

SONOMA LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION

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Staff Report

Meeting Date: February 5, 2025

Agenda No. Item 4.1

Agenda Item Title: Sonoma Valley Fire District Reorganization No. 2024-10
(Kenwood Fire Protection District)

LAFCO File No. 2024-10

Applicant: Sonoma Valley Fire District

Proposal: Request for a reorganization of territory consisting of dissolution of the Kenwood Fire Protection District and annexation of that territory to the Sonoma Valley Fire District.

Location: The affected territory includes the unincorporated community of Kenwood in the northern portion of the Sonoma Valley.

Environmental Determination: Exempt pursuant to Sections 15320 and 15061(b)(3) of the State CEQA Guidelines

Staff Contact: Mark Bramfitt

Analysis

Background

The Sonoma Valley Fire District (“District”) provides fire and emergency services to the City of Sonoma (under contract) and to the unincorporated communities of El Verano, Agua Caliente, Boyes Hot Springs, Fetters Hot Springs, Glen Ellen, and Trinity Oaks, comprising much of the Sonoma Valley in southeastern Sonoma County.

The contract that the District has with the City of Sonoma is longstanding (over twenty years), and territory that was once covered by the Glen Ellen Fire Protection District was subsumed by the District through a reorganization in 2019.

The Kenwood Fire Protection District serves the unincorporated community of Kenwood, in the northernmost portion of the Sonoma Valley.

An illustrative map of the District territory and the Kenwood FPD territory that is the subject of the reorganization proposal is included in the Plan For Service submitted by Sonoma Valley Fire (Attachment 1).

The two districts passed concurrent resolutions seeking a reorganization consisting of the dissolution of Kenwood FPD and the subsequent annexation of the Kenwood territory to Sonoma Valley Fire District.

The Commission adopted a Municipal Service Review and Sphere of Influence study for fire and emergency service agencies in the Sonoma Valley in 2019. The Commission adopted the determinations in the study and amended the sphere of influence of Sonoma Valley Fire District to cover the entirety of the Sonoma Valley. Therefore, Sonoma Valley Fire District is eligible to seek the proposed reorganization.

Reason for Request; History; and Agency Actions

The Kenwood Fire Protection District is a “combined” fire services operator, with both paid staffing and volunteers (who are recompensed with stipends). The District has faced financial challenges in recent years and has had some issue with staff turnover.

In the past two years, the District has contracted with Sonoma Valley Fire District to provide leadership and administrative services, and recently Sonoma Valley has provided two or more firefighters to the Kenwood to fill vacant positions.

Sonoma Valley and Kenwood have determined that a consolidation of the agencies will ensure continued service to the Kenwood community. Additionally, Sonoma Valley Fire, as the advanced life support/ambulance provider for the Sonoma Valley, will station paramedic staff at the Kenwood station, which will result in much shortened response times for medical calls.

The Board Of Directors of both Districts have passed resolutions seeking the reorganization. These resolutions are included in the Plan for Service document.

Prior Commission Action

For territory to be eligible for annexation to a district, it must be within the agency's sphere of influence. The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act requires that the Commission adopt a Municipal Services Review for agencies seeking a sphere of influence amendment. A Municipal Services Review evaluates districts against eight subject areas (the eighth category is very broad, in that the Commission can consider any items it deems pertinent).

Additionally, to support a proposed Sphere of Influence amendment or amendments, the Commission must adopt a Sphere of Influence study that evaluates proposed amendments against five criteria.

Staff completed a Municipal Services Review for the fire and emergency medical service agencies in Sonoma Valley in 2019. This study included both Districts. The Commission adopted the determinations of the study, and further ordered that the entirety of the Sonoma Valley be included in the sphere of influence of Sonoma Valley Fire District.

District Plan for Service

The District's Plan for Service is included as Attachment 1.

Evaluation of Plan for Service

The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act sets no specific requirements for a Plan for Services, so the Commission has broad authority to seek information and analysis from the agency filing a reorganization proposal as it sees fit and necessary.

Commission staff has reviewed the Plan and finds that it sufficiently describes how services will be provided, and how operations will be funded.

Environmental Review

The proposed reorganization is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to Section 15320 of the State CEQA Guidelines because the proposed action does not change the geographical area in which previously existing powers are exercised.

The proposal is also exempt from CEQA under State CEQA Guidelines Section 15061 (b)(3), the "general rule" exemption that CEQA applies only to projects which have the

potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. The change in fire and emergency services provider will not cause a significant effect on the environment.

Individual Factors for Consideration

California Government Code sections 56668 and 56669.3 describe seventeen factors to be considered in the Commission's review of an annexation proposal of this type. The review must include, but is not limited to, consideration of these factors. The factors are outlined and addressed in Attachment 2.

Need for Public Hearings: Merits

As indicated earlier in this report, both districts initiated the proceedings with the Commission by resolution. In a situation in which it is clear that not all owners of property within the affected territory or all registered voters residing within the annexation boundary have given their written consent to the proposal, state law requires the Commission to conduct a public hearing on the merits of the proposal.

Notice of this public hearing was issued on December 19, 2024. Because of the total number of registered voters and landowners within the affected territory, pursuant to Section 56157(h) of the California Government Code, notice was provided through a notice placement in the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*.

Protest Proceeding

Should the Commission approve the reorganization proposal, conditionally approve the proposal, or approve the proposal with modifications, then the Commission will conduct a protest proceeding which must be noticed for a period of not less than 21 days nor longer than 60 days. Staff recommends that a protest proceeding be scheduled commencing on February 17, 2025, and concluding at the Commission's April 2, 2025, meeting. The protest period would then consist of 44 days.

To provide public notice for the protest proceeding, staff will publish notices in the same fashion as for this hearing, and additionally will mail notices to all landowners within the affected territories.

The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act requires that notices be mailed to landowners when they will be subject to special taxes as a result of a reorganization. In this case, Sonoma Valley Fire District has voter-authorized special taxes (parcel taxes) that will be applied to the affected territories upon annexation. (The tax rates are nominally comparable to Kenwood FPD's special taxes but do deviate in amount and structure.)

Recommendation

Staff requests that the Commission conduct a public hearing on the Sonoma Valley Fire District's proposal to dissolve the Kenwood Fire Protection District, and to subsequently annex that territory to the District.

The Commission may deny the reorganization proposal, accept it as presented, or approve it with modifications, including imposing conditions and/or modifying the boundaries of the reorganization.

If the Commission approves, conditionally approves, or approves with modifications, staff recommends doing so pursuant to the following findings and determinations:

- a. The affected territory is within the Sonoma Valley Fire District's sphere of influence, making it eligible for annexation.
- b. The reason for the reorganization is to allow residents of the affected territory to directly receive the full range of services provided by the District.
- c. The Municipal Services Review adopted for Sonoma Valley Fire District and other fire and emergency medical service providers in the Sonoma Valley region in 2019 reflects the district's ability to serve the affected territory.

If the Commission approves, conditionally approves, or approves with modifications, the proposal, staff recommends doing so pursuant to the State CEQA Guidelines, finding that the proposal is categorically exempt to CEQA, under Section 15320, or, if the proposal could be considered to be a project, find it exempt pursuant to Section 15061(b)(3) the State CEQA Guidelines.

If the Commission approves, conditionally approves, or approves with modifications, the proposal, staff recommends setting a protest period beginning on February 17, 2025, and ending at the conclusion of a protest proceeding at the Commission's regularly scheduled meeting on April 2, 2025.

Staff has prepared a draft resolution for the Commission's review and consideration (Attachment 3).

Attachments

1. Plan for Service
2. Factors for Consideration
3. Draft Resolution