

**Solano Local Agency Formation Commission**

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**Staff Report**

DATE: May 15, 2013

TO: Members of the Local Agency Formation Commission

FROM: Elliot Mulberg, Interim Executive Officer

SUBJECT: **Consolidation of Solano County Fire Protection Districts**

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**Recommendation:**

That the Commission review the possibilities of consolidating the fire districts and provide staff direction.

**Background:**

Solano County is served by six fire district and 7 city fire departments. Of the six districts two, Dixon and East Vallejo, contract with city fire departments for services. Dixon FPD maintains its own board of directors while East Vallejo is a dependent special district as the Solano Board of Supervisors serves as its board of directors. Table 1 gives some key statistics on each of the districts. It should be noted the budgets are from the 2006 MSR and are presented to show the relative differences between the districts.

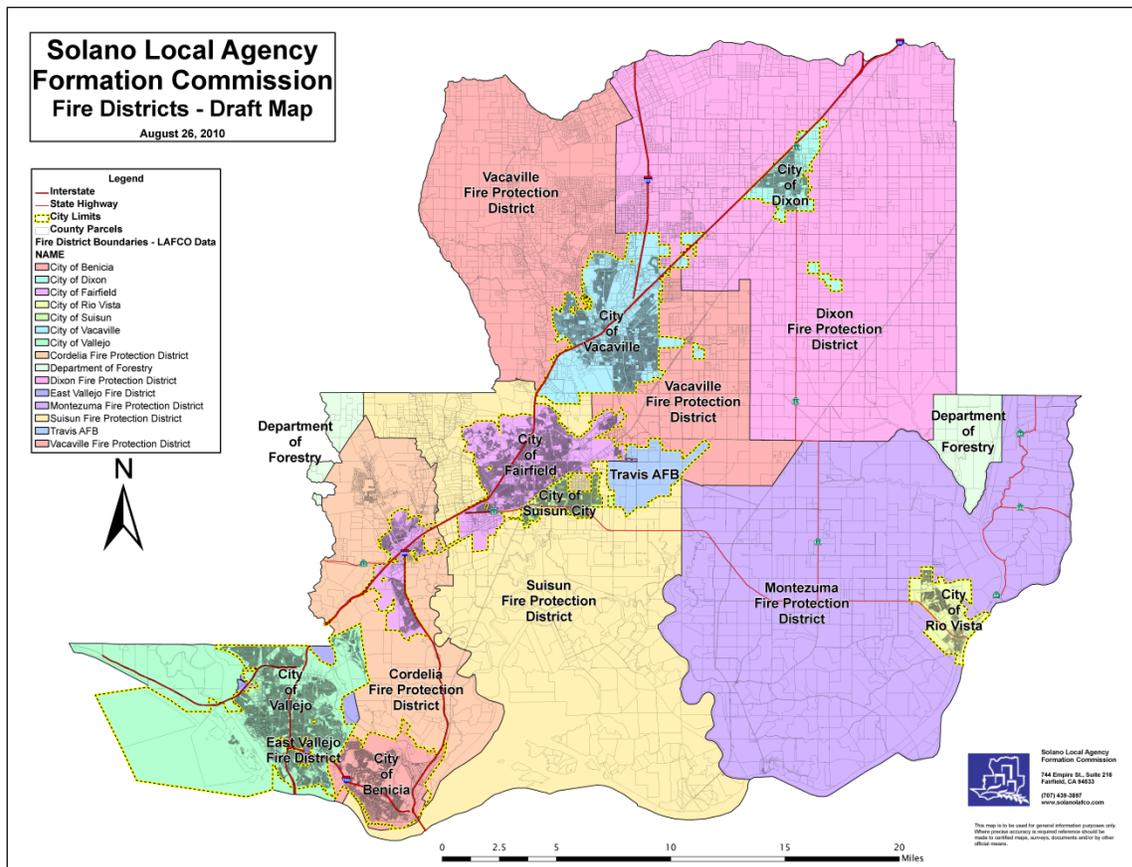
The fire service is unique in that neighboring departments often have mutual aid or automatic aid agreements. With mutual aid the call is relayed to the closest station within jurisdictional boundaries who then must decide if additional aid is required. They then contact the agency with whom they have the mutual aid agreement once on the scene. With automatic aid the call is dispatched to closest station of either department. The concept of boundary drops – that is no jurisdictional boundaries - is important in providing optimum response and service.

Table 1: Solano County Fire Districts

	Cordelia FPD <sup>5</sup>	Suisun FPD <sup>1,2</sup>	Vacaville FPD <sup>4</sup>	Montezuma FPD <sup>3</sup>	Dixon FDP <sup>1</sup>	E Vallejo FPD <sup>1</sup>
<b>General</b>						
Area(mi <sup>2</sup> )	56	138	135	230	320	1.5
Population	5,000	4,000	6,300	1,450	2,500	3,000
No Stations	2	2	5	2+5 satellite	1-city stn	2
ISO	5	5/9	8B-5	9	5/9	3
Budget <sup>1</sup>	\$730,000	\$274,480	\$1,645,750	\$537,635	\$456,929	\$368,289
Chief	Jay Huyssoon	Ron Glantz	Howard Wood	Joe Rosewall	Aaron McAllister	Ron Prince
<b>Staffing</b>						
FT	4	1 (chief)	6	3	7	none
Vol/Paid Call	51	41	70	27	56	none

Source: <sup>1</sup> 2006 MSR, <sup>2</sup> 2008 Grand Jury, <sup>3</sup> website, <sup>4</sup> Chief Wood, <sup>5</sup> Chief Huyssoon

Exhibit 1 below shows the boundaries of each of the fire districts. As shown in the exhibit CalFire is responsible for areas on the west edge and the southeast edge of the county. CalFire does not maintain a presence in the County and primarily responds to wildfires.



**Consolidation Options:**

There are two main consolidation options. For the purposes of this discussion, option one will be considered the LAFCO process. Option two will be considered a functional consolidation where the district contracts with a city department. There are advantages and disadvantages to both.

**Option One - LAFCO Consolidation:**

While there are many operational issues involved in consolidation the following will focus solely on the LAFCO process and LAFCO related issues. Consolidation through the LAFCO process can be initiated in any of three ways. LAFCO can initiate the process, voters or land owners can initiate the process by a petition, or it can be initiated by the districts.

LAFCO Initiated Consolidation

LAFCO can initiate the process under GC section 56375 if the consolidation is consistent with a recommendation or conclusion of a study such as the municipal service review, a sphere update, or special study initiated specifically for that purpose. As a result of that study the commission would need to make two determinations 1) that the cost to provide service as a result of the consolidation would be less or similar to the alternative means of providing service and 2) the consolidation promotes public access and accountability for service needs and financial resources (56881).

The municipal service review completed in 2006 recommended consolidation of Ryer Island and Montezuma Fire District which was accomplished in 2007. The MSR did not recommend a consolidation of all the districts, but did recommend forming a consolidation committee. The recommendation is just short of the requirement for LAFCO to initiate a consolidation. Since the MSR is more than five years old it would need to be current so that a consolidation could proceed. If the updated MSR recommends consolidation then LAFCO could initiate the process.

Should LAFCO initiate the consolidation CKH allows the commission to hold a duly noticed public hearing to determine whether the proposed consolidation should be disapproved or go to the reorganization committee. CKH encourages LAFCO to use a reorganization committee to review the proposal (56827). The committee could consist of the fire chiefs of the affected agencies.

Consolidation Initiated by Petition

Alternatively the consolidation could be initiated by petition of the registered voters. The petitions must be signed by not less than 5% of the registered voters within each of the districts.

Consolidation Initiated by Resolution of the Legislative Bodies of Each District

The third option would be by resolution of the board of directors. If the boards of the districts adopt substantially similar resolutions LAFCO cannot deny the consolidation but may impose conditions that are acceptable to the applicants.

**Option Two - Functional Consolidation:**

Another option is functional consolidation where the district contracts with another agency to provide staffing, equipment and administrative support. Examples are the Dixon Fire Protection District which contracts with the City of Dixon, and the East Vallejo Fire Protection District which contracts with the City of Vallejo.

The advantages of a functional consolidation are that the district receives the service and the city receives extra revenues. Other advantages are that the district can retain local control because it has a separate board of directors who can determine the level of service their community prefers. The disadvantage is that there are still two governing bodies that make decisions that can result in uneven service delivery.

In Solano County it is the districts that contract with a city department for services. There are occasions when a city will contract with a district for services. Such an example is the City of Ukiah and the Ukiah Valley Fire Protection District. The advantages of the Ukiah model and similarly with Dixon and E Vallejo are:

- 1) Common dispatch center
- 2) Common Chief
- 3) Automatic Aid agreement
- 4) Shared personnel and equipment

**Issues Involving Consolidation:**

There are several potential issues with a consolidation.

- 1) Dispatch - With the exception East Vallejo all the fire districts are dispatched by Solano County Dispatch. East Vallejo is dispatched through the City of Vallejo. The cities of Benicia, Fairfield, Suisun City, Vacaville, and Vallejo each have their own dispatch center. Many of the districts have mutual aid agreements with the cities.

Dispatch becomes a problem if the closest responder is a city or if a city requires assistance from a district. Often times it takes a couple calls to different departments to get assistance sent.

- 2) Governance - Each district is governed by a five member board. In three of the six districts, Suisun, Vacaville, and Dixon, a majority of the board terms have expired,

however, board members continue until they are reappointed or another person is appointed. Table 2 shows the status of the district boards and when terms are set to expire.

Table 2: Governing Boards and Terms

Seats	Cordelia	Montezuma	Suisun	Vacaville	Dixon	E. Vallejo
<b>Appointed/Elected</b>	Elected	Appointed	Appointed	Appointed	Appointed	BOS
<b>Expired terms 2013</b>			4	3	1	n/a
<b>Terms ending 2013</b>	3	2		1 <sup>1</sup>	2	

<sup>1</sup> Terms expires July 1

Source: County Yearly Vacancy announcements/appointments & reappointments report

Suisun FPD was subject of a recent Grand Jury Report which pointed out that three board members have expired terms and the other two seats are vacant. For the Vacaville Fire District three of the directors’ terms have expired in March 2013 and one term will expire in July.

- 3) Contracts - The contracts with each of the districts would have to be reviewed and consolidated. That could include ambulance service agreements and mutual aid agreements with the cities. This would also include long term debt. Only the Vacaville FPD has long term debt. The others are debt free. A consolidation would require that the successor agency assume the debt of the Vacaville District.
- 4) Staffing - All the fire districts are primarily volunteer staffed districts. A consolidation would require a new organizational chart and one of the present chiefs could be appointed chief of the consolidated districts. It might be useful to form a reorganization committee to work out the form of the new organization. There would need to be outreach to the firefighters associations of each of the districts.
- 5) Station Locations – One aspect of the consolidation would be a review of station locations to determine if there is an overlap in coverage. The consolidated district may want to determine the configuration of stations that will provide the best service and perhaps the lowest ISO rating.
- 6) Apparatus - All apparatus would need to be inventoried. The condition of all apparatus would need to be assessed to determine a replacement schedule.
- 7) Training - In addition training would need to be standardized and scheduled. The new administration would need to keep records of training completed by each firefighter.

**Conclusions:**

1. An updated MSR is required for any change of organization with the fire districts. The MSR could be completed in approximately two months by staff or 6 months if completed with an outside consultant through the RFP process. The MSR could cost up to \$35,000. The FY13/14 budget includes an item for MSR updates.
2. It is recommended the Fire District Subcommittee reconvene to monitor the process and provide assistance as needed.
3. Since East Vallejo FPD and Dixon FPD have a working functional consolidation with their respective cities it may be best not to include those districts in the consolidation.
4. Suisun FPD, Montezuma FPD, Vacaville FPD and Cordelia FPD may want to consider consolidation. The most effective way to proceed would be for each of the boards to pass substantially similar resolutions.
5. The action would be exempt from CEQA under the class 20 exemption, changes in organization of local agencies.
6. It is recommended that there be initially a nine member board with three districts having two members and a fourth having three members. The number could be adjusted based on when terms of existing board members expire. The HSC 13842 allows the maximum number of eleven board members for a fire district.