

# SONOMA LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION

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Item 4.1

## Staff Report

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**Meeting Date:** July 6, 2022

**Agenda No.** Item 4.1

**Agenda Item Title:** File No. 2021-02: Municipal Service Review for the City of Sonoma

**Environmental Determination:** Not a project under CEQA

**Staff Contacts:** Mark Bramfitt

## **Analysis**

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In 2020 the City of Sonoma requested that LAFCO conduct a Municipal Service Review, and staff, with the Commission's support, engaged a consultant, E. Mulberg and Associates, to complete the study.

Staff worked with the consultant and city staff to develop a Public Review Draft of the report. Although the study does not recommend any changes to the City's sphere of influence (SOI), and therefore does not require a noticed public hearing of the Commission, staff noted considerable community interest in the study, and did provide public notice and published the draft for a period in excess of 21 days.

The Municipal Service Review (MSR) was conducted to evaluate the City's provision of services, in part due to recent interest in annexation of properties to the City.

Staff is requesting that the Commission review the Municipal Service Review and consider adopting a resolution (draft attached) that adopts the determinations in the report.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of a Municipal Service Review is to evaluate whether a local agency is providing services in an effective and efficient manner, and to determine if there are opportunities for providing services through other arrangements. The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act delineates the categories of evaluation that must be included in an MSR (the Commission may also evaluate any other factors as it deems necessary).

An MSR can also inform the Commission regarding amendments to an agency's sphere of influence, which is defined as the probable service area of a local agency. Territory within a sphere of influence is eligible for annexation by the agency; territory outside the sphere is not.

## **Determinations of MSR**

The evaluation of the services provided by the City did not uncover any substantive concerns, though it does make a series of recommendations.

The financial health of the City has been solid, in part due to federal funding to offset tax revenue losses during the pandemic. It appears that the City's financial condition is returning to good health.

The recommendations in the report are substantive, and the City has indicated that they are well considered. The recommendations include:

- The City has had a contract with a neighboring fire district (now known as the Sonoma Valley Fire District after a recent LAFCO-approved reorganization) for almost twenty years. The report recommends that the city consider undertaking a formal reorganization with Sonoma Valley Fire, or otherwise negotiate a long-term contract with appropriate funding mechanisms, to ensure the future of fire and emergency medical service for the City.
- The report reviews a half-dozen or so areas that are within the City’s existing sphere of influence, and recommends actions that the City might undertake to facilitate appropriate annexations. These include:
  - For two areas, Maxwell Farms Regional Park and the Montini Open Space Preserve, the City should consider annexation, or request that one or both areas be removed from the sphere.
  - The city surrounds one unincorporated island of territory (“Train Town”), and should endeavor to annex the territory, if necessary through a City application under the island annexation provision of the Cortese Knox Hertzberg Act.
  - A collection of properties at the southern “gateway” to the City on Highway 12 have at various times been the subject of preliminary annexation proposals. The City might consider conducting a specific area land use plan to facilitate an area-wide annexation. (Several of the sites have been mooted as appropriate for affordable housing development.)
  - The remaining three areas within the City’s sphere that have not been annexed are largely developed. The study recommends that the City facilitate annexations of properties in these areas as far as is possible.
- Finally, the report acknowledges that there are potential partnerships and reorganizations within the Sonoma Valley that are worthy of continued discussion and evaluation by the City and Valley at large.

These include potentially combining the City’s municipal water service provision with the neighboring Valley of the Moon Water District, combining both operations with the Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District, and even adding groundwater management services under the aegis of a “Sonoma Valley Water Authority”.

The City has also been part of recent discussions regarding opportunities to bring other urbanized territory, notably the Springs communities of El Verano, Agua Caliente, and Boyes Hot Springs, into the City. The report makes no recommendations regarding these possibilities, but does note that these options would involve LAFCO review and actions, as well as support from affected communities (potentially through an amendment to the City’s Urban Growth Boundary ordinance, and through protest proceedings undertaken as part of LAFCO actions).

## **Commission Review**

Staff is seeking Commission review of the MSR, and has prepared a draft resolution that the Commission can modify and/or approve to adopt the determinations of the report.

Although the MSR does not make any recommendations regarding a sphere of influence amendment for the City at this time, the report could be relied upon for an analysis of any sphere of influence proposal in the near term.

## **Recommendation**

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Staff is seeking Commission review and comment regarding the Public Review Draft of the Municipal Service Review for the City of Sonoma.

The Commission might consider:

- Adoption of the determinations of the report as written.
- Amendments to the determinations, and subsequent adoption.
- Additional evaluation of the City, covering areas within the scope of the report, or new ones.

Staff has prepared a draft resolution for Commission consideration that adopts the determinations of the Municipal Service Review.

## **Attachments**

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1. Municipal Service Review for the City of Sonoma, Public Review Draft
2. Draft Resolution