire and the ECCFPD in Sept. 2020. The phase one study was delivered to the boards of both agencies the following December. That initial report concluded there was sufficient evidence to warrant a more exhaustive phase two study, and the ECCFPD board approved the expenditure of up to \$30,000 for the effort.

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“It is important to note, however, that as we proceed, Contra Costa (County) Fire Protection District can move forward with East Contra Costa and/or Rodeo Hercules Fire District,” Helmick said. “It’s not all or none. It is individually what the boards respectfully decide and what authority is given to move forward with the LAFCO process,”

The phase two study projected a five-year forecast of financial and operational impacts of the potential consolidation of the three districts. Cash flow analysis completed in the phase one study determined that the cash flow is negative five years after consolidation.

“Why (the study) is five years, I’m not sure,” Young said. “I’m not sure what the county’s planning horizon is, how far they look ahead. The fact that the deficits begin to show up in the fourth and fifth year is important. The county is buying into accepting the responsibility.”

The cash flow analysis did not include any accommodation for Measure X revenue. Last month Contra Costa County fire chiefs requested an annual allocation of \$28.5 million from the \$90 million the measure is expected to deliver to the county annually for the next 20 years. A community advisory board will make a revenue allocation recommendation to the county’s board of supervisors later this summer.

However, Discovery Bay resident Bob Mankin, speaking during the public comment portion of the committee meeting, warned that Measure X revenue is an imperfect funding solution.

“There’s an expectation that if consolidation goes through, all of our troubles go away in perpetuity,” Mankin said. “I think Joe (Young), you would know better than anybody that that’s not likely. The numbers don’t work that way. Measure X is not a forever passage. That sunsets at some point. If that becomes a super critical source of revenue within the funding equation that ultimately comes out of this, and it goes away in 20 years, then it breaks the solution.”

If the ConFire and ECCFPD boards approve consolidating the two agencies next month, ConFire will submit a request to the Contra Costa County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). LAFCO is expected to require approximately six months to approve the request. Consolidation would then be expected to occur sometime between March and July 2022.

“I feel we are doing the kind of due diligence that was not done in 2002 when the district was formed,” said Smith. “The problems were there to be seen. The 2006 Gateway study made them obvious. The fire board was getting things accomplished now, that if had been done then, would have resulted in a viable district.”

Assembly bill would close Pittsburg health district

AB90

3

By Judith Prieve

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A state bill that would dissolve a small Pittsburg-based healthcare district to save money and possibly improve community-based health care programs is getting pushback from opponents who say it'll disenfranchise voters and remove local control.

The Los Medanos Community Healthcare District, formed by a vote of local residents in 1948 to build and run a community hospital, has continued to operate even after Los Medanos Community Hospital closed

in 1994. Since then, the district has overseen the distribution of various grants to health-related local programs, a task that critics say Contra Costa County could do.

Assemblyman Jim Frazier, D-Fairfield, has introduced a bill, **AB90**

");>AB90

3, that would dissolve the district and require the county to run all of its community health programs and take over the

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FROM PAGE 1

building that once housed the hospital. The county currently leases the building from the district to run the Pittsburg Health Center.

Frazier said the coronavirus pandemic has exposed critical shortfalls in health care funding across the state, and the toll has fallen hardest on minorities.

"Now more than ever, we have seen the life-changing impacts of devoting every possible dollar to serving those we represent," he said in a statement. "AB 903 is a district bill that takes strides toward addressing this issue. The bill effectively creates hundreds of thousands of dollars in funding for badly needed healthcare services in the region." That money, he said, would come from savings through eliminating high administrative costs associated with running the healthcare district. The 2017-18 county grand jury reported that Los Medanos Community Healthcare District spent 40% of its revenue on grants and 36% administering those grants, with the remaining 24% going to reserves in 2016-2017. The grand jury's report, the fourth one critical of the district, also said it duplicated county services and did not maximize cash assets.

would save the cost of the administrative staff, but we lose the local control," Young said. "The county is not going to fund all these little programs on the budget or faith-based programs that are trying to feed people in communities," she added.

"The healthcare district is a one-stop shop," Young said. "And one of our plans is to continue to grow so that we can leverage some of our funding to bring in other programs." One of the nonprofits that gets some funding from the district, as well as the county, is Pittsburg's Souljahs, whose mission is social service and social justice. The group hosts annual Juneteenth and Martin Luther King Jr. celebrations, which are combined with health fairs, and its leader is adamant that the district's future should be decided by its residents, not state legislation.

The Board of Supervisors first asked LAFCO to dissolve the district and transfer all of its assets and debts to the county in 2018. LAFCO approved the action on Sept. 12, 2018, but the district responded by obtaining 10,594 valid protest signatures to stop dissolution, though it was later told the effort came up 419 votes short.

In 2019, the county superior court sided with the district and issued a preliminary injunction preventing the dissolution, and in January 2020, the court again ruled in favor of the district, ordering LAFCO to hold

Although the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) has authorized Los Medanos' dissolution, the district appealed after the county said it didn't collect enough qualifying petition signatures to challenge the action and the matter remains tied up in court.

The district says its administrative costs are down to about 22%. Its top administrator - Antioch Mayor Lamar Thorpe - makes \$96,000.

"When the grand jury found that our administrative costs were too high, we made immediate changes and we kept it down," district board President Patt Young said in an interview.

The healthcare district serves a largely disadvantaged community of more than 97,000 people in Pittsburg, Bay Point and parts of Antioch, Concord and Clayton, whose residents pay it special taxes.

"It's up to the residents of the district who have been paying the tax since 1948 and have paid for that building and property," Young said. "The district is our asset." Fra zier and others, though, have noted the district duplicates services. For example, the county's grant administrator, Keller Canyon Mitigation Fund, supports some of the same programs funded by the district.

Critics counter that the district pays for many community-based programs that would not otherwise be funded. Some of these include programs that provide free eyeglasses for children, scholarships for children's swimming and karate lessons, electronics for seniors and health programs for others.

The district is also one of the major contributors to the Pittsburg RotaCare clinic, which provides free medical services to the uninsured.

"It (dissolving the district)

an election to determine Los Medanos' future. LAFCO has appealed.

"The county is trying to take away our right to vote," Gregory Osorio of Souljahs said. "It's disenfranchising the voters of this community." Osorio is part of a coalition of residents and nonprofits that has tried to save the district, holding rallies and posting on Facebook.

"They're trying to circumvent the whole thing because they're afraid it's going to lose (in court) now, so they're trying to go to the state," he said. "That's unheard of." Victoria Adams, president of East County NAACP, said the local branch also opposes [AB903](#).

"We feel that the voters have a right to decide whether or not this entity should remain or be dismantled," she said. "That decision should not be circumvented. The voters have a right to vote and voter suppression is not something we would ever agree to." Young added that she believes the district addressed all of the issues in the grand jury report, so "it's not about what we're not doing right, as the reason for being dissolved." "It's testing the waters of creating a blueprint to disenfranchise voters," she said.

After passing the Assembly, the bill is in committee. If approved by the Senate and signed by the governor, the district would be dissolved by Feb. 1, 2022. *Contact Judith Prieve at 925-779-7178.*

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Board swaps homes for lot of open space

125-home development in Tassajara Valley offset by 727 acres

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

By Shomik Mukherjee

smukherjee@bayareanewsgroup.com

To allow a 125-home development on 30 acres in Tassajara Valley, the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday voted 4-1 to stretch the urban limit line east of Blackhawk that voters set in 1990.

Developers have long sought to build homes there, and the latest proposal - by FT Land, LLC - swayed the supervisors to go along largely because the landowner promised to dedicate 727 acres for open space.

At least four of the supervisors had to approve the move because subdivisions aren't otherwise allowed beyond cities' urban boundaries. Supervisor Candace Andersen dissented.

Supervisors agreed that although their decision will allow development to stretch farther out, it ensures that a much larger swath of open space will remain, staving off the specter of a far more expansive housing project years down the road. The 727 acres will be dedicated to the East Bay Regional Park District.

"One of the things we wanted to do with the urban limit line is end sprawl development," Supervisor Federal Glover said at Tuesday's meeting. "Certainly the gifting of 700-and-some-odd acres would actually serve that purpose." The project has drawn the ire of conservationists and some environmental groups, such as the Greenbelt Alliance and the Sierra Club. An online petition with more than 5,000 signatures warns that shifting the urban limit line sets a precedent that threatens an additional 9,000 acres of open space. According to the ballot measure voters approved in 2006, though, the urban limit line can only be changed for parcels up to 30 acres at a time by a four-fifths vote of county supervisors.

Getting water to the homes could be a problem, however. The East Bay Municipal Utility District, which would need to expand its service area to supply water to the homes, has said it doesn't have the capacity to do so, especially in drought years.

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Development

FROM PAGE 1

"The drought highlights the importance of preserving water sources of supply, including any remaining conservation for current and future customers in our service boundary," Dave Rehnstrom, a manager at the district, said at the meeting.

Project representatives pressed the board to focus on land use, and not water, in determining the development's fate.

"While water is a critical issue, it's not the only concern," said Nadia Costa, an attorney for developer FT Land, LLC. "The county does not have the luxury to ignore other considerations, like satisfying its housing obligations, protecting open space in

"We were left out of the (preservation) agreement because if they included us, then the board wouldn't be able to make the finding they needed to make," Calabrigo said.

The county's Planning Commission last month recommended in a 4-2 vote that the supervisors reject the proposal, saying any new housing in the county should be built much closer to existing developments inside the urban boundary.

The developer received union support after promising to hire local labor for the homes' construction. And park district officials were enthusiastic about the promise of open space that can almost never be touched once its dedicated for preservation.

"If you really want to preserve property, you have to buy it or you have to have it dedicated," Bob Doyle,

perpetuity and preserving agricultural lands." Supervisor Andersen didn't buy the argument. Although the property lies within Supervisor Diane Burgis' district, Andersen represents San Ramon and Danville, which are directly west of Tassajara Valley.

In addition to a four-fifths vote, movement of the urban limit line also hinged on the crucial legal condition that the "majority of cities" involved in the developers' agreement to preserve open space need to support it.

San Ramon, the only city included in the agreement, favored developing outside the urban boundary. Danville staunchly opposed the project, but it was omitted from the final agreement after participating in early discussions, City Manager Joe Calabrigo said at the meeting.

Andersen seized on that point to warn that the project ultimately may not hold up legally, since, as Calabrigo said, "one is not a majority of two." "I don't believe that this end justifies the means of how we're going about (expanding the boundary)," Andersen said. "If we're going to move the urban limit line, I really think it should be up to the voters. I feel this method that we're using is very contrived." In an interview Wednesday, Calabrigo said the Danville council will soon discuss its next options for potentially challenging the project.

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Some neighboring residents who called into Tuesday's meeting were also supportive of the project.

"As an avid hiker and biker I'm all for additional open space, that's something we can't have enough of," said one public speaker, Sue McKinney. "I'm not necessarily for more houses, but this project seems like a fair tradeoff for the area." But environmental groups warned that the new housing would be a step backwards for a region looking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and a state where rural homes are regularly threatened by wildfires.

"Developments of this kind and in this location would actually put our communities at greater risk to the effects of climate change," Karen Rosenberg of the Greenbelt Alliance said at the meeting. "City boundaries were created for a reason."

Controversial Tassajara Parks Subdivision Near Danville Approved; Water Questions Remain

By [John Ramos](#) July 13, 2021 at 6:44 pm

Filed Under: [Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors](#), [Danville](#), [Danville News](#), [East Bay Municipal Utility District](#), [East Bay Regional Parks](#), [EBMUD](#), [Housing](#), [Tassajara Parks](#), [Water](#)

DANVILLE (KPIX 5) – Contra Costa County supervisors voted Tuesday to allow a controversial housing development near Danville, but questions remain about how water will be supplied to more than 120 homes that would be built.

In a 4-1 vote, the Board allowed a 125-home subdivision called Tassajara Parks on property just outside the urban limit line.

The 30-acre project will place homes in an area that was supposed to be free of large development. Supervisors ended up approving the plan after the developer offered to donate an additional 727 acres of open land to the East Bay Regional Park District.



Site of proposed Tassajara Parks development near Danville. (CBS)

“This will not only be preserved permanently by the Park District, it will be available in a broader public use for all the public to be able have a trail there,” Park District general manager Bob Doyle said at the meeting.

Despite receiving approval, the project faces another huge problem. The East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD), is refusing to supply water to the new homes.

The developer wants to fund conservation efforts to produce enough water for the project, but EBMUD considers water saved by conservation to be something they already own, as they stated in the Board meeting.

“The drought highlights the importance of preserving water sources of supply, including any remaining conservation potential, for current and future customers within our ultimate service boundary,” said Dave Rehnstrom, the agency’s manager of water distribution planning.

That left Supervisor Candace Anderson, the lone vote against the Tassajara Parks project, to pose the key question.

“Have we ever, in Contra Costa, ever certified an EIR or approved a project where there is no identifiable source of water?” Anderson asked.

That will be the next challenge for a project already 10 years in the making, where to find new water in an already parched area.

Supervisors said it will be up to the developer to identify a water supply before any construction can begin. Without it, the land may stay dry and open for a long time to come.

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Report: Con Fire should merge with other county fire districts

Built in the Bay 3 days ago



(Justin Sullivan / Getty Images)

By Ian Firstenberg

(LAFAYETTE, Calif.) A recently released study, conducted by the consultant company [AP Triton](#) which was hired by Contra Costa County last year, recommends that Contra Costa County Fire Protection District (Con Fire) consolidate with the East Contra Costa and Rodeo-Hercules districts to "increase effectiveness and efficiency," according to [Patch](#).

Notably, Con Fire provides protection for Lafayette but not for Moraga and Orinda. Moraga-Orinda Fire was not included in the report.

In mid-May of this year, the [Moraga Town Council](#) opposed the consolidation of Moraga-Orinda Fire (MOFD) with Con Fire. A portion of the council's opposition to consolidation centered around emergency response time.

"We strongly oppose MOFD spending resources studying a process for consolidation with ConFire. Resources should continue to be spent on the delivery of high-quality fire protection, fire safety, and emergency response systems," Moraga Mayor Michael McCluer wrote in [staff report](#).

The study from AP Triton also suggests that the districts align to determine a training philosophy and a more standardized action plan.

AP Triton presented its findings to the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors, which acts as Con Fire's board of directors, Tuesday during a [meeting](#).

This comes after similar presentations were made, it's unclear if by the same company, to East Contra Costa and the Rodeo-Hercules board. Now, each district or governing jurisdiction will survey residents to determine appropriate next steps.

"Our actions today, and the decision by the ECCFPD governing board to continue to work with Con Fire is a long-awaited opportunity to form a regional sustainable solution to providing the level of fire service that our communities need and deserve," said Contra Costa County Supervisor Diane Burgis, whose District 3 includes much of East Contra Costa.

All three chiefs from cooperating fire agencies approved the study's recommendations.

3 possible developers for Concord site

2,300-ACRE SITE

Former naval weapons station could become home to as many as 13,000 housing units

By Shomik Mukherjee

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CONCORD >> Three prominent developers have emerged as the latest contenders for the opportunity to transform the former Concord Naval Weapons Station site into a fullfledged community — one of the East Bay’s biggest projects ever.

As envisioned by the city, the 2,300-acre site could become the home of as many as 13,000 housing units and millions of square feet of commercial and office space in coming years.

All three proposals submitted by the developers last month and publicly released by the city on Tuesday generally reflect that vision — including the promise that a quarter of the homes will be listed at affordable prices.

So it’s the key differences among the proposals that could ultimately determine which master developer the City Council chooses at its Aug. 31 meeting.

“This is like a job interview

for a partnership with the city,” Guy Bjerke, the city’s economic development director, told this news organization.

One applicant, Brookfield Development, is a multinational company that has developed thousands of housing units including Pier 70, a 28acre waterfront community in San Francisco.

The company, which is publicly traded, provided the city

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City of Concord officials are zeroing in on a new developer for the former Concord Naval Weapons Station site.

DAN ROSENSTRAUCH — STAFF ARCHIVES

Developers

FROM PAGE 1

with extensive details about its finances and has glowing references from past partners, according to the city's agenda for the Aug. 21 meeting.

Another prospective developer is Irvine-based City Ventures, which has done sizable projects around the state and Bay Area, including The Orchard, a development of 188 townhouses and 10,000 square feet of retail space in San Jose. The firm provided the city with financial statements indicating it has the

more letters every day, Bjerke said, adding he's received only one comment in his inbox that supports choosing Seeno as master developer.

"The Seenos have a history of breaking environmental and other laws and not acting in the public's best interest," the form letters state. "Their business practices have been unethical and illegal." But at least for the moment, Seeno does appear to have one significant merit point over its competitors - an agreement to exclusively hire local union labor for construction and related work at the site. The other companies are still negotiat- ing for similar agreements.

bandwidth to take on the naval weapons site development.

Unlike its two competitors who say their ideas for the naval weapons site are consistent with the City Council's stated vision, City Ventures' proposal puts more focus on housing and less on commercial development, according to city staff.

The third contender is Seeno Company, a longtime local developer with a history of legal battles against East Bay public agencies and environmental groups, a track record so contentious that Save Mount Diablo has already organized a letter-writing campaign urging the City Council to reject its proposal.

Seeno and Discovery Builders, its partner in the naval weapons station application, sued in 2018 to prevent the U.S. Navy from transferring the weapons station property to the city, arguing that the proposed development's massive scale would produce so much traffic congestion and air pollution that it could harm their own nearby housing and office projects.

Last year, the company also filed a lawsuit to prevent the Navy's transfer of adjacent land to the East Bay Regional Park District, citing similar reasons.

The city has received more than 200 letters opposing Seeno's proposal - most of them lifting the opposition text that Save Mount Diablo posted on its website - and is getting

The city has made it clear that any developer interested in taking on the naval weapons station must be willing to cut a deal with local unions, known as project labor agreements.

Lennar Corp., the last master developer of the site, walked away from the project after refusing to commit to solely hiring union workers, even though it had invested years of effort to make the project happen.

Seeno has been less forthcoming to the city about its finances than the two other developers, telling Bjerke in an email last month, "we feel that a broad, generic request for financial information (at this point) is premature and unnecessary." Representatives from the three developers did not respond to requests for comment on this story.

After the council makes a choice, the city and developer must negotiate final terms for proceeding and prepare a specific plan that shows how the new community ultimately will look like. That process could take 18 to 20 months, Bjerke said.

The development will likely take years to complete.

For Councilman Edi Birsan, the sooner the better. "In two-and-a-half years, I want to see dirt moving," he said in an email last month.