

**MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW
AND SPHERE OF INFLUENCE STUDY
FOR
GOLD RIDGE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT
MONTE RIO FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT
AND
THE CITY OF SEBASTOPOL FIRE DEPARTMENT**

**Sonoma Local Agency Formation Commission
November 2024**

PUBLIC REVIEW DRAFT

Project Name: Municipal Service Review and Sphere of Influence Study for Gold Ridge Fire Protection District, Monte Rio Fire Protection District, and City of Sebastopol Fire Department

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Subject Agencies: Gold Ridge Fire Protection District
Monte Rio Fire Protection District
City of Sebastopol (Fire Department)

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Date of Last MSR/SOI Adopted by LAFCO: Municipal Service Review of West County Fire and Emergency Services Agencies, 2019

Table of Contents

Municipal Service Review: Scope and Report Format 3

Municipal Service Review: Summary Determinations..... 7

Municipal Service Review: Gold Ridge Fire Protection District20

Municipal Service Review: Monte Rio Fire Protection District33

Municipal Service Review: City of Sebastopol Fire Department.....

Sphere of Influence Study

MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW: SCOPE AND REPORT FORMAT

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF LAFCO

The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000, as amended (“CKH Act”) (California Government Code §§56000 et seq.), is LAFCO’s governing law and outlines the requirements for preparing Municipal Service Reviews (MSRs) for periodic Sphere of Influence (SOI) updates.

MSRs and SOIs are tools created to empower LAFCO to satisfy its legislative charge of “discouraging urban sprawl, preserving open-space and prime agricultural lands, efficiently providing government services, and encouraging the orderly formation and development of local agencies based upon local conditions and circumstances” (§56301).

CKH Act Section 56301 further establishes that “one of the objectives of the commission is to make studies and to obtain and furnish information which will contribute to the logical and reasonable development of local agencies in each county and to shape the development of local agencies so as to advantageously provide for the present and future needs of each county and its communities.”

Based on that legislative charge, LAFCO serves as an arm of the State; preparing and reviewing studies and analyzing independent data to make informed, quasi-legislative decisions that guide the physical and economic development of the state (including agricultural uses) and the efficient, cost-effective, and reliable delivery of services to residents, landowners, and businesses.

While SOIs are required to be updated every five years, they are not time-bound as planning tools by the statute, but are plans meant to address the “probable physical boundaries and service area of a local agency” (§56076). SOIs therefore guide both the near-term and long-term physical and economic development of local agencies and their broader county area, and MSRs provide the near-term and long-term time-relevant data to inform LAFCO’s SOI determinations.

PURPOSE OF A MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW

As described above, MSRs are designed to equip LAFCO with relevant information and data necessary for the Commission to make informed decisions on SOIs. The CKH Act, however, gives LAFCO broad discretion in deciding how to conduct MSRs, including geographic focus, scope of study, and the identification of alternatives for improving the efficiency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and reliability of public services.

The purpose of an MSR in general is to provide a comprehensive inventory and analysis of the services provided by local municipalities, service areas, and special districts. An MSR evaluates the structure and operation of the local municipalities, service areas, and special districts and discusses possible areas for improvement and coordination.

The MSR is intended to provide information and analysis to support a sphere of influence update. A written statement of the study's determinations must be made in the following areas:

1. Growth and population projections for the affected area;
2. The location and characteristics of any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within or contiguous to the sphere of influence;
3. Present and planned capacity of public facilities, adequacy of public services, and infrastructure needs or deficiencies including needs or deficiencies related to sewers, municipal and industrial water, and structural fire protection in any disadvantaged, unincorporated communities within or contiguous to the sphere of influence;
4. Financial ability of agencies to provide services;
5. Status of, and opportunities for, shared facilities;
6. Accountability for community service needs, including governmental structure and operational efficiencies; and
7. Any other matter related to effective or efficient service delivery, as required by commission policy.

The MSR is organized according to these determination categories. Information regarding each of the above issue areas is provided in this document.

PURPOSE OF A SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

In 1972, LAFCOs were given the power to establish SOIs for all local agencies under their jurisdiction. As defined by the CKH Act, "'sphere of influence' means a plan for the probable physical boundaries and service area of a local agency, as determined by the commission" (§56076).

SOIs are designed to both proactively guide and respond to the need for the extension of infrastructure and delivery of municipal services to areas of emerging growth and development. Likewise, they are also designed to discourage urban sprawl and the premature conversion of agricultural and open space resources to urbanized uses.

The role of SOIs in guiding the State's growth and development was validated and strengthened in 2000 when the Legislature passed Assembly Bill ("AB") 2838 (Chapter 761, Statutes of 2000), which was the result of two years of labor by the Commission on Local Governance for the 21st Century, which traveled up and down the State taking testimony from a variety of local government stakeholders and assembled an extensive set of recommendations to the Legislature to strengthen the powers and tools of LAFCOs to promote logical and orderly growth and development, and the efficient, cost-effective, and reliable delivery of public services to California's residents, businesses, landowners, and visitors.

The requirement for LAFCOs to conduct MSR was established by AB 2838 as an acknowledgment of the importance of SOIs and recognition that regular periodic updates of SOIs should be conducted on a five-year basis (§56425(g)) with the benefit of better information and data through MSRs (§56430(a)).

Pursuant to Sonoma LAFCO policy, an SOI includes an area adjacent to a jurisdiction where development might be reasonably expected to occur in the next twenty years. An MSR is conducted prior to, or in conjunction with, the update of a SOI and provides the foundation for updating it.

LAFCO is required to make five written determinations when establishing, amending, or updating a SOI for any local agency that address the following (§56425(c)):

1. The present and planned land uses in the area, including agricultural and open-space lands.
2. The present and probable need for public facilities and services in the area.
3. The present capacity of public facilities and adequacy of public services that the agency provides or is authorized to provide.
4. The existence of any social or economic communities of interest in the area if the commission determines that they are relevant to the agency.
5. For an update of a SOI of a city or special district that provides public facilities or services related to sewers, municipal and industrial water, or structural fire protection, the present and probable need for those public facilities and services of any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within the existing sphere of influence (see next section).

SCOPE OF STUDY

Note Regarding Terminology

A "reorganization" of a special district encompasses any action that changes a district's boundaries, including annexing or detaching territory; dissolution of the district and assignment of its functions to a successor agency; or a consolidation of one or more districts.

For the subsequent sphere of influence study, LAFCO will propose that any eventual reorganization of subject agencies be accomplished by dissolution of a given district and annexation to another.

Technically, a "consolidation" (Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg §56030) is defined as uniting or joining two or more special districts into a single new successor district. In order to accommodate differing taxation structures (and, in particular, parcel tax rates), the preferred means to "consolidate" special districts is to conduct a reorganization that involves the aforementioned "dissolution/annexation" process.

In order to make this report clearer to the public, when the term “consolidation” is used it denotes the dissolution/annexation process rather than the formal definition denoted in state code.

ORGANIZATION OF STUDY

This report includes a discussion of issues common to the subject agencies, with an accompanying set of determinations. The balance of the report features what are effectively “stand alone” Municipal Service Reviews for each subject agency, describing agency conditions, and making accompanying determinations.

The format of the “stand-alone” MSR/SOI Studies are based on the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act, the LAFCO MSR Guidelines prepared by the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research, and adopted Sonoma LAFCO local policies and procedures.

Each agency MSR Study includes:

- A description of the subject agency;
- MSR draft determinations for public and Commission review; and
- Identification of any other issues that the Commission should consider.

AFFECTED AGENCIES

Per Government Code Section 56427, a public hearing is required to adopt, amend, or revise a sphere of influence. Notice shall be provided at least twenty-one days in advance and mailed notice shall be provided to each affected local agency or affected County, and to any interested party who has filed a written request for notice with the executive officer.

Sonoma LAFCO notified all subject agencies and interested parties to solicit comments and corrections to the study.

Per Government Code Section 56014, an affected local agency means any local agency that overlaps with any portion of the subject agency boundary or SOI (including any proposed changes to the SOI).

The affected local agencies for this study are:

- County of Sonoma (various departments and dependent districts)
- Sonoma Resource Conservation District
- Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District
- Sweetwater Springs Water District
- Monte Rio Recreation and Park District
- Marin/Sonoma Mosquito and Vector Control District
- Sonoma Community College District
- CAL FIRE

Although there are no registered interested parties for this study, draft copies of this report have been provided as a courtesy to:

- Sonoma County Fire District
- Coastal Valleys EMS Agency
- Graton Fire Protection District
- Occidental Community Services District

MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW: SUMMARY DETERMINATIONS

Growth and Population Projections

Determinations

- **Although there continues to be modest population growth in the territories served by the two fire protection districts and the City of Sebastopol, subject agencies point to an array of other factors driving increased call volumes.**
- **These factors include an aging population, a shift to year-round use of homes instead of seasonal or part-time use, an increase in the homeless population, and a dramatic increase in tourist visitors to the region.**
- **Similarly, agencies do not consider land use development a driver of call volume.**

Discussion

In previous Municipal Service Reviews for fire and emergency service agencies, Sonoma LAFCO has cited population growth estimates from the County and cities to analyze the potential impacts that a growing population will have on service provision.

Those analyses have indicated that call volume growth at fire and emergency service agencies is largely disconnected from population growth – for example, agencies typically report call volume growth rates of five percent per year or higher. The general population growth rate in the County is generally just over one percent annually.

Agency staff cite a variety of other factors that they believe drives call volume growth, including:

- An aging population, which drives an increase in medical service calls.
- An increase in full-time residency, particularly in what were once seasonally or part-time occupancy areas, in both River and coastal areas.
- An increase in the homeless population in the River area. Agency staff indicate that this population generates significant volumes of medical service calls.
- An influx of residents from suburban and urban regions of the Bay Area and elsewhere, where expectations of service are higher. Agency staff indicate that these residents are more likely to avail themselves of emergency services than longtime residents who may be more independent.
- A dramatic increase in tourism, bringing large volumes of visitors to the coast and to the River area, as well as traffic on the roadways throughout the region. This population drives rescue and medical service calls.

Other than citing tourism statistics, it is difficult to imagine sources of information that would accurately quantify the service impacts that these trends would engender.

Therefore, in the subsequent agency sections, high-impact trends will be noted alongside historical call volume growth statistics to indicate how agencies are being impacted.

Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities

Determinations

- **Fire and emergency service provision is exempted from provisions of SB 244.**

Discussion

SB 244 (Chapter 513, Statutes of 2011) made changes to the CKH Act related to disadvantaged unincorporated communities. Disadvantaged unincorporated communities, or “DUCs,” are inhabited territories (containing twelve or more registered voters) where the annual median household income is less than eighty percent of the statewide annual median household income.

The Commission has undertaken a DUC identification and mapping project, which is not yet complete.

Because the subject agencies do not provide a service that triggers the provisions of SB 244, a LAFCO determination regarding any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within or adjacent to agency spheres of influence is not required.

Capacity and Adequacy of Public Facilities and Services

Determinations

- Both Districts have stabilized funding and staffing through recent increases in revenues.
- The Gold Ridge Fire Protection District continues to make progress integrating the volunteer fire companies that served County Service Area 40 – Fire Services, that were reorganized into the district in 2023. Remaining challenges include securing appropriate ownership or lease agreements for facilities that are owned by the fire companies.
- The City of Sebastopol acknowledges that it has underfunded its fire department for many years, and although new funding from a recent sales tax measure to support fire services in the County (Measure H) will provide more financial resources, these are unlikely to be sufficient to bolster service provision in the City.
- The Monte Rio Fire Protection District has stabilized staffing availability by hiring paid firefighters for daytime, weekday shifts. However, the District expects its long-time chief to retire, and is seeking an agency partner that can provide an appropriate level of leadership, management, and administrative support.
- While a cursory review of response time statistics indicate that subject agencies are meeting National Fire Protection Association guidelines, the statistics are rudimentary and can obscure significant service level deficiencies.
- All agencies have deficient facilities, and have not identified financial resources to rectify those deficiencies.

Discussion

The capacity and adequacy of facilities and services for each agency is reported in the subsequent subject agency sections. A general, area-wide assessment is presented here.

Staffing

All agencies have managed to improve staffing levels in recent years.

- For Gold Ridge FPD, property tax revenue, special (parcel) tax revenue, and an ongoing commitment of supplemental funding from the County has allowed for more robust volunteer stipend programs and additional hiring of paid professional staff. Additionally, Measure H funding will support the District's wider operations since the majority of County Service Area 40 – Fire Services was annexed to the District in 2023.
- For Monte Rio FPD, passage of a voter-approved special (parcel) tax measure has allowed the District to hire paid professional staff for weekday daytime shifts. The District will also receive a Measure H funding allocation.
- The City of Sebastopol has run an almost 100% volunteer-based service, with only a paid chief and half-time administrative support position. The City recently added a paid fire engineer position and is considering adding a second. The

volunteer roster has seen swings in numbers in recent years. The City has also entered into a contract with Gold Ridge FPD for leadership and administrative support.

All agencies continue to rely primarily on volunteers (less so for Gold Ridge FPD), but face difficulty in staffing service calls during weekday daytime hours.

Training

In order to serve the public, firefighters undergo rigorous training so that they can appropriately respond to a wide array of emergency calls.

Career firefighters often enroll in training programs offered by educational institutions; in Sonoma County, the Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC) offers a firefighter academy program.

Volunteer firefighters do not have to complete as rigorous a training program – the SRJC also offers an academy program targeted at volunteers.

The Federal government recommends that all active firefighters undertake training for 20 hours per month. The subject agencies typically arrange training programs in house or occasionally in partnership with neighboring agencies, but all admit that volunteer firefighters rarely if ever meet the Federal training standard.

Call Volumes

REDCOM, the joint powers agency that provides dispatch services to almost all of the fire and EMS service providers in the County), logs calls for service in a variety of ways.

A “first cut” of response statistics is simply a count of the number of calls received in each agency territory and an average of the response times for calls (see following section).

Further analysis can indicate which agency responded to calls within a given area – generally most calls are responded to by the agency, but some calls are supported with mutual aid response. (Mutual aid response can be in support of a local agency that has responded to a call, or response when the subject agency is unable to respond.)

REDCOM also records the type of call received, with common categories like vehicle accidents and medical responses, and uncommon ones like structure fires or hazardous material incidents.

(One of the most common calls within the “medical” category is “lift assist”, where crews respond to residents who have fallen and need assistance.)

The following chart summarizes historical call volumes for 2018 through 2023 for the subject agencies. **Historical call volumes have not been accessible due to lack of analytical support from RedCom.**

Response Times

In each of the individual agency sections of the report, the response time statistics for the agency is listed and compared to National Fire Protection Association standards.

Although it is clearly crucially important to evaluate an emergency service agency on the basis of response times, the statistics gathered from REDCOM, the County-wide dispatch center, require clarification and understanding.

To determine response time statistics, one would look at all of the calls directed to an agency within a given timeframe, and then average the time it took for the agency to arrive on scene for each call.

The statistics listed in this report attempt to follow that methodology, but crucial factors are not reflected in the numbers.

For example, if an agency is unable to respond to a call for any reason, it is redirected to a neighboring agency that provides mutual aid backup, and the call is no longer part of the response time statistics for either agency.

Clearly, mutual aid response is the ideal course of action, but the response time statistics make no distinction regarding why an agency was unable to respond – were resources responding to other calls, or were there no resources available due to unavailability of staffing?

Similarly, the statistics simply indicate how long it took to respond to a call and not whether appropriate resources were dispatched. In particular, the subject agencies acknowledge that a subset of their calls are addressed with “2/0” staffing – just two firefighters respond rather than three, which is now considered the minimum safe staffing level.

Emergency Medical Service

The subject agencies report that three-quarters or more of service calls are related to medical needs, so provision of emergency medical services (“EMS”) is really their primary mission.

In the vernacular of fire and EMS agencies, providing emergency medical service is “turning victims into patients”, and is considered a crucial “front door” entry point for medical care.

Agencies provide emergency medical services in a variety of ways:

Basic Life Support

Most agencies provide what is termed “basic life support” service, meaning that firefighters are trained as Emergency Medical Technicians (“EMTs”), providing a level of medical care for victims of illness or injury until they can be provided full medical care by an advanced life support provider or at a hospital. Basic life support (“BLS”)

comprises an initial assessment of a victim and airway maintenance and cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

All subject agencies provide BLS service.

A key understanding of BLS responses to incidents is that the firefighter EMTs assess and stabilize a victim in preparation for transport by an agency or private provider that has ambulance capability.

Advanced Life Support/Paramedics

Provision of Advanced Life Support service, or "ALS", requires a higher degree of training, because staff can use needles, administer drugs, and make incisions in victims to stabilize them for transport to a hospital. Firefighters who are trained in ALS procedures are called paramedics.

Because of the more expansive set of medical interventions that paramedics can provide, ALS provision requires a more expansive array of equipment and supplies.

Paramedics can be based on ambulances or on engines. If an ambulance is staffed with cross-trained paramedics, the ambulances are often based on box vans rather than panel vans, to enable storage of rescue equipment and supplies. (ALS service can be provided using the typical panel van ambulance, if the paramedics are relying on firefighters to do rescue and extractions.)

Box van ambulances have an additional advantage in that they can accommodate two or even more patients.

Ambulance (Transport) Service

Gold Ridge FPD largely relies on ambulance/paramedic service from Sonoma County Fire District and from the Petaluma Fire Department.

Monte Rio FPD and the City of Sebastopol rely on ambulance/paramedic service from Sonoma County Fire District.

Facilities

The subject agencies own or lease and maintain a variety of facilities that house vehicles and equipment and in some cases provide quarters for employees.

Some of these facilities are substandard for their current use, or otherwise require significant upgrades or outright replacement. Additionally, as the agencies begin to employ career-professional staff, upgrades to facilities will be required, including installation of dormitory housing.

None of the subject agency stations are fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). While many facilities can accommodate disabled persons in their public areas (notably meeting rooms that are used for board meetings), a variety of non-compliance issues are evident. (By law, all areas of publicly-owned facilities, which for fire stations includes crew quarters, must be compliant.)

Perhaps the most troubling facility issue for the subject agencies are stations that are notably seismically deficient. These stations feature unreinforced concrete block construction. There is a significant risk that these facilities could fail catastrophically in an earthquake, potentially trapping equipment inside and endangering staff.

While some agency-operated facilities have installed ventilation systems for truck bays, there are a significant number of facilities that do not have these essential systems in place.

Only Gold Ridge FPD operates a station with firefighter accommodations. Gold Ridge has also not secured ownership or lease agreements with all of the volunteer fire companies that were annexed to the District in 2022.

Table 1 – Facility Inventory

| Agency - Facility | Suited for Staff | Upgrade Needed for Staff | Seismic Issues | Rebuild Indicated | Notes |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Gold Ridge – Twin Hills | Yes | No | No | No | |
| Gold Ridge - Hessel | Yes | No | No | No | |
| Gold Ridge -Freestone | No | No | Maybe | No | Storage only |
| Gold Ridge – Bodega | Yes | No | No | No | |
| Gold Ridge – Camp Meeker | No | No | No | No | No staffing anticipated |
| Gold Ridge – Fort Ross (4 Facilities) | No | No | No | No | Suitable for current use |
| Gold Ridge – Lakeville | No | No | No | No | Suitable for current use |
| Gold Ridge – Two Rock | No | No | No | No | |
| Gold Ridge – Valley Ford | No | Yes, if staffed as proposed | No | | |
| Gold Ridge - Willmar | Yes | No | No | No | |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----|-----------------|-----|-----|---|
| Monte Rio -Monte Rio (Headquarters) | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | |
| Monte Rio -Duncans Mills | No | Yes, if staffed | No | No | Storage only |
| Monte Rio -Jenner | No | No | Yes | Yes | Facility is suitable only for small vehicle storage |
| City of Sebastopol | No | Yes, if staffed | No | No | |

Equipment

The subject agencies utilize a variety of equipment, including “typical” engines, “wildland” engines, rescue trucks, water tenders, and other specialized equipment (e.g. boats for swift water or near-shore rescue).

“Typical” engines are suited for structure fire deployments and rescues and are designated as Type 1 or 2. “Wildland” engines are designated as Types 3 through 7, and among other features include four-wheel drive and high ride clearance.

Gold Ridge and Monte Rio deploy Type 6 engines, and Type 7s, which are based on pickup truck platforms. Type 7s are the only vehicles suited for some areas due to roadway access conditions.

The agencies generally plan to retain vehicles for a fifteen or twenty-year life cycle. Although vehicles can have quite low mileage at the end of that lifespan (sometimes under 20,000 miles), maintenance costs for hydraulic equipment becomes prohibitively expensive and parts availability becomes problematic. Although there are cases where vehicles are well past their useful life, generally speaking the agency vehicle fleets are in reasonable condition.

Subject agencies have a cursory vehicle replacement plan. These plans have short time horizons (e.g. five years), and do not attempt to evaluate net present costs or provide an annual capital retention estimate that would wholly fund future replacements.

Subject agencies do not have a dedicated capital reserve fund for equipment purchases or facility upgrades and maintenance, instead funding these categories out of unrestricted reserves.



Photograph 1: Monte Rio FPD Type 7 Engine; Suited for Poor Access Conditions

Without a rigorous capital program analysis, it is difficult to evaluate whether the agencies can sustainably fund vehicle and facility costs.

Financial Ability to Provide Service

Determinations

- **Two of the subject agencies (the City of Sebastopol and Gold Ridge FPD) are conducting multi-year financial forecasting.**
- **Gold Ridge FPD is implementing a thirty-year vehicle and equipment capital plan.**
- **While some facilities (stations) are in reasonable condition and fit for purpose, there has been little evaluation of capital funding needs for ADA compliance, seismic retrofitting, other facility upgrades (e.g. engine bay ventilation systems and/or crew quarters), or outright facility rebuilds.**

Discussion

The subject agencies are providing the level of fire and emergency services that they can afford.

There are four general categories of rising expenses:

- The need to implement stipends for volunteer firefighters, to increase stipend levels, to establish career firefighter positions, to increase salaries and benefits for career firefighters.
- Supplies, equipment maintenance, and equipment replacement costs.
- Facility maintenance and replacement costs.
- Vehicle replacement.

Sebastopol does prepare multi-year budget forecasts, and Gold Ridge has recently contracted for financial and asset management support that will consider a thirty-year window for assets such as vehicles. Monte Rio prepares budget forecasts only for the subsequent fiscal year.

Governance and Accountability

Determinations

- The two Districts appear to have well-functioning governing boards, as does the City of Sebastopol.
- None of the subject agencies report any particular difficulty in recruiting candidates to run for board or council seats, though the Districts rarely see contested elections either.
- District board members often have a fire and emergency services career background; it might better serve agency and community interests to have a wider variety of board member backgrounds and experience, and for there to be a somewhat higher turnover rate.
- Neither District ensures that board members have filed financial interest disclosures or completed state-mandated ethics training. The City of Sebastopol does manage disclosure filings.
- There are no apparent instances of recent violations of open meeting regulations, campaign regulations, or other accountability requirements for any of the subject agencies.

Discussion

Generally speaking, the subject agencies have governing boards that are meeting most standards of ethical and professional conduct and have reasonably healthy elected board member turnover.

Opportunity for Shared Services

Determinations

- **A proposed reorganization of the subject agencies, or a contractual service arrangement, is likely to generate only modest cost savings.**

Discussion

The Monte Rio FPD intends to seek a reorganization that would annex the District into Gold Ridge FPD, primarily as a means of addressing a leadership challenge issue (the impending retirement of their long-term volunteer Chief).

Although Monte Rio does not presently project long-term revenues that would support hiring a part-time or full-time chief, it is thought that leadership services from Gold Ridge FPD could be secured more cost effectively (relying on an existing leadership and administrative team from Gold Ridge).

The City of Sebastopol has also selected Gold Ridge FPD as a reorganization partner, and has already entered into a contract with Gold Ridge for leadership and administrative services.

MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW: GOLD RIDGE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT**SUMMARY DETERMINATIONS**

- **Gold Ridge FPD, which has one of the most diverse set of position classes of any county fire protection and emergency medical service agency, recognizes that pressure will build to support more paid career firefighters, which will strain financial resources.**
- **Gold Ridge FPD is continuing activities to integrate the eight active volunteer fire districts that it annexed as part of the County Service Area 40 – Fire Services reorganization in 2023. Challenges include securing rights to facilities from the volunteer company associations, which typically own the fire stations.**

The District primarily relies on ambulance/paramedic coverage provided by the contracted provider for the “Exclusive Operating Area” in Sonoma County (Sonoma County Fire District), and from the City of Petaluma’s Fire Department.

OVERVIEW

The Gold Ridge Fire Protection District (“Gold Ridge” or “Gold Ridge FPD”) serves 226 square miles of territory including territory that was recently annexed to the District that were part of County Service Area 40 – Fire Services and served by volunteer fire companies.

The District territory now spans the former Lakeville VFC territory in the far south of the County, loops around the areas west of Petaluma, and extends west of Sebastopol and into the west county area, including an island of territory that was once served by the Ft. Ross VFC.

The District was formed as a consolidation of the Hessel and Twin Hills Fire Protection Districts in 1993.

The Agency serves a population of about 26,000 residents within district boundaries.

Territory served by the District is primarily rural residential and agricultural, with very limited commercial activity. The District does include sections of Highways 1, 116 and 12, as well as portions of many rural routes including Lakeville Highway.

The District is staffed with 24 career professionals augmented by a cadre of volunteers. The District is funded with property tax revenue, through a special (parcel) tax, and through an ongoing allocation of supplemental funding from the County. The District will also receive funding from Measure H, which voters approved in March 2024.

SIGNIFICANT MSR DETERMINATIONS

The MSR determinations reviewed below are potentially significant, as indicated by “yes” or “maybe” answers to the key policy questions in each checklist and corresponding discussion.

DETERMINATION 1. GROWTH AND POPULATION

| Growth and population projections for the affected area. | Evaluation |
|--|------------|
| a. Is the agency's territory or surrounding area expected to experience any significant population change or development over the next 5-10 years? | No |
| b. Will population changes have an impact on the subject agency's service needs and demands? | No |
| c. Will projected growth require a change to agency service boundaries? | No |

Determinations

- **The communities served by Gold Ridge will continue to experience minimal development and population growth due to land use policies enacted by the County of Sonoma and managed by the Permit Sonoma.**

Discussion

The required level of staffing and other resources for a fire and emergency services agency is linked to three primary categories:

- The population of residents and workers within the territory
- Transient populations, included travelers through the territory (on roads or other transit systems) and visitors (to event centers and recreational areas)
- The amount and type of development in the territory (i.e., commercial, industrial, residential, and the composition of each). This factor is also informed by the age, type of construction, and building standards of the development.

Resident Population

The areas served by the District have approximately 26,000 residents. District staff believe that there has been a trend of increasing year-round residency (as opposed to seasonal or vacation home use) in recent years, but that there will not be substantial development and attendant resident population growth in the future.

Recent County land use planning regulation changes will likely permit more accessory dwelling units, which may lead to a modest increase in resident population.

Overall Effect

Gold Ridge serves rural residential communities. Growth in those unincorporated areas is low and therefore will not drive a marked need for increased service provision.

Transient Population

Fire and emergency services agencies respond to “transient” populations as well as resident populations within their service areas. For Gold Ridge, transient population service needs are primarily driven by visitors transiting through the area on Highways 116 and Bodega Highway.

Development

The County of Sonoma has jurisdiction over land use and planning for the areas served by the District. The County General Plan does not anticipate significant development in the areas served by the District.

DETERMINATION 2. CAPACITY AND ADEQUACY OF PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

| Present and planned capacity of public facilities, adequacy of public services, and infrastructure needs or deficiencies. | Evaluation |
|--|------------|
| a. Are there any deficiencies in agency capacity to meet service needs of existing development within its existing territory? | No |
| b. Are there any issues regarding the agency's capacity to meet the service demand of reasonably foreseeable future growth? | Maybe |
| c. Are there any concerns regarding public services provided by the agency being considered adequate? | Maybe |
| d. Are there any significant infrastructure needs or deficiencies to be addressed? | Yes |
| e. Are there changes in state regulations on the horizon that will require significant facility and/or infrastructure upgrades? | Yes |
| f. Are there any service needs or deficiencies for disadvantaged unincorporated communities related structural fire protection within or contiguous to the agency's sphere of influence? | No |

Determinations

- **The Gold Ridge Fire Protection District has experienced call volume growth that exceeds population and development growth. The District has been able to meet response time standards.**
- **Gold Ridge effectively provides fire and emergency services within its existing service area and, with additional funding, can be expected to be able to serve population and development growth for the foreseeable future.**

Discussion

Service Volumes

Gold Ridge FPD provides fire and emergency services within its boundaries, and provides mutual aid support to neighboring agencies (notably the City of Sebastopol). Table 2 indicates the historical frequency of calls generated within Gold Ridge's territory.

Table 2: Historical Call for Service Volumes – Gold Ridge Fire Protection District

| | 2018 | 2019 | 2020* | 2021* | 2022* |
|---------------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| Calls Generated Within District | 960 | | | | |

* Represents partial year of expanded territory through North Bay Fire, Inc, contract (2020), and full year of contract (2021 and 2022).

Response Standards

Gold Ridge serves territories with **rural** demands and currently operates crews with “2/0” staffing (two-member crews are dispatched to all calls).

Table 3: Response Time Statistics – Gold Ridge FPD

| Year | Average Response Times (Dispatched to “Arrived On Scene”) |
|-------|--|
| 2019 | 7 minutes |
| 2020* | 6 minutes 45 seconds |
| 2021* | 6 minutes 40 seconds |
| 2022* | 6 minutes 31 seconds |
| 2023* | 6 minutes 18 seconds |

* Notes as for Table 2 above.

These statistics indicate response times from all units (including units from other agencies), and indicate that Gold Ridge meets NFPA response time standards for rural areas for calls that are generated from within the District’s territory.

Facilities

A critical factor in providing effective and efficient fire service is the location and quality of equipment.

Determining the location for fire station facilities should take in a number of considerations that include an analysis of service area demographics, roadway data, and occupancy types, population, emergency response data, workforce and response trend analysis.

Gold Ridge operates a dozen facilities, including the District's original two staffed stations in Hessel and Twin Hills, and stations and storage facilities added to the District through the 2023 reorganization with County Service Agency 40 – Fire Services.

In the reorganization approved in 2023, LAFCO was not able to direct that assets of the volunteer fire companies that provided service within the CSA 40 territory must be transferred to Gold Ridge (volunteer fire companies are not public agencies, so LAFCO had no authority to do so).

The District indicated that they would seek appropriate outright transfers or leases of needed facilities from the volunteer companies. (The VFCs typically had a non-profit status.) To date, Gold Ridge has not secured ownership or lease agreements for all of the facilities needed to assume the operational responsibilities in the former CSA territories.

Staffing

Gold Ridge has a diverse staffing model, including full-time and part-time career staff, stipend-paid volunteers, and an explorer unit.

Gold Ridge reports that it does have challenges recruiting and maintaining its career professional workforce. Career staff cannot afford to live within the area, and many staff members have pursued their careers at other agencies outside of the County after training and working at Gold Ridge.

The District's pool of volunteers is drawn from a local population that is aging and from a workforce that works out of the area.

DETERMINATION 3. FINANCIAL CONDITION

| Financial ability of agencies to provide services | Evaluation |
|---|------------|
| a. Does the organization routinely engage in budgeting practices that may indicate poor financial management, such as overspending its revenues, failing to commission independent audits, or adopting its budget late? | No |
| b. Is the organization lacking adequate reserve to protect against unexpected events or upcoming significant costs? | No |
| c. Is the organization's rate/fee schedule insufficient to fund an adequate level of service, and/or is the fee inconsistent with the schedules of similar service organizations? | No |
| d. Is the organization unable to fund necessary infrastructure maintenance, replacement and/or any needed expansion? | Maybe |
| e. Is the organization lacking financial policies that ensure its continued financial accountability and stability? | No |
| f. Is the organization's debt at an unmanageable level? | No |

Determinations

- **The District has been meeting its expenses without difficulty and has been able to provide funding for infrastructure needs (primarily vehicle and equipment replacement).**
- **Gold Ridge has secured additional funding by extending a special (parcel) tax over newly-annexed CSA 40 territories, by receiving property tax allocations from those territories, through receipt of ongoing direct financial support from the County, and through Measure H sales tax allocations.**
- **Financial management of Gold Ridge is sound and is independently audited on an annual basis.**

Discussion

Budgeting

The District staff prepares annual budgets in the spring for consideration and approval by the Board of Directors prior to the upcoming fiscal year (July through June). The staff seeks guidance from the Board, and District residents are able to comment, in successive board meetings prior to budget approval.

Finances

Gold Ridge career staff are enrolled in the CalPERS retirement system. The District is making regular annual contributions to the plan and is also paying an amortized amount to pay off an unfunded account balance.

Table 4 shows historical and projected budgets for Gold Ridge FPD.

Table 4: Gold Ridge FPD Budget Review

| Fiscal Year | Revenue | Salaries and Benefits | Operating and Capital Expenditures and Depreciation | Surplus / (Deficit) | Reserves /Fund Balance |
|--------------------|----------------|------------------------------|--|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 19-20 | \$3,722,919 | \$2,564,274 | \$557,460 | \$601,185 | \$3,597,739 |
| 20-21 | \$6,026,875 | \$3,497,740 | \$740,255 | \$1,788,880 | \$4,198,924 |
| 21-22 | \$5,503,543 | \$4,196,231 | \$902,288 | \$404,024 | \$5,577,544 |
| 22-23 | \$5,717,632 | \$4,474,141 | \$1,158,615 | \$84,876 | \$5,662,420 |
| 23-24* | \$9,294,439 | \$6,192,603 | \$3,101,836 | | |

** Reflects budgeted or projected.*

Gold Ridge faces several challenges related to sustainable funding:

- The District will likely have to continue a transition to more career professional staffing.
- The District has ongoing vehicle and equipment replacement needs.

Reserves

Gold Ridge maintains cash reserves and manages them per a board-adopted Financial Reserve Policy.

Current reserves amount to approximately \$550,000, and are intended for general operating expenditures. The District has a policy of maintaining at least two months of operating expenses in reserve.

The District does not allocate reserves for specific cost categories.

Financial Policies

Gold Ridge has adopted financial policies to help ensure the proper fiscal management, including:

- Purchasing
- Financial Reserve
- Capital Assets

The District retains an independent contracted auditor to conduct financial reviews annually.

FINANCIAL OPTIONS

Revenue Source Options

The District was formed in 1993 through the consolidation of two pre-Proposition 13 agencies (Twin Hills and Hessel FPDs). Property tax allocations for those territories average (as shown in Appendix 4) a low 4.89%, compared to the average for fire districts in the County of 7.89%.

The assumption of CSA 40 – Fire Services territories in 2023 added additional property tax revenue to the District, sometimes at higher rates than in the former District territory.

Gold Ridge has three voter-approved special (parcel) tax measures in place, and will now levy these taxes over the CSA 40 territories that were added to the District in 2023., The typical single family home is currently assessed \$270 in special taxes annually.

The District is slated to receive significant new revenue from Measure H, a sales tax increase to support fire and emergency service agencies that passed in March 2024. Projected annual revenues from Measure H are almost \$6,000,000.

Resources:

- Audited financial statements, approved current budgets, and budget projections for the Agency are on file with LAFCO.

DETERMINATION 4. SHARED SERVICES AND FACILITIES

| Status of, and opportunities for, shared facilities. | Evaluation |
|---|---|
| a. Are subject agencies currently sharing services or facilities with other organizations? If so, describe the status of such efforts. | Yes. Gold Ridge is providing leadership and administrative services to the City of Sebastopol under contract. |
| b. Are there any opportunities for the organizations to share services or facilities with neighboring or overlapping organizations that are not currently being utilized? | Yes |
| c. Are there any governance options that may produce economies of scale and/or improve buying power in order to reduce costs? | Yes |
| d. Are there governance options to allow appropriate facilities and/or resources to be shared, or making excess capacity available to others, and avoid construction of extra or unnecessary infrastructure or eliminate duplicative resources? | No |

Determinations

- **Although not analyzed in this report, consolidation with Monte Rio FPD and/or Sebastopol Fire may reduce fleet costs by eliminating duplicative equipment.**

Discussion

Gold Ridge manages operations cooperatively with neighboring agencies, notably through mutual response agreements. They also participate in multi-agency management systems, such as the Redwood Empire Dispatch Communications Authority (REDCOM), which manages emergency services dispatch for the majority of emergency services agencies in the County.

Gold Ridge FPD is insured through the Fire Agencies Insurance Risk Authority (FAIRA), and is a member of the Fire District Association of California/Fire Agency Self-Insurance System (FDAC/FASIS) for workers' compensation coverage.

A summary of best practices for fire district coordination with other agencies for the District is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Coordination Best Practices – Gold Ridge Fire Protection District

| Best Practice | Observation and findings |
|---|--------------------------|
| The District participates in the Redwood Empire Dispatch Communications Authority (REDCOM) | Yes |
| The District has mutual aid agreements with other agencies. | Yes |
| The District contracts for accounting and audit services with other districts or the County. | No |
| The District participates with other districts or the County for equipment purchasing or leasing. | No |
| The District participates in joint insurance programs. | Yes |
| The District has an "Amador Contract" with CalFire. | No |
| The District participates in joint training with other districts or the County. | No (pending) |
| The District participates with another district or the County for joint administration services. | Yes |
| The District shares facilities with other districts. | No |
| The District shares a fire chief or other staff with another District. | Yes |
| The District participates in joint recruitment with other districts. | No |

*REGIONAL AGENCY CONSOLIDATION**POTENTIAL COST SAVINGS FROM CONSOLIDATION*

Should the District reorganize with Monte Rio FPD and/or Sebastopol Fire, modest cost savings might accrue from sharing of leadership and administration personnel and potentially from vehicle fleet reduction.

While the District does not have redundant vehicles or other equipment, there may be a modest opportunity to reduce inventories.

DETERMINATION 5. ACCOUNTABILITY, STRUCTURE AND EFFICIENCIES

| Accountability for community service needs, including governmental structure and operational efficiencies | Evaluation |
|--|------------|
| a. Are there any issues with meetings being accessible and well publicized? Any failures to comply with disclosure laws and the Brown Act? | No |
| b. Are there any issues with filling board vacancies and maintaining board members? | No |
| c. Are there any issues with staff turnover or operational efficiencies? | Yes |
| d. Is there a lack of regular audits, adopted budgets and public access to these documents? | No |
| e. Are there any recommended changes to the organization's governance structure that will increase accountability and efficiency? | No |
| f. Are there any governance restructure options to enhance services and/or eliminate deficiencies or redundancies? | Maybe |

Determinations

- **The District is governed in a manner that not only complies with all statutes and laws but is fully open to community input. Board directors have been elected and/or appointed appropriately.**
- **Gold Ridge undertakes annual independent financial and business practice audits and complies with financial regulations and recommended practices.**
- **The District is encouraged to continue discussions regarding opportunities for coordinating service provision to produce efficiencies and cost savings, up to and including potential consolidation of operations in the future.**

Discussion

The District complies with all public noticing requirements for board meetings. There have been no noted Brown Act violations by the district directors.

The District makes files available to the general public when requested, and pertinent files are available on the district web site.

Board members file financial interest statements and comply with State training requirements for public officials.

Gold Ridge undergoes annual financial audits and change auditors regularly.

MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW: MONTE RIO FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

SUMMARY DETERMINATIONS

- **The Monte Rio Fire Protection District manages to provide a remarkable level of fire and emergency service given limited resources, a hugely challenging service area, and what has been an all-volunteer operation. However, the District acknowledges that service provision is “nominal”, often with 2/0 responses rather than the optimal 3/0.**
- **The District recently secured approval of a parcel tax, which is used to support career staffing during workhours on weekdays. The District will also receive an allocation of Measure H funding.**
- **The District’s facilities need a comprehensive review, which would include the development of a plan to build a new facility in Monte Rio, and to evaluate the viability and use of the Duncans Mills and Jenner facilities.**
- **The District relies on the Sonoma County Fire District for EMS/ambulance support, but does not contribute financially for that service.**

OVERVIEW

The Monte Rio Fire Protection District (“Monte Rio” or “Monte Rio FPD”) serves the unincorporated communities of Jenner, Duncans Mills, and Monte Rio. Formed in 1920, it is the oldest Fire Protection District in Sonoma County.

The District is bounded by the Pacific Ocean on the west; by Timber Cove FPD, Gold Ridge FPD, Cazadero CSD, and Sonoma County Fire District to the north; by Sonoma County Fire District to the east; and by Occidental CSD, Gold Ridge FPD, and Sonoma County Fire to the south. The territory covers 45 square miles.

The terrain within the district territory includes coastal beaches and bluffs, the lower swath of the Russian River, open wildland, and redwood forests. Most development is clustered on either side of the Russian River and along creek tributaries. The District also serves a number of seasonal camps, notably the Bohemian Grove.

Some areas of the District, such as “The Terraces” immediately west and above the District headquarters, are heavily wooded and have very poor access, with very narrow, constricted roadways. The District has invested in Type 7 vehicles (based on pickup truck chassis) that are short enough to access these areas.

Monte Rio serves full and part-time residents within district boundaries, though the trend has been conversion of seasonal home use to year-round use. The district does experience a seasonal uptick in population in the summer, particularly due to camp use.

Monte Rio has transitioned from an all-volunteer agency, with new career firefighters serving weekday day time hours.

SIGNIFICANT MSR DETERMINATIONS

The MSR determinations reviewed below are potentially significant, as indicated by “yes” or “maybe” answers to the key policy questions in the checklist and corresponding discussion.

DETERMINATION 1. GROWTH AND POPULATION

| Growth and population projections for the affected area. | Evaluation |
|--|------------|
| a. Is the agency's territory or surrounding area expected to experience any significant population change or development over the next 5-10 years? | No |
| b. Will population changes have an impact on the subject agency's service needs and demands? | No |
| c. Will projected growth require a change to agency service boundaries? | No |

Determinations

- **The regions served by Monte Rio FPD will continue to experience minimal development and population growth due to land use policies enacted by the County of Sonoma and managed by the County's Permit and Resource Management Department (Permit Sonoma), and by restrictions on coastal-area development imposed by the California Coastal Commission.**

Discussion

The required level of staffing and other resources for a fire and emergency services agency is linked to three primary categories:

- The population of residents and workers within the territory
- Transient populations, included travelers through the territory (on roads or other transit systems) and visitors (to event centers and recreational areas)
- The amount and type of development in the territory (i.e., commercial, industrial, residential, and the composition of each). This factor is also informed by the age, type of construction, and building standards of the development.

Resident Population

The District has a population of about 2500 residents, with a significant visitor population during summer months.

Transient Population

Fire and emergency services agencies respond to “transient” populations as well as resident populations within their service areas. For Monte Rio, transient population service needs are driven by Russian River-area tourism (including use of seasonal camps such as the Bohemian Grove) and related vehicle traffic through the corridor.

Development

The County of Sonoma and the Coastal Commission have jurisdiction over land use and planning for the areas served by the District. The County General Plan does not anticipate significant development in the areas served by the District, and the Coastal Commission has essentially enacted the equivalent of a moratorium on coastal-area development. (The entirety of Jenner, along with Sonoma Coast State Beach, is under Coastal Commission jurisdiction.)

DETERMINATION 2. CAPACITY AND ADEQUACY OF PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

| Present and planned capacity of public facilities, adequacy of public services, and infrastructure needs or deficiencies. | Evaluation |
|--|------------|
| a. Are there any deficiencies in agency capacity to meet service needs of existing development within its existing territory? | Yes |
| b. Are there any issues regarding the agency's capacity to meet the service demand of reasonably foreseeable future growth? | Maybe |
| c. Are there any concerns regarding public services provided by the agency being considered adequate? | Yes |
| d. Are there any significant infrastructure needs or deficiencies to be addressed? | Yes |
| e. Are there changes in state regulations on the horizon that will require significant facility and/or infrastructure upgrades? | No |
| f. Are there any service needs or deficiencies for disadvantaged unincorporated communities related structural fire protection within or contiguous to the agency's sphere of influence? | No |

Determinations

- **The District has experienced call volume growth that exceeds population and development growth. The District has been able to meet response time standards.**
- **Although call response times for the District are within standards, Monte Rio is providing a level of service below what is recommended by NFPA standards, often responding to calls with only two firefighter/medics.**

Discussion

Service Volumes

Monte Rio provides fire and emergency services within its boundaries, and provides mutual aid support to neighboring agencies.

The District primarily responds to medical response calls, but is also occasionally called on for cliff rescues and flood response.

Table 6 indicates the historical frequency of calls generated within Monte Rio's territory.

Table 6: Historical Call for Service Volumes – Monte Rio Fire Protection District

| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Calls Generated Within District | 496 | | | | |

Response Standards

Monte Rio serves a territory with **rural** demands and strives to operate crews with “2/0” staffing (two-member crews are dispatched to all calls).

Table 7: Response Time Statistics – Monte Rio Fire Protection District

| Year | Average Response Times (Dispatched to “Arrived On Scene”) |
|------|--|
| 2019 | 22 minutes 10 seconds |
| 2020 | 23 minutes 20 seconds |
| 2021 | 24 minutes 8 seconds |
| 2022 | 22 minutes 24 seconds |
| 2023 | 21 minutes |

These statistics indicate that Monte Rio exceeds NFPA response time standards for rural areas for calls that are generated from within the District's territory. It should be noted that other agencies providing mutual aid coverage, in particular Sonoma County Fire District's ambulance/advanced life support coverage from Guerneville or Bodega Bay, often arrive on scene before Monte Rio crews.

Facilities

A critical factor in providing effective and efficient fire service is the location and quality of equipment.

Determining the location for fire station facilities should take in a number of considerations and include an analysis of service area demographics, roadway data, and occupancy types, population, emergency response data, workforce and response trend analysis.

Monte Rio FPD has four facilities: a headquarters station in Monte Rio; an auxiliary station across the street from the headquarters facility, which is used solely for vehicle storage; a two-bay station with capacity for four vehicles in Duncans Mills; and a two-bay station in Jenner suitable for storage of small vehicles.

The headquarters station, which was built in 1954, has limited capability for full-time staffing, and the vehicle bays are not sufficiently high. The station has not been evaluated for seismic stability, and is not compliant with ADA requirements. The auxiliary building across the street has a deteriorating foundation and is unsuitable for use for anything other than vehicle and equipment storage.

The Duncans Mills station has limited capability for staffing (the station does not have water service). The Jenner facility is of little operational use.

The District has a vision of trading land with the County to enable the construction of a new headquarters/fire station adjacent to the existing facility, but there is no planning effort to determine if this is feasible, and the District does not have any financial resources for a station construction project.

Staffing

Monte Rio FPD is a volunteer department, transitioning to a “combined” department, with both career and volunteer firefighter staffing. The volunteer roster has slowly declined, with only half of the dozen volunteers on the roster taking active duty.

The District has added one paid and one stipend-paid position for weekday day time hours.

The District is facing an impending retirement of its long-serving chief, and is seeking an agency partner to secure leadership, management, and administrative service capacity.

DETERMINATION 3. FINANCIAL CONDITION

| Financial ability of agencies to provide services | Evaluation |
|---|------------|
| a. Does the organization routinely engage in budgeting practices that may indicate poor financial management, such as overspending its revenues, failing to commission independent audits, or adopting its budget late? | No |
| b. Is the organization lacking adequate reserve to protect against unexpected events or upcoming significant costs? | Yes |
| c. Is the organization's rate/fee schedule insufficient to fund an adequate level of service, and/or is the fee inconsistent with the schedules of similar service organizations? | Maybe |
| d. Is the organization unable to fund necessary infrastructure maintenance, replacement and/or any needed expansion? | Yes |
| e. Is the organization lacking financial policies that ensure its continued financial accountability and stability? | No |
| f. Is the organization's debt at an unmanageable level? | No |

Determinations

- **The District has been meeting its expenses without difficulty and has been able to provide funding for some infrastructure needs (primarily vehicle and equipment replacement). The District does not have funding for facility replacement.**

Discussion

Budgeting

The District staff prepares annual budgets in the spring for consideration and approval by the Board of Directors prior to the upcoming fiscal year (July through June). The staff seeks guidance from the Board, and District residents are able to comment, in successive board meetings prior to budget approval.

Finances

Table 8 shows historical and projected budgets for the Monte Rio Fire Protection District.

Table 8: Monte Rio FPD Budget Review

| Fiscal Year | Revenue | Salaries and Benefits | Operating and Capital Expenditures and Depreciation | Surplus / (Deficit) | Reserves /Fund Balance |
|--------------------|----------------|------------------------------|--|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 19-20 | \$1,100,180 | \$184,817 | \$347,392 | \$567,971 | \$1,937,858 |
| 20-21 | \$1,357,897 | \$565,529 | \$449,770 | \$342,598 | \$2,453,959 |
| 21-22 | \$1,853,129 | \$855,341 | \$545,392 | \$425,396 | \$3,248,953 |
| 22-23 | \$1,745,805 | \$751,132 | \$570,877 | \$423,796 | \$3,672,749 |
| 23-24* | \$1,165,001 | \$657,001 | \$508,000 | | |

* Reflects budgeted or projected.

Monte Rio FPD faces several challenges related to sustainable funding:

- Costs are increasing at a rate higher than revenues.
- The District has ongoing vehicle and equipment replacement needs.
- While a facility "master plan" is clearly needed, the District has no funding to improve or reconstruct facilities.

Reserves

Monte Rio FPD maintains cash reserves and manages them per a board-adopted Financial Reserve Policy.

Current reserves amount to approximately \$3,600,000 and are intended for general operating expenditures.

The District does not have a capital plan for vehicles and equipment, or a facility upgrade/reconstruction plan.

Financial Policies

Monte Rio FPD has adopted financial policies to help ensure the proper fiscal management, including:

- Purchasing
- Financial Reserve
- Capital Assets

The District retains an independent contracted auditor to conduct financial reviews annually.

FINANCIAL OPTIONS

Revenue Source Options

The District was formed in 1920, well before the passage of Proposition 13. Property tax allocations for the Monte Rio FPD were determined at formation, and, as shown in Appendix 4, the District has a healthy property tax allocation, of 12.56%, compared to the average for fire districts in the County of 7.89%.

Monte Rio FPD sought and received voter approval for a parcel tax that features rate classes based on “units of risk” – different rates are charged depending on a number of factors including building type and size. The parcel tax does feature an escalation factor for cost of living adjustments.

Monte Rio's parcel tax, at \$200 for a single-family residence, raises approximately \$497,000 annually.

The District will see additional funding from Measure H, projected at \$1,458,000 per year.

Potential Cost Savings from Consolidation

It is generally assumed that district consolidations might generate increased efficiencies that would result in cost savings. For consolidations of fire and emergency service agencies, these efficiencies could include elimination of redundant staffing, streamlined administrative support, vehicle fleet reductions, and reduced facilities costs (if there are facility redundancies).

For Monte Rio, the most pressing need is to secure career leadership support, given that their longtime volunteer chief is likely to retire imminently.

The District may have modest opportunities for reducing costs or otherwise securing funding for facility remodel/replacement. The District houses a small fleet of vintage fire engines in its facilities; if reduced in number, there might be an opportunity to close the auxiliary station in Monte Rio, or otherwise put the property “in play” for a potential land swap with the County as part of a headquarters reconstruction. Alternatively, if the existing headquarters station can be remodeled, sale of the auxiliary station site could provide some funding for the project.

Resources:

- Audited financial statements, approved current budgets, and budget projections for the District are on file with LAFCO.

DETERMINATION 4. SHARED SERVICES AND FACILITIES

| Status of, and opportunities for, shared facilities. | Evaluation |
|---|------------|
| a. Are subject agencies currently sharing services or facilities with other organizations? If so, describe the status of such efforts. | Yes |
| b. Are there any opportunities for the organizations to share services or facilities with neighboring or overlapping organizations that are not currently being utilized? | No |
| c. Are there any governance options that may produce economies of scale and/or improve buying power in order to reduce costs? | Yes |
| d. Are there governance options to allow appropriate facilities and/or resources to be shared, or making excess capacity available to others, and avoid construction of extra or unnecessary infrastructure or eliminate duplicative resources? | Yes |

Determinations

- **Were Monte Rio FPD to reorganize with Gold Ridge FPD there would likely only be modest reductions in total administrative and leadership costs.**
- **Although not analyzed in this report, a consolidated agency might realize modest reductions in fleet costs by eliminating duplicative equipment.**

Discussion

Monte Rio manages operations cooperatively with neighboring agencies, notably through mutual response agreements, and a contractual service arrangement to provide support to Cazadero Community Service District. They also participate in multi-agency management systems, such as the Redwood Empire Dispatch Communications Authority (REDCOM), which manages emergency services dispatch for the majority of emergency services agencies in the County.

The Agency is insured through the Fire Agencies Insurance Risk Authority (FAIRA).

A summary of best practices for fire district coordination with other agencies for the District is presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Coordination Best Practices – Monte Rio Fire Protection District

| Best Practice | Observation and findings |
|---|--|
| The District participates in the Redwood Empire Dispatch Communications Authority (REDCOM) | Yes |
| The District has mutual aid agreements with other agencies. | Yes |
| The District contracts for accounting and audit services with other districts or the County. | No |
| The District participates with other districts or the County for equipment purchasing or leasing. | No |
| The District participates in joint insurance programs. | Yes |
| The District has an "Amador Contract" with CalFire. | No |
| The District participates in joint training with other districts or the County. | Joint training opportunities in the Russian River area have been sporadic. |
| The District participates with another district or the County for joint administration services. | Yes, with Russian River FPD |
| The District shares facilities with other districts. | No |
| The District shares a fire chief or other staff with another District. | No |
| The District participates in joint recruitment with other districts. | No |

POTENTIAL COST SAVINGS FROM CONSOLIDATION

Should the District join a regional consolidation in the future, modest cost savings might accrue from sharing of leadership and administration personnel and potentially from vehicle fleet reduction.

While the District does not have any active redundant vehicles or other equipment, there may be a modest opportunity to reduce inventories, particularly of specialized vehicles and equipment, if it joined a regional consolidation program. The District might also consider reducing its inventory of vintage equipment, particularly as part of a potential facility master planning process.

DETERMINATION 5. ACCOUNTABILITY, STRUCTURE AND EFFICIENCIES

| Accountability for community service needs, including governmental structure and operational efficiencies | Evaluation |
|---|------------|
| a. Are there any issues with meetings being accessible and well publicized? Any failures to comply with disclosure laws and the Brown Act? | No |
| b. Are there any issues with filling board vacancies and maintaining board members? | No |
| c. Are there any issues with staff turnover or operational efficiencies? | Yes |
| d. Is there a lack of regular audits, adopted budgets and public access to these documents? | No |
| e. Are there any recommended changes to the organization's governance structure that will increase accountability and efficiency? | No |
| f. Are there any governance restructure options to enhance services and/or eliminate deficiencies or redundancies? | Maybe |
| g. Are there any opportunities to eliminate overlapping boundaries that confuse the public, cause service inefficiencies, unnecessarily increase the cost of infrastructure, exacerbate rate issues and/or undermine good planning practices? | Yes |

Determinations

- **The District is governed in a manner that not only complies with all statutes and laws but is fully open to community input. Board directors have been elected and/or appointed appropriately.**
- **Monte Rio FPD undertakes annual independent financial and business practice audits and is in compliance with financial regulations and recommended practices.**
- **The District is encouraged to continue discussions regarding opportunities for coordinating service provision to produce efficiencies and cost savings, up to and including potential consolidation of operations in the future.**

Discussion

The District is in compliance with all public noticing requirements for board meetings. There have been no noted Brown Act violations by the district directors. Board members file financial interest statements and comply with State training requirements for public officials.

The District board has experienced some turnover recently, and has had some apparent difficulty in attracting candidates for office.

The District makes files available to the general public when requested, and pertinent files are available on the district web site.

Monte Rio FPD undergoes annual financial audits and change auditors regularly.

District staff and board members have supported discussions regarding operational and governance options in Region 5, up to and including a West County-wide reorganization and consolidation of fire and emergency service agencies.

MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW: CITY OF SEBASTOPOL (FIRE AND EMS)**SUMMARY DETERMINATIONS**

- The City of Sebastopol is often unable to provide appropriately-staffed responses to service calls, particularly during weekday daytime hours when volunteer availability is limited.
- The City has addressed staffing shortfalls within its fire department by adding two paid professional positions and increasing stipend payments to volunteers.
- Sebastopol should consider ceding its fire and emergency services responsibilities to a regionally-consolidated agency, which would be better positioned to provide coverage to City residents.

OVERVIEW

The City of Sebastopol operates a volunteer fire and emergency services department utilizing both paid staff for leadership and administrative activities, and volunteers for firefighter/EMT work. Although the Department has a roster of over thirty volunteers, the department is often unable to provide "2/0" staffing on calls, particularly during weekday daytime hours.

The Department relies heavily on neighboring agencies (primarily Gold Ridge and Graton Fire Protection Districts) to provide mutual aid coverage but is rarely able to reciprocate due to staffing availability.

The 7,666 residents of the City generated 1,071 service calls in 20XX – a rate that has been increasing even though population has plateaued.

The City funds the department from general fund revenue, which is primarily raised through property and sales taxes.

SIGNIFICANT MSR DETERMINATIONS

The MSR determinations reviewed below are potentially significant, as indicated by "yes" or "maybe" answers to the key policy questions in the checklist and corresponding discussion.

DETERMINATION 1. GROWTH AND POPULATION

| Growth and population projections for the affected area. | Evaluation |
|--|------------|
| a. Is the agency's territory or surrounding area expected to experience any significant population change or development over the next 5-10 years? | No |
| b. Will population changes have an impact on the subject agency's service needs and demands? | No |
| c. Will projected growth require a change to agency service boundaries? | No |

Determinations

- **The City does not project significant growth in population or development that would result in the need for increased fire and emergency service capabilities, but is experiencing the same trends as other fire and emergency response agencies that is driving an increase in service calls.**

Discussion

The required level of staffing and other resources for a fire and emergency services agency is linked to three primary categories:

- The population of residents and workers within the territory
- Transient populations, included travelers through the territory (on roads or other transit systems) and visitors (to event centers and recreational areas)
- The amount and type of development in the territory (i.e., commercial, industrial, residential, and the composition of each). This factor is also informed by the age, type of construction, and building standards of the development.

Resident Population

The City does not anticipate significant population growth. The City's current population of 7,666 is only a few residents higher than in 2000, and population actually declined slightly during the interim period.

Transient Population

Fire and emergency services agencies respond to "transient" populations as well as resident populations within their service areas. Although many visitors to West County amenities may travel through the City, or use lodging and dining facilities within City boundaries, transient population levels are likely "moderate" compared to other areas of the County.

Development

The City does anticipate some moderate development in the future, but land use policies and regulations, including a voter-approved Urban Growth Boundary, preclude major growth.

DETERMINATION 2. CAPACITY AND ADEQUACY OF PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

| Present and planned capacity of public facilities, adequacy of public services, and infrastructure needs or deficiencies. | Evaluation |
|--|------------|
| a. Are there any deficiencies in agency capacity to meet service needs of existing development within its existing territory? | Yes |
| b. Are there any issues regarding the agency's capacity to meet the service demand of reasonably foreseeable future growth? | Yes |
| c. Are there any concerns regarding public services provided by the agency being considered adequate? | Yes |
| d. Are there any significant infrastructure needs or deficiencies to be addressed? | Maybe |
| e. Are there changes in state regulations on the horizon that will require significant facility and/or infrastructure upgrades? | No |
| f. Are there any service needs or deficiencies for disadvantaged unincorporated communities related structural fire protection within or contiguous to the agency's sphere of influence? | No |

Determinations

- **The City has experienced call volume growth that exceeds what would be expected based on population and development growth. The City has been able to meet response time standards, though has experienced a degradation in response times during weekday daylight hours.**
- **Sebastopol struggles to effectively provide fire and emergency services at an appropriate level ("2/0" staffing), and is largely reliant on mutual aid partners for support. The City is rarely able to provide mutual aid support to neighboring agencies.**

Discussion

Service Volumes

Sebastopol provides fire and emergency services within its boundaries, and, rarely, provides mutual aid support to neighboring agencies. Table 10 indicates the historical frequency of calls generated within the City.

Table 10: Historical Call for Service Volumes – City of Sebastopol

| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Calls Generated Within District | | | | | |

Response Standards

Sebastopol serves a territory with **suburban** demands and currently strives to operate crews with “2/0” staffing (two-member crews are dispatched to all calls).

Table 11: Response Time Statistics – City of Sebastopol

| Year | Average Response Times (Dispatched to “Arrived On Scene”) |
|------|--|
| 2019 | 4 minutes 11 seconds |
| 2020 | 4 minutes 39 seconds |
| 2021 | 5 minutes 19 seconds |
| 2022 | 5 minutes 9 seconds |
| 2023 | 5 minutes 11 seconds |

These statistics represent the average response times to calls within the city regardless of the agency that was first on scene. In the past year or so the City's department was unable to respond to a number of calls, relying on neighboring agencies (generally Gold Ridge and Graton FPDs) to cover the incidents.

The City meets NFPA response time standards for suburban areas for calls that are generated within the City. However, the Department notes that response times for incidents during weekday daytime hours has increased from around four or five minutes to over six minutes.

Facilities

A critical factor in providing effective and efficient fire service is the location and quality of equipment.

Determining the location for fire station facilities should take in a number of considerations and include an analysis of service area demographics, roadway data, and occupancy types, population, emergency response data, workforce and response trend analysis.

The City operates one fire station proximate to the downtown area, which is well-situated for service provision. The City has planned to add a fourth vehicle bay to the facility, but has no firm plans for installing crew quarters.

Staffing

The City operates essentially a “volunteer” department, with career leadership and administrative staff, and volunteer firefighter and EMT staffing. In 2019 the department added one paid firefighter position and has approved filling an additional firefighter position.

The City’s pool of volunteers is limited by housing costs, an aging population, and a workforce that is not available for volunteer service during weekday daytime hours. The department has a current roster of around twenty-five volunteers.

DETERMINATION 3. FINANCIAL CONDITION

| Financial ability of agencies to provide services | Evaluation |
|---|---------------|
| a. Does the organization routinely engage in budgeting practices that may indicate poor financial management, such as overspending its revenues, failing to commission independent audits, or adopting its budget late? | No |
| b. Is the organization lacking adequate reserve to protect against unexpected events or upcoming significant costs? | No |
| c. Is the organization's rate/fee schedule insufficient to fund an adequate level of service, and/or is the fee inconsistent with the schedules of similar service organizations? | Yes |
| d. Is the organization unable to fund necessary infrastructure maintenance, replacement and/or any needed expansion? | No |
| e. Is the organization lacking financial policies that ensure its continued financial accountability and stability? | No |
| f. Is the organization's debt at an unmanageable level? | Not Evaluated |

Determinations

- **The City has been funding existing staffing levels from General Fund revenues, and could normally be expected to fund future vehicles and equipment needs. However, the City faces serious financial challenges that hinder its ability to address service shortfalls in its fire department.**
- **Financial management of the City has not been evaluated in the context of this study.**

Discussion

Budgeting

The City's staff prepares annual budgets in the spring for consideration and approval by the City Council prior to the upcoming fiscal year (July through June). The staff seeks guidance from the Council, and City residents are able to comment, in successive Council meetings prior to budget approval.

The Fire Department had a budget of \$1,299,080 for the 2022/2023 fiscal year, and spent \$1,193,875 (audited). The budget for the Department represents almost thirteen percent of the City's overall budget of just over \$10 million.

Finances

The City's career staff are enrolled in the CalPERS retirement system. The City is making regular annual contributions to the plan and is also paying an amortized amount to pay off an unfunded account balance.

The City's Fire Department faces several challenges related to sustainable funding:

- Costs are increasing at a rate higher than revenues.
- The City has inadequate staffing when compared current NFPA standards.
- The City has ongoing vehicle and equipment replacement needs.

Reserves

The City maintains cash reserves, though has no allocated amount specifically for the Fire Department.

The City allocates funds to an assigned capital replacement reserve and maintains a five-year "capital replacement plan", which anticipates major expenditures such as vehicle and equipment replacements.

Financial Policies

The City's financial policies and procedures were not evaluated as part of this study.

FINANCIAL OPTIONS

Revenue Source Options

The City was formed in 1902, and receives revenue from a variety of sources, including:

- Property taxes. Sebastopol's property tax revenue has declined somewhat in recent years due to a complicated shift in allocations mandated by the State.
- Sales taxes. The City receives a general sales tax apportionment and has two special sales taxes that were approved by City residents.
- Transient Occupancy Tax ("TOT"). Revenues in this category have been essentially flat in recent years.
- Utility Users Tax and Franchise Fees.
- Miscellaneous License Fees, Interest and Rents, and Grant revenue.

If the City determined a need for additional revenue support specifically for the Fire Department it could seek voter approval of a special tax, ideally based on a "units of risk" basis.

Alternatively, the City could consider whether consolidating the fire department, with another fire and emergency service agency might result in improved service levels at similar or marginally higher costs. As an interim step, the City could consider undertaking a contractual arrangement with a neighboring agency that might yield similar results.

Potential Cost Savings from Consolidation

It is generally assumed that district consolidations might generate increased efficiencies that would result in cost savings. For consolidations of fire and emergency service agencies, these efficiencies could include elimination of redundant staffing, streamlined administrative support, vehicle fleet reductions, and reduced facilities costs (if there are facility redundancies).

For Sebastopol, some of these efficiencies are possible, but are unlikely to deliver anything but modest cost savings.

Operationally, it is clear that a regional district would retain the fire station in Sebastopol, given its location in the center of the City. However, leadership of a regional district would have the potential opportunity to re-evaluate station staffing levels.

Lastly, after a consolidation there would be the opportunity to re-evaluate equipment needs, as it is often the case that agencies own and operate specialty vehicles that could be shared over a wider region.

Resources:

- Audited financial statements, approved current budgets, and budget projections for the City are on file with LAFCO.

DETERMINATION 4. SHARED SERVICES AND FACILITIES

| Status of, and opportunities for, shared facilities. | Evaluation |
|---|------------|
| a. Are subject agencies currently sharing services or facilities with other organizations? If so, describe the status of such efforts. | Yes |
| b. Are there any opportunities for the organizations to share services or facilities with neighboring or overlapping organizations that are not currently being utilized? | Yes |
| c. Are there any governance options that may produce economies of scale and/or improve buying power in order to reduce costs? | Yes |
| d. Are there governance options to allow appropriate facilities and/or resources to be shared, or making excess capacity available to others, and avoid construction of extra or unnecessary infrastructure or eliminate duplicative resources? | No |

Determinations

- **Were Sebastopol to consolidate the fire department with another fire and emergency service agency there would likely only be modest reductions in total administrative and leadership costs, but potential improvements in volunteer staffing levels.**
- **Although not analyzed in this report, a consolidated department might realize modest reductions in fleet costs by eliminating duplicative equipment.**

Discussion

The City's Fire Department manages operations cooperatively with neighboring agencies, notably through mutual response agreements. They also participate in multi-agency management systems, such as the Redwood Empire Dispatch Communications Authority (REDCOM), which manages emergency services dispatch for the majority of emergency services agencies in the County.

A summary of best practices for fire agency coordination for the City is presented in Table 12.

Table 12: Coordination Best Practices – City of Sebastopol (Fire Department)

| Best Practice | Observation and findings |
|---|--------------------------|
| The Department participates in the Redwood Empire Dispatch Communications Authority (REDCOM) | Yes |
| The Department has mutual aid agreements with other agencies. | Yes |
| The Department contracts for accounting and audit services with other districts or the County. | No |
| The Department participates with other districts or the County for equipment purchasing or leasing. | No |
| The Department participates in joint insurance programs. | Yes |
| The Department has an "Amador Contract" with CalFire. | No |
| The Department participates in joint training with other districts or the County. | No |
| The Department participates with another district or the County for joint administration services. | No |
| The Department shares facilities with other districts. | No |
| The Department shares a fire chief or other staff with another District. | No |
| The Department participates in joint recruitment with other districts. | No |

POTENTIAL COST SAVINGS FROM CONSOLIDATION

Should the City's Fire Department be consolidated with another agency, modest cost savings might accrue from sharing of leadership and administration personnel and potentially from vehicle fleet reduction.

While the City does not have redundant vehicles or other equipment, there may be a modest opportunity to reduce inventories, particularly of specialized vehicles and equipment, if it joined another agency.

DETERMINATION 5. ACCOUNTABILITY, STRUCTURE AND EFFICIENCIES

| Accountability for community service needs, including governmental structure and operational efficiencies | Evaluation |
|---|------------|
| a. Are there any issues with meetings being accessible and well publicized? Any failures to comply with disclosure laws and the Brown Act? | No |
| b. Are there any issues with filling board vacancies and maintaining board members? | No |
| c. Are there any issues with staff turnover or operational efficiencies? | Yes |
| d. Is there a lack of regular audits, adopted budgets and public access to these documents? | No |
| e. Are there any recommended changes to the organization's governance structure that will increase accountability and efficiency? | No |
| f. Are there any governance restructure options to enhance services and/or eliminate deficiencies or redundancies? | Maybe |
| g. Are there any opportunities to eliminate overlapping boundaries that confuse the public, cause service inefficiencies, unnecessarily increase the cost of infrastructure, exacerbate rate issues and/or undermine good planning practices? | Yes |

Determinations

- **The City is governed in a manner that not only complies with all statutes and laws but is fully open to community input. Councilmembers have been elected and/or appointed appropriately.**
- **The City has decided that seeking consolidation of the fire department with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District is the best option for meeting City fire service needs in the future.**

Discussion

The City complies with all public noticing requirements for Council meetings. There have been no noted Brown Act violations by the Council members. Council members file financial interest statements and comply with State training requirements for public officials.

The City makes files available to the general public when requested, and pertinent files are available on the City's web site.

Sebastopol undergoes annual financial audits and change auditors regularly.

The City Council has established a fire service ad hoc committee that has explored consolidation and contracting opportunities for five years. The Council has concluded that a consolidation with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District best meets the needs of the City.

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE STUDY

On the basis of the Municipal Service Review and agency preferences staff recommends that the Municipal Service Review does identify and support the need to change the Spheres of Influence for the subject agencies.

The existing Sphere of Influence for the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District is contiguous with the District's boundaries. Staff is recommending that the Commission consider amending Gold Ridge's sphere to include the City of Sebastopol territory (for fire and EMS services only) and the Monte Rio Fire Protection District territory.

The subject agencies have indicated that they will support reorganization proposals that would incorporate the City of Sebastopol's territory (for fire and EMS services only) into Gold Ridge, and the dissolution of the Monte Rio Fire Protection District and subsequent annexation of the territory to Gold Ridge.

It should be noted that for both reorganization proposals, if they are approved by the Commission and not successfully challenged by registered voters or landowners, Gold Ridge will impose special taxes (in the form of parcel taxes and other assessments) onto the annexed territories.

The Commission, as part of the consideration of the proposals, can designate transfers of liabilities and assets of the City of Sebastopol's Fire Department and Monte Rio FPD to Gold Ridge FPD.

Staff has enjoined the City of Sebastopol and Gold Ridge to enter into an agreement with regard to transfers of assets such as vehicles, equipment, and the City's fire station to Gold Ridge post reorganization. Staff has also indicated that a funding agreement between the two agencies should be agreed upon prior to filing a reorganization proposal.

(Staff assumes that all assets and liabilities of Monte Rio FPD would be transferred to Gold Ridge post reorganization, and that supplemental agreements are therefore unnecessary.)

Both reorganization proposals must also include a Plan for Service document, that should enlist staffing plans, financial projections, and service commitments.

PRESENT AND PLANNED LAND USES IN THE AREA

The present and planned land uses in the area, including agricultural and open-space lands.

Determinations

- **The county's current general plan does not indicate significant land use development occurring within the two district territories.**
- **The City's general plan indicates some development growth but not at a rate that would significantly drive fire and emergency service needs.**

NEED FOR PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

The present and probable need for public facilities and services in the area.

Determinations

- **The City of Sebastopol has been facing serious deficiencies in fire and EMS service provision and should therefore seek solutions to improve service levels.**
- **Monte Rio FPD is facing a looming leadership and management transition, and feels that a reorganization would best address challenges it expects to face.**
- **Although Gold Ridge FPD could provide services to Sebastopol and Monte Rio under contract, the agencies prefer to seek reorganizations. Amending the District's Sphere of Influence to include the territories of the City of Sebastopol and Monte Rio, with the implication that an annexation of the areas would quickly follow, is an appropriate action.**
- **Other options for reorganizations are generally unworkable from a financial resource perspective.**

Discussion

Addition of the territories to Gold Ridge FPD's SOI, leading to likely reorganizations, does not conflict with Sonoma LAFCO goals and policy related to the efficient provision of municipal services.

CAPACITY AND ADEQUACY OF PROVIDED SERVICES

The present capacity of public facilities and adequacy of public services that the agency provides or is authorized to provide.

Determinations

- **Gold Ridge FPD may have sufficient leadership, management, and administrative capability to meet the needs of Sebastopol and Monte Rio in the short term, and could make the case through a reorganization proposal that it could maintain or possibly improve on service delivery in the two areas.**
- **Gold Ridge FPD may continue to have to address challenges from its last large reorganization which may impede any future reorganization proposals.**

Discussion

It is evident that the City of Sebastopol has under-invested in its Fire Department for many years, which has culminated in almost total reliance on a volunteer force, and unaddressed facility needs. Despite recent efforts to bolster the volunteer force, which has included an expansion in ranks, the City is experiencing significant difficulties in responding to daytime weekday service calls. Neighboring agencies (predominantly Gold Ridge and Graton FPDs) are covering calls through mutual aid agreements but can not reasonably be expected to cover service gaps continually.

Monte Rio FPD has supplemented volunteer ranks with two paid positions and absent medical calls requiring Advanced Life Support (paramedic) support, appears to be able to meet the service needs in its territory. The challenge facing Monte Rio is provision of leadership, management, and administrative support, particularly given an impending though unscheduled retirement of its long-time volunteer chief.

Because it is envisioned that both the Sebastopol and Monte Rio operations will be primarily staffed with volunteers, the agencies believe that Gold Ridge FPD is the best operational fit, rather than an almost wholly paid professional organization such as Sonoma County Fire. (Although the City of Sebastopol conferred with Sonoma County Fire, it was determined that there simply isn't sufficient funding available from the City to support a paid professional staff model.)

(Staff has largely construed "operational fit" as a preference for agency reorganizations that deflect primarily mutual aid activities. For example, Sonoma County Fire is the primary backup service provider for Monte Rio, so should be preferred as a reorganization partner. Increasingly it appears that the remaining fire service agencies see the volunteer/paid model as the defining operational fit characteristic.)

Communities of Interest

The existence of any social or economic communities of interest in the area if the commission determines that they are relevant to the agency.

Determinations

- **None.**

There are no social or economic communities of interest within the subject agency territories that have bearing on the provision of fire and emergency medical services.

Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities

For an update of a SOI of a city or special district that provides public facilities or services related to sewers, municipal and industrial water, or structural fire protection, the present and probable need for those public facilities and services of any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within the existing sphere of influence.

Determinations

- **There are no disadvantaged unincorporated communities within the three agency territory's spheres of influence that are not receiving fire and emergency medical services currently.**