

Proposal One: Sonoma County Fire District/County Service Area 40 IRPs 51, 56 and 61 (Portion)

Proposal Outline:

The County and Sonoma County Fire District have informally requested that the Commission consider a Sphere of Influence amendment and subsequent reorganization involving three County Service Area 40 territories:

- Incident Response Area 51, A small area immediately north of Hacienda.
- Incident Response Area 56, which includes the Armstrong Redwoods State Preserve and Austin Creek State Recreation Area and surroundings.
- The southern portion of Incident Response Area 61, which encompasses the Dry Creek Valley area. The Northern Sonoma County Fire Protection District is currently completing a reorganization through the Commission that encompasses the northern portion of this territory.

The three Incident Response Areas (IRPs) are to the north of the former Russian River and Forestville Fire Protection Districts; those Districts historically provided direct service to the territory.

Two subsequent reorganizations were approved by the Commission, adding the Russian River and Forestville FPDs to Sonoma County Fire District. The IRP territories were not addressed at that time. Sonoma County Fire now provides direct service to the territories.

Sonoma County Fire is not receiving property tax revenue for the areas, nor is it able to apply its special (parcel) tax schedule to the territory. As an equity issue, and to further the County's goal of eliminating CSA 40, the IRP areas should be reorganized into Sonoma County Fire.

Status of LAFCO Work Product:

A Municipal Service Review was completed and adopted by the Commission for fifteen fire and emergency medical service providers in the west county region in 2019. Unfortunately, the IRP areas were not expressly reviewed, so a new Municipal Service Review is required. A sphere of influence study is also necessary to make determinations in two categories not covered in a Municipal Service Review.

Staff believes that a combined MSR and sphere of influence review for these areas could be quite simple to prepare given the limited circumstances for the area.

Staff notes that Sonoma County Fire District would be required to prepare a Plan for Service for the areas, but that it too could be relatively pro forma.

Staff Analysis: SOI Criteria

Staff believes that a proposed sphere amendment fully satisfies all of the evaluation criteria.

Other Issues

Staff notes that while the proposed sphere of influence amendment is clearly warranted, a reorganization proposal will be subject to a protest proceeding. For these circumstances the landowners within the IRP territories would become subject to Sonoma County Fire District's voter-approved special (parcel) taxes. It is not expected that the reorganization would result in any changes to existing service levels.

In essence then, a reorganization becomes a referendum on special taxation for the landowners in the IRP areas, and there may be some likelihood of a successful protest challenge.

Options for Commission Guidance

Staff is seeking Commission guidance regarding further work on this proposal, nominally with regard to prioritizing staff work. Options include, but are not limited to:

- Directing staff to complete a Municipal Service Review and Sphere of Influence Study for the IRP areas.
- Working with Sonoma County Fire District to process a subsequent reorganization proposal.