

Resolution No. XXXX

111 Santa Rosa Ave. Ste. 240
Santa Rosa, CA 95404

November 6, 2024

Resolution of the Local Agency Formation Commission of the County of Sonoma, State of California, Making Findings and Determinations Related to Information Contained in the Municipal Service Review and Sphere of Influence Study for the City of Sebastopol Fire Department and Gold Ridge and Monte Rio Fire Protection Districts, Amending the Sphere of Influence of the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District, and Determining Exemption from the California Environmental Quality Act.

RESOLVED, that the Local Agency Formation Commission of the County of Sonoma (“the Commission”) hereby finds and determines as follows:

1. Procedural History

1.1 The City of Sebastopol, Gold Ridge Fire Protection District, and Monte Rio Fire Protection District (“the Subject Agencies”) requested that the Commission prepare a Municipal Service Review and Sphere of Influence study (“MSR/SOI STUDY/SOI Study”) of the agencies pursuant to the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000, Government Code section 56000 et seq. (“the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act”).

1.2 The Executive Officer considered the request and prepared a Municipal Service Review and Sphere of Influence study.

1.3 The Executive Officer determined that the Commission would comply with California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) and the State CEQA Guidelines by acting as the lead agency in its consideration of the MSR/SOI STUDY/SOI Study. The Executive Officer further determined that the MSR/SOI STUDY is exempt pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15306 and 15061(b)(3).

1.4 Following the preparation of the MSR/SOI STUDY, the Executive Officer set the matter for consideration by the Commission and provided notice thereof as provided in the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act.

1.5 The Executive Officer considered written comments received on the MSR/SOI STUDY/SOI Study and prepared a staff report (“the Executive Officer’s Report”) which included a recommendation that THE Commission adopt the determinations in the MSR/SOI STUDY/SOI Study and order the amendment of the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District’s sphere . The Executive Officer furnished copies of

the Executive Officer's Report to all persons entitled to copies under the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act.

1.6 The Commission conducted a noticed public hearing to consider the MSR/SOI Study on November 6, 2024. At the hearing, the Commission heard and received all relevant oral and written testimony and evidence presented or filed and considered the Executive Officer's Report and the MSR/SOI Study. All interested persons were given the opportunity to hear and be heard. At the conclusion of public testimony, the Commission closed the public hearing and adopted the determinations in the MSR/SOI Study and ordered the amendment of Gold Ridge Fire Protection District's sphere of influence.

1.7 The Commission has reviewed and considered this resolution and hereby finds that it accurately sets forth the intentions of the Commission regarding the determinations of the MSR/SOI Study.

2. CEQA Compliance

2.1 The Commission concurs with the Executive Officer and finds that the Commission is the lead agency for the preparation of the MSR/SOI Study pursuant to CEQA and the state CEQA Guidelines.

2.2 The Commission finds and determines that preparation of a Municipal Service Review consists largely of the collection of data and research through reports and/or interviews with those knowledgeable about the Agency studied, resulting in conclusions and recommendations. When such activities "do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource," pursuant to Section 15306 of the State CEQA Guidelines, is exempt from CEQA.

2.3 The Commission finds and determines that confirming the Sphere of Influence of the Subject Agency is exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15061 (b)(3) of the State CEQA Guidelines, which states that CEQA applies only to projects that have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. Where it can be seen with certainty that there is not a possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the activity is not subject to CEQA.

2.3 Amendment of the Sphere of Influence of the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District will not result in a physical change to the environment in and of itself. Any future actions for change of organization would be further subject to separate environmental determination.

2.3 The Commission has considered the potential environmental effects of the MSR/SOI Study prior to reaching its decision. The Commission finds that, in doing so, it has fully discharged its responsibilities under CEQA.

3. Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act Compliance – Municipal Service Review

3.1 The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act directs LAFCOs to review and update Agency Spheres of influence, as necessary, every five years and further to conduct municipal service reviews prior to, or in conjunction with such updates.

Regarding the subject agencies, the Commission makes the following summary determinations:

3.2 Growth and Population Projections Determinations

3.2.1 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.

3.2.2 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.

3.2.3 Similarly, agencies do not consider land use development a driver of call volume.

3.3 Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities

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

3.4 Capacity and Adequacy of Public Facilities and Services

3.4.1 Both Districts have stabilized funding and staffing through recent increases in revenues.

3.4.2 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.

3.4.3 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.

3.4.4 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.

3.4.5 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.

3.4.6 All agencies have deficient facilities and have not identified financial resources to rectify those deficiencies.

3.5 Financial Ability to Provide Service

3.5.1 Two of the subject agencies (the City of Sebastopol and Gold Ridge FPD) are conducting multi-year financial forecasting.

3.5.2 Gold Ridge FPD is implementing a thirty-year vehicle and equipment capital plan.

3.5.3 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.

3.6 Governance and Accountability

3.6.1 The two Districts appear to have well-functioning governing boards, as does the City of Sebastopol.

3.6.2 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.

3.6.3 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.

3.6.4 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.

3.6.5 There are no apparent instances of recent violations of open meeting regulations, campaign regulations, or other accountability requirements for any of the subject agencies.

3.7 Opportunity for Shared Services

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

Regarding the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District, the Commission makes the following determinations:

3.8 Summary Determinations

- 3.8.1 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.

- 3.8.2 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.

- 3.8.1 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.

3.9 Growth and Population

- 3.9.1 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.

3.10 Capacity and Adequacy of Public Facilities and Services

- 3.10.1 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.

- 3.10.2 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.

3.11 Financial Condition

- 3.11.1 The District has been meeting its expenses without difficulty and has been able to provide funding for infrastructure needs (primarily vehicle and equipment replacement).

- 3.11.2 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.

3.11.3 Financial management of Gold Ridge is sound and is independently audited on an annual basis.

3.12 Shared Services and Facilities

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

3.13 Accountability, Structure and Efficiencies

3.13.1 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.

3.13.2 Gold Ridge undertakes annual independent financial and business practice audits and complies with financial regulations and recommended practices.

3.13.3 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.

Regarding the Monte Rio Fire Protection District, the Commission makes the following determinations:

3.14 Summary Determinations

3.14.1 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.

3.14.2 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.

3.14.3 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.

3.14.4 The District relies on the Sonoma County Fire District for EMS/ambulance support, but does not contribute financially for that service.

3.15 Growth and Population

3.15.1 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.

3.16 Capacity and Adequacy of Public Facilities and Services

3.16.1 The District has experienced call volume growth that exceeds population and development growth. The District has been able to meet response time standards.

3.16.2 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.

3.17 Financial Condition

3.17.1 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.

3.18 Shared Services and Facilities

3.18.1 Were Monte Rio FPD to reorganize with Gold Ridge FPD there would likely only be modest reductions in total administrative and leadership costs.

3.18.2 Although not analyzed in this report, a consolidated agency might realize modest reductions in fleet costs by eliminating duplicative equipment.

3.19 Accountability, Structure and Efficiencies

3.19.1 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.

3.19.2 Monte Rio FPD undertakes annual independent financial and business practice audits and is in compliance with financial regulations and recommended practices.

- 3.19.3 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.

Regarding the City of Sebastopol Fire Department, the Commission makes the following determinations:

3.20 Summary Determinations

- 3.20.1 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.

- 3.20.2 The City has addressed staffing shortfalls within its fire department by adding two paid professional positions and increasing stipend payments to volunteers.

- 3.20.3 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.

3.21 Growth and Population

- 3.21.1 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.

3.22 Capacity and Adequacy of Public Facilities and Services

- 3.22.1 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.

- 3.22.2 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.

3.23 Financial Condition

- 3.23.1 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.

3.23.2 Financial management of the City has not been evaluated in the context of this study.

3.24 Shared Services and Facilities

3.24.1 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.

3.24.2 Although not analyzed in this report, a consolidated department might realize modest reductions in fleet costs by eliminating duplicative equipment.

3.25 Accountability, Structure and Efficiencies

3.25.1 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.

3.25.2 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.

4.0 Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act Compliance – Sphere of Influence

With regard to the subject agencies, the Commission makes the following determinations:

4.1 Present and Planned Land Uses In the Area

4.1.1 The county's current general plan does not indicate significant land use development occurring within the two district territories.

4.1.2 The City's general plan indicates some development growth but not at a rate that would significantly drive fire and emergency service needs.

4.2 Need For Public Facilities and Services

4.2.1 The City of Sebastopol has been facing serious deficiencies in fire and EMS service provision and should therefore seek solutions to improve service levels.

4.2.2 Monte Rio FPD is facing a looming leadership and management transition, and feels that a reorganization would best address challenges it expects to face.

4.2.3 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.

4.2.4 Other options for reorganizations are generally unworkable from a financial resource perspective.

4.3 Capacity and Adequacy of Provided Services

4.3.1 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.

4.3.2 Gold Ridge FPD may continue to have to address challenges from its last large reorganization which may impede any future reorganization proposals.

4.4 Communities of Interest

4.4.1 None.

4.5 Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities

4.5.1 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.

The Commission is amending the sphere of influence of the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District to include the territory of the City of Sebastopol (for fire and emergency medical service only) and the Monte Rio Fire Protection District.

NOW, THEREFORE, based on the foregoing findings and determinations and the record of these proceedings, and pursuant to the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act, the Commission hereby declares, and orders as follows:

1. The foregoing findings and determinations are true and correct, are supported by substantial evidence in the record, and are adopted as hereinabove set forth.
2. The Commission has reviewed and considered the information contained in the final MSR/SOI Study for the City of Sebastopol (fire and emergency

- services) and the Gold Ridge and Monte Rio Fire Protection Districts.
3. The Commission adopts the determinations made in the MSR/SOI Study.

The Clerk of the Commission is designated as the custodian of the documents and other materials that constitute the record of the proceedings upon which the Commission's decision herein is based. These documents may be found at the office of the Clerk of the Commission, 111 Santa Rosa Ave., Ste. 240, Santa Rosa, CA, 95404.

THE FOREGOING RESOLUTION was introduced at a regular meeting of the Commission on the 6th day of November 2024 and ordered adopted by the following vote:

Commissioners:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

WHEREUPON, the Chair declared the foregoing resolution adopted and

SO ORDERED.

Mark Bramfitt, Executive Officer

The within instrument is a true and correct copy of the original on file in this office.

ATTEST:

BY: _____
Clerk