

CONTRA COSTA LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION  
FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES AD-HOC COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF SPECIAL LAFCO MEETING

June 25, 2009

County Administration Building, Room 101  
Martinez, CA

1. Chair Helen Allen called the meeting to order at 9:07 a.m.
2. Present were Committee members Helen Allen, Chair, David Piepho, Vice Chair, and Martin McNair. Alternate Committee members Don Tatzin and Gayle Uilkema were present.

Present were Executive Officer Lou Ann Texeira, Legal Counsel Silvano Marchesi, and Commission Clerk Kate Sibley.

3. Approval of the Agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The Chair welcomed visitors and explained that the focus of the meeting would be on those governance structure and SOI options relating to West County fire protection service providers.

The Chair asked Lance Maples, Fire Chief of the City of El Cerrito Fire Department, to provide a brief overview of that department's operations.

John Gioia, County Supervisor District 1, expressed his appreciation for the MSR, and made two suggestions: 1) study the issues facing West County fire protection districts separately from the rest of the County; and 2) include stakeholders from all of the affected agencies in any such study to promote "buy-in" to any proposed solutions.

Ciara Wood, resident of Kensington, spoke in support of the Kensington FPD's contract with the City of El Cerrito Fire Department noting efficiency and effectiveness.

Brenda Navellier, Administrator for the Kensington FPD, provided an overview of that district's history and operations. Of note was the fact that the district is suspending its special assessment (\$88 per property) for 2009-10; this will be reevaluated in a year.

Janice Kosel, Kensington FPD Board Member, emphasized that the district is satisfied with its contract with the City of El Cerrito for fire protection services, and that they are not interested in consolidation.

Chief Jim Parrott provided an overview of the City of Pinole Fire Department, highlighting the geographic challenges they face, and acknowledging Battalion 7, a partnership among Pinole, Rodeo-Hercules FPD, and ConFire, which has enhanced coverage.

Discussion ensued regarding auto mutual aid and AVL (automatic vehicle locator) and their benefits to each district and department.

Vince Wells, Local 1230 President, noted that the effectiveness of Battalion 7 would be impacted if Pinole's Station 74 were to be closed.

Belinda Espinosa, City Manager of Pinole, stated that the City is not discussing closing Station 74, although sustainability is an issue and there must be discussion soon at the council level; they are open to exploring various possibilities.

Jim Russey, resident of Richmond and member of Firefighters Local 188, urged that Pinole's short-term problems be addressed quickly and suggested that perhaps some temporary agreements would be appropriate for this purpose.

Staff and Commissioners responded that the Fire MSR Committee's purpose is to address district boundaries and spheres of influence, and that agencies may want to form their own committee for operational issues.

Michael Banks, Chief of the City of Richmond Fire Department, in his overview stated that his department's relationship with El Cerrito and Kensington FPD (as well as Chevron's fire chief and department and East Bay Regional Park District's) is a very good one, and that they are working on other collaborations, including joint training. Currently there is a preliminary auto aid agreement in place, and all of the districts are working toward a formal, permanent agreement. He recognizes the communication problems with the two different radio systems; his goal is to go to 800MHz in order to solve this. In response to Commissioners' questions about service to San Pablo and the potential to form a subsidiary district, Banks indicated that there have been no discussions regarding forming a subsidiary district; however, there have been numerous discussions focusing on improving auto aid, and that with a new communication system, this will work more seamlessly.

Brock Arner, City Manager for San Pablo, underscored the critical need for a new communication system, and pointed out that the County has finally begun to spend money on a joint communication system that has been in planning stages for the past few years. San Pablo will be unable to fund additional fire service due to fiscal constraints. Arner echoed Supervisor Gioia's comment that a study of the West County fire districts should be done separately from the rest of the County, and should include representatives of all stakeholder agencies.

San Pablo Mayor Leonard McNeil agreed with Arner and stated that "auto aid" means one system to him. Funding issues compel all agencies coming together. Station 70 has seismic issues and is not ideally located. He recommended merging fire and emergency medical services.

Keith Richter, Chief of ConFire, confirmed that Station 70 is the busiest in the County; they used to have two companies in San Pablo, but downsized to one four-person engine, which will be further reduced to three personnel in the new fiscal year.

Battalion 7 is a collaboration among Richmond, ConFire, and Pinole; all involved agencies are proud of it and recognize its value.

When asked if consideration has been given to reorganizing West County and removing unincorporated areas from ConFire, Chief Richter responded that there had been, but it is a matter of political will; there are eight major fire protection jurisdictions in West County; put another way, 20% of the County has 75% of the fire departments. The current boundaries have been in place since 1994. Richter added that all districts are limited by funding; auto aid has to work, along with the AVL system. ConFire already subsidizes tax dollars that come to the district from each of the unincorporated areas. Funding is a major issue.

In West County, the two different communication systems, requiring firefighters to carry two radios, continues to present problems between Richmond and the rest of the fire districts operating there. Richter added that ConFire also lacks infrastructure there, necessitating reliance on Richmond, El Cerrito, etc.

There was general agreement that there are three primary concerns to be addressed: Staffing, training, and communications. Banks indicated that if auto aid continues to work well, perhaps districts in West County would not need to explore consolidations/mergers. McNeil asked what would happen if auto aid fell apart again, as it did in 2002-04. Parrott agreed that unless such agreements as auto aid are memorialized they can fall apart.

Piepho stated that while LAFCO appreciates the auto aid efforts, its focus is orderly boundaries and efficient, sustainable services. Tatzin explained that LAFCO provides tools that agencies can use to address their issues, rather than LAFCO simply requiring the agencies to conform to its rules. Flexibility is needed.

Richter suggested that reducing the SOI for ConFire in West County might be a good starting point in generating some new thinking about possibilities.

Steve Aker, from Pinole Fire Department and part of Battalion 7, spoke to the problems that Pinole has with funding, which will not be addressed solely through auto aid.

J.R. Stafford, Board Chair of the Rodeo-Hercules FPD, spoke in support of consolidation talks and against assigning a zero SOI to their district. They are looking for ways to sustain their district. RHFPD Assistant Fire Chief Alan Biagi clarified the difference between auto aid and mutual aid: Auto aid is when any fire district responds to a call from the dispatcher; mutual aid has to be cleared with the neighboring chief before responding.

Gerald Littleton, Fire Chief of Crockett-Carquinez FPD, provided background on his district, which is governed by the County Supervisors. He noted his prior involvement in various committees that reviewed fire district problems in West County and the challenges with sovereignty issues and public concerns. He supports assigning zero SOIs to all districts to level the playing field.

Art Lathrop, Director of County Emergency Medical Services, provided an overview of County Service Area (CSA) EM-1, formed in 1989 by the Board of Supervisors. The District has two zones (A- San Ramon Valley FPD area; B – rest of County), as defined by their assessment amounts (SRVFPD already had paramedic services in place). In 2004, a different service model was adopted, with only one paramedic on an ambulance; this allows the County to provide funding assistance to fire districts

for their paramedics. Lathrop stated that state law enables all counties to establish emergency medical services, but they can determine the level of services provided.

Piepho asked LAFCO Legal Counsel to research the law regarding the provision of emergency medical service to its residents; what the law mandates and how that applies to the fire protection districts and CSA EM-1.

Commissioners acknowledged that there is no simple solution in West County and discussed possible recommendations for moving forward. Clarification was provided regarding accepting and approving the MSR as an adequate document that provides options, which does not include adopting SOIs. The options provided in the MSR are simply a variety of choices and are not necessarily recommendations.

Following further discussion, the committee reached consensus on the following items:

- Recommended accepting the MSR and making the required determinations (Motion by Piepho, second by McNair)
- Supported the continued exclusion from ConFire's SOI the western boundary areas in anticipation of a future west county consolidation (Piepho, McNair).
- Recommended forming an ad-hoc committee of west county agencies to develop recommendations and report to LAFCO (McNair, Piepho). This committee will be chaired by Commissioner McNair and Pinole Fire Chief Jim Parrott will coordinate the participation of representatives from the west county agencies. The Committee will have 30 days to develop a work plan and timeline and report back to LAFCO.
- Recommended clarifying to LAFCO that the committee does not support option item #24 (consolidation of Kensington FPD with Kensington CSD) (Piepho, McNair).
- Recommended a special LAFCO meeting in July to review all recommendations for approval by LAFCO.

The committee tabled discussion of countywide consolidation of fire service.

The meeting adjourned at 1:10 p.m.

Final Minutes Approved by the Commission on August 12, 2009.

AYES: Allen, Glover, McNair, Meadows, D. Piepho, Tatzin, Uilkema

NOES:

ABSTAIN:

ABSENT: Schroder (M)

By /s/ Lou Ann Texeira  
Executive Officer