

SONOMA LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION

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Staff Report

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| Meeting Date: | April 5, 2023 |
| Agenda No. | Item 4.2 |
| Agenda Item Title: | Sphere of Influence Study and Amendment for Portions of County Service Area 40 – Fire Services |
| Proposal: | Staff is requesting that the Commission review a Sphere of Influence Study for major portions of County Service Area 40 territory, consider adopting the determinations of the report, and consider amending the sphere of influence for the territories based on options discussed in the report. |
| Environmental Determination: | Exempt from CEQA pursuant to Sections 15306, 15262, and 15061 (b)(3) of the State CEQA Guidelines |
| Staff Contact: | Mark Bramfitt |

Analysis

Background

The County of Sonoma has several dependent districts, including County Service Area 40 – Fire Services (“CSA 40”). This district includes territories in the County that are not served by cities and independent special districts.

These territories have been served in two ways: through the services of volunteer fire companies, and through contractual arrangements between the county and neighboring fire service providers. The latter of these areas are called “Incident Response Plan” areas, or “IRPs”.

Through a series of reorganizations in recent years, several areas previously within CSA 40 have been annexed to independent fire protection districts. The County has long signaled its intention to eventually dissolve CSA 40 by finding partner agencies willing to take on additional territories. The County has essentially closed its fire operation, keeping only fire inspection services run through Permit Sonoma, and limited administrative activities managed through the County Administrator’s Office.

The County entered into a contractual service arrangement several years ago with North Bay Fire, Inc., an entity comprised of representatives from the remaining active volunteer fire companies. North Bay Fire, Inc. has taken on the role of evaluating funding requests from volunteer fire companies for capital and expense purposes, and dispensing funding provided by the County.

North Bay Fire, Inc. has in turn contracted with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District (“Gold Ridge FPD”) for leadership, administrative and training services.

Both the County and Gold Ridge FPD are seeking an amendment to the Gold Ridge FPD sphere of influence to include the nine remaining volunteer fire company territories and one IRP of CSA 40. CSA 40 will still encompass several other IRP areas.

Municipal Service Reviews

In order to amend a sphere of influence for a district, LAFCO must complete a Municipal Services Review that conforms to requirements listed in the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act.

The Commission adopted a Municipal Services Review for some of the CSA 40 territory as part of a study of West County fire and emergency medical service agencies in 2019.

The Commission most recently adopted a Municipal Services Review for the southern portions of CSA 40 in March 2023.

Although the West County Municipal Services Review is somewhat dated, staff believes that the two documents represent a reasonable assessment of the conditions of most of

the remaining CSA 40 territory. (Several IRPs have not been subjects of a recent Municipal Services Review, and they are not part of the sphere of influence study discussed here.)

Sphere of Influence Study

In addition to completion of Municipal Services Reviews, the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act requires LAFCO to make determinations in five additional areas before considering sphere of influence amendments for agencies.

Given the County's and Gold Ridge FPD's interest in a sphere of influence amendment for a large portion of CSA 40, staff has prepared a Sphere of Influence Study that proposes a set of determinations, and presents and evaluates sphere of influence amendment options.

The sphere of influence amendment options are evaluated against a set of criteria adopted by the Commission. Of the six criteria, these were found to be the most pertinent:

- Operational fit.
- Financial sustainability.
- Agency preference.
- Advanced Life Support/Ambulance transport.

Noticing

The Public Review Draft of the Sphere of Influence Study was published on the Commission's web site and copies were provided to Affected Agencies and interested parties consistent with state law noticing requirements. Notice to the public was provided using a print placement in the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*.

Environmental Review Compliance.

Confirming or amending the Sphere of Influence of the Subject Agency is exempt from CEQA pursuant to Sections 15306, 15262, and 15061 (b)(3) of the State CEQA Guidelines, which states:

Other Considerations

A reorganization proposal filed by Gold Ridge FPD is the subject of Commission consideration subsequent to determinations that may be made for this item. The Commission may make decisions, particularly with regard to sphere of influence amendments, that may wholly or partially enable or preclude the proposed reorganization.

Recommendation

Staff requests that the Commission conduct a public hearing regarding the report and the options for potential sphere amendments for CSA 40.

The Commission can then consider adopting the determinations of the study, or direct staff to amend them. Further, the Commission could consider adopting a sphere of influence amendment or amendments, choosing from options presented in the study.

Staff has prepared a draft resolution that would indicate approval of the study determinations, and could also reflect Commission decisions regarding a sphere of influence amendment or amendments.

Staff recommends that the Commission hold a recess during the proceedings on this matter, allowing staff to amend the draft resolution to denote what territories are being approved for sphere of influence amendments. Staff would then print and distribute copies of the amended draft resolution, to ensure clarity and transparency of the Commission's direction.

Alternate Recommendation

None

Attachments

1. Sphere of Influence Study for Portions of County Service Area 40 – Fire Services (Public Review Draft)
2. Draft Resolution