

**MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW AND SPHERE  
OF INFLUENCE STUDY FOR THE**

**WINDSOR  
FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT**

**RINCON VALLEY  
FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT**

**BENNETT VALLEY  
FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT**

**COUNTY SERVICE AREA 40 – FIRE SERVICES  
(MOUNTAIN VFD)**

**Final**

**Sonoma Local Agency Formation Commission**

**August 2018**

**Project Name:** Municipal Services Review and Sphere of Influence  
Amendment Study for Windsor Fire Protection District,  
Rincon Valley Fire Protection District, Bennett Valley Fire  
Protection District, and County Service Area 40 – Fire  
Services (Mountain Volunteer Fire Department Territory)

**Conducted By:** Sonoma Local Agency Formation Commission  
111 Santa Rosa Avenue, Ste. 240  
Santa Rosa, CA 95404

**Date:** August 2018

**Subject Agencies:** Rincon Valley Fire Protection District  
And Windsor Fire Protection District  
8200 Old Redwood Hwy  
Windsor, CA 95492

Bennett Valley Fire Protection District  
6161 Bennett Valley Rd  
Santa Rosa, CA 95472

Sonoma County Fire and Emergency Services  
(County Service Area 40 – Fire Services)  
2300 County Center Drive, Suite 220B  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

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Rincon Valley Fire Protection District  
And Windsor Fire Protection District

Dan George, Chief  
Bennett Valley Fire Protection District

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Sonoma County Fire and Emergency Services  
Department  
(County Service Area 40 – Fire Services)

**Date of Last MSR/SOI  
Adopted by LAFCO:** Confirmation of Sphere of Influence in 2006

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## **MSR/SOI BACKGROUND**

### **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 objects 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 determinations listed above. 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 MSRs 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, a SOI includes an area adjacent to a jurisdiction where development might be reasonably expected to occur in the next 20 years. A MSR is conducted prior to, or in conjunction with, the update of a SOI and provides the foundation for updating it. In Sonoma County, a SOI generally has two planning lines. One is the 10-year boundary which includes the area that may likely be annexed within 10 years, while the 20-year boundary is anticipated to accommodate boundary expansions over a 20-year horizon.

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**

It is important to note that this study is being prepared with a deliberately limited scope, at the request of the applicant agencies and at the discretion of Sonoma LAFCO staff.

Fire and emergency service agencies throughout the county have been conducting discussions to determine if a regional consolidation program would best serve communities and underpin a sustainable service model for the future.

The subject agencies are seeking a Sphere of Influence amendment to potentially encompass the entirety of their territories, allowing consolidation through reorganizations. (The request to prepare the MSR and SOI Study came formally from

Windsor and Rincon Valley FPDs; CSA 40 and Bennett Valley FPD agreed to being included as subject agencies).

While the subject agencies believe that there may be further opportunities for reorganizations involving other neighboring agencies, at their request and at the discretion of Sonoma LAFCO staff, this Municipal Service Review has a deliberately limited scope focusing **solely on providing a review of the subject agencies and whether a Sphere of Influence amendment is warranted to encompass the entirety or a portion of the territories served by those agencies.**

The study does note potential opportunities for reorganizations to form a larger regional agency by including other agencies; but does not formally study those options. Nevertheless, this study should **not** be seen as precluding those opportunities in the future.

If the Commission adopts this Municipal Service Review and its determinations and agrees to amend spheres of influence as proposed, it would be expected that Windsor FPD and Rincon Valley FPD would consider a reorganization proposal shortly thereafter, followed by consideration of reorganizing Bennett Valley FPD and Mountain VFD.

#### *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 this study, LAFCO is proposing that any eventual reorganization of the subject agencies would be accomplished by dissolution of a given district and annexation to another, or in the case of the County Service 40 – Fire Services territory, detachment from CSA 40 and annexation to one of the three independent special districts.

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 MSR/SOI STUDY**

This report has been organized in a checklist format to focus the information and discussion on key issues that may be particularly relevant to the subject agencies while providing required MSR and SOI determinations. The checklist questions 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. This report includes the following:

- Descriptions of the subject agencies;
- MSR and SOI draft determinations for public and Commission review; and
- Identification of any other issues that the Commission should consider in the MSR/SOI.

## **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.

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 MSR/SOI are:

- County of Sonoma (various departments)
- Sonoma Resource Conservation District
- North Sonoma County Health Care District
- Town of Windsor

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

- City of Santa Rosa
- City of Rohnert Park
- City of Cotati
- City of Healdsburg
- City of Sebastopol
- Geyserville Fire Protection District
- Kenwood Fire Protection District
- Glen Ellen Fire Protection District
- Valley of the Moon Fire Protection District, acting as the Sonoma Valley Fire and Rescue Authority
- Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District
- Gold Ridge Fire Protection District
- Graton Fire Protection District
- Forestville Fire Protection District
- Russian River Fire Protection District
- Cazadero Community Services District



- Napa County Fire
- Sonoma County Fire Services Advisory Council
- CALFIRE
- Coastal Valleys EMS Agency
- Napa Local Agency Formation Commission

**AGENCY PROFILES****Windsor Fire Protection District****Table 1. Agency Profile: Windsor Fire Protection District**

Date of District Formation	1986
District Area	Approximately 30 square miles centered on the Town of Windsor and surrounding environs. Neighboring agencies are the City of Healdsburg (north), Geyserville Fire Protection District (north), Rincon Valley Fire Protection District (east and south), Forestville Fire Protection District (west), and CSA 40 – Sotoyome (west).
Enabling Legislation	Fire Protection District pursuant to Health and Safety Code Sections 13800 et seq.
Authorized Services	The Health and Safety Code authorizes the following services, which the District provides: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fire protection services</li> <li>2. Rescue services</li> <li>3. Emergency medical services</li> <li>4. Hazardous material emergency response services</li> </ol>
Aid Agreements (mutual or automatic)	Aid agreements exist with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CALFIRE</li> <li>• Geyserville Fire Protection District</li> <li>• Healdsburg Fire Department</li> <li>• Rincon Valley Fire Protection District</li> <li>• CSA 40 (County Fire and EMS)</li> </ul>
Organizational Note	Windsor FPD and Rincon Valley FPD were once operated under a Joint Powers Agreement, which has subsequently lapsed. The Districts continue to share leadership and administrative staffs, and hold coordinated board meetings.
Properties and Facilities Managed	The District has two fire stations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Station 21: 8200 Old Redwood Hwy., Windsor</li> <li>• Station 23: 8600 Windsor River Road, Windsor</li> </ul>

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**SONOMA LAFCO MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW/SPHERE OF INFLUENCE STUDY**

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Selection of Board Members	Registered voters residing within District boundaries elect the Board of Directors.
Number of Board Members	The District is governed by a five-member Board.
Members Terms of Office	Directors are elected to four-year staggered terms.
District Funding Sources	The District's primary source of revenue is the general property tax based on either a flat 1% rate applied to the adjusted 1975/1976 full value or on 1% of the sales price of the property on sales transactions and construction after the adjusted 1975/1976 valuation. The District receives a 0.0337 property tax allocation rate. The District also receives revenue from a special tax based on units of risk.
Property Tax Allocation	Funds are allocated to the District through the County tax collection process. The amount is based on the property tax rate allocable to the District through the tax rate areas within the District's jurisdictional boundaries.
Special Taxes or Assessments	The District levies a parcel tax, with rates designated for residences, commercial development based on size and unit of risk.
District Staffing and Employees	Windsor FPD is a "combined" department, with both paid and volunteer staffing.
Meeting Schedule	The regular meeting of the Board of Directors is held on the third Tuesday of each month. (The meeting is held jointly with the board of the Rincon Valley Fire Protection District).
Meeting Location	Station 21, 8200 Old Redwood Highway, Windsor
Office Location	8200 Old Redwood Highway Windsor, CA 95492
Contact Information	Mailing Address: As above Phone Number: (707) 838-1170
Web Site	<a href="http://www.cscfire.org">www.cscfire.org</a>

## Rincon Valley Fire Protection District

Table 2. Agency Profile: Rincon Valley Fire Protection District

Date of District Formation	1948
District Area	<p>Approximately 120 square miles adjacent to the southwestern, western, northern, and northeastern borders of the City of Santa Rosa, which the District essentially surrounds except for territory to the southeast of Santa Rosa.</p> <p>On the periphery of the District territory, adjacent agencies include: Windsor Fire Protection District (north), CSA 40 – Mountain VFD (north), Napa County Fire (east), Kenwood Fire Protection District (separated by two IRP areas, east), Bennett Valley Fire Protection District (south), Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District (south), City of Rohnert Park Public Safety Department (south), Gold Ridge Fire Protection District (west), City of Sebastopol Fire Department (west), Graton Fire Protection District (west) and Forestville Fire Protection District (west).</p>
Enabling Legislation	Fire Protection District pursuant to Health and Safety Code Sections 13800 et seq.
Authorized Services	<p>The Health and Safety Code authorizes the following services, which the District provides:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fire protection services</li> <li>2. Rescue services, including aircraft rescue</li> <li>3. Emergency medical services</li> <li>4. Hazardous material emergency response services</li> </ol>
Aid Agreements (mutual or automatic)	<p>Aid agreements exist with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bennett Valley Fire Protection District</li> <li>• CALFIRE</li> <li>• Forestville Fire Protection District</li> <li>• Gold Ridge Fire Protection District</li> <li>• Graton Fire Protection District</li> <li>• Kenwood Fire Protection District</li> <li>• Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District</li> <li>• Rohnert Park Public Safety Department</li> <li>• Saint Helena Fire Department</li> <li>• Santa Rosa Fire Department</li> <li>• Sebastopol Fire Department</li> <li>• Windsor Fire Protection District</li> <li>• CSA 40 (County Fire and EMS)</li> </ul>

**SONOMA LAFCO MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW/SPHERE OF INFLUENCE STUDY**

Organizational Note	Rincon Valley FPD and Windsor FPD were once operated under a Joint Powers Agreement, which has subsequently lapsed. The Districts continue to share leadership and administrative staffs, and hold coordinated board meetings.
Properties and Facilities Managed	<p>The District has four fire stations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Station 20: 91 Middle Rincon Road, Santa Rosa</li> <li>• Station 22: 45 Lark Center Drive, Santa Rosa</li> <li>• Station 24: 207 Todd Road, Santa Rosa</li> <li>• Station 25: 2675 Calistoga Road, Santa Rosa</li> </ul>
Selection of Board Members	Registered voters residing within District boundaries elect the Board of Directors.
Number of Board Members	The District is governed by a five-member Board.
Members Terms of Office	Directors are elected to four-year staggered terms.
District Funding Sources	The District's primary source of revenue is the general property tax based on either a flat 1% rate applied to the adjusted 1975/1976 full value or on 1% of the sales price of the property on sales transactions and construction after the adjusted 1975/1976 valuation. The District receives a 0.0828 property tax allocation rate. The District also receives revenue from a special tax based on units of risk.
Property Tax Allocation	Funds are allocated to the District through the County tax collection process. The amount is based on the property tax rate allocable to the District through the tax rate areas within the District's jurisdictional boundaries.
Special Taxes or Assessments	The District levies a parcel tax, with a flat rate for residential properties and a rate of \$0.05 per square footage for commercial development.
District Staffing and Employees	Rincon Valley FPD is a "combined" department, with both paid and volunteer staffing.
Meeting Schedule	The regular meeting of the Board of Directors is held on the third Tuesday of each month. (The meeting is held jointly with the board of the Windsor Fire Protection District).
Meeting Location	8200 Old Redwood Highway, Windsor

Office Location	8200 Old Redwood Highway Windsor, CA 95492
Contact Information	Mailing Address: As above Phone Number: (707) 838-1170
Web Site	www.cscfire.org

### **Bennett Valley Fire Protection District**

**Table 3. Agency Profile: Bennett Valley Fire Protection District**

Date of District Formation	1948
District Area	Approximately 25 square miles southeast of the City of Santa Rosa. Neighboring agencies are the City of Santa Rosa (north), Kenwood Fire Protection District (west), Glen Ellen Fire Protection District (west), Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District (south), and Rincon Valley Fire Protection District (east).
Enabling Legislation	Fire Protection District pursuant to Health and Safety Code Sections 13800 et seq.
Authorized Services	The Health and Safety Code authorizes the following services, which the District provides: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fire protection services</li> <li>2. Rescue services</li> <li>3. Emergency medical services</li> <li>4. Hazardous material emergency response services</li> </ol>
Aid Agreements (mutual or automatic)	Rincon Valley Fire Protection District
Properties and Facilities Managed	The District has one fire station at 6161 Bennett Valley Road, Santa Rosa.
Selection of Board Members	Registered voters residing within District boundaries elect the Board of Directors.
Number of Board Members	The District is governed by a five-member Board.

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**SONOMA LAFCO MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW/SPHERE OF INFLUENCE STUDY**

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Members Terms of Office	Directors are elected to four-year staggered terms.
District Funding Sources	The District's primary source of revenue is the general property tax based on either a flat 1% rate applied to the adjusted 1975/1976 full value or on 1% of the sales price of the property on sales transactions and construction after the adjusted 1975/1976 valuation. The District receives a median 0.0822 property tax rate allocation, with thirteen (13) tax rate allocation areas ranging from 0.0292 to 0.0855. The District also receives revenue from a parcel tax approved in 2002.
Property Tax Allocation	Funds are allocated to the District through the County tax collection process. The amount is based on the property tax rate allocable to the District through the tax rate areas within the District's jurisdictional boundaries.
Special Taxes or Assessments	The District levies a parcel tax of \$37.50 per unit of risk with a maximum of \$180 for a single-family residence.
District Staffing and Employees	Bennett Valley FPD is a "combined" department, with both paid and volunteer staffing.
Meeting Schedule	The regular meeting of the Board of Directors is held on the second Tuesday of each month.
Meeting Location	6161 Bennett Valley Road, Santa Rosa
Office Location	As above
Contact Information	Mailing Address: As above Phone Number: (707) 578-7761
Web Site	<a href="http://www.bennettvalleyfire.org">www.bennettvalleyfire.org</a>

## Sonoma County Fire and Emergency Services Acting as County Service Area 40 – Fire Services (Mountain VFD)

**Table 4. Agency Profile: CSA 40/County Fire and Emergency Services /Mountain VFD**

Date of CSA Formation	1993
Date of VFD Formation	1968
CSA Territory	<p>County Service Area 40 – Fire Services covers all territory in Sonoma County that is not served by cities or fire protection districts. Within that 600 square mile area, eleven volunteer fire companies serve distinct territories and are provided administrative and financial support from the CSA.</p> <p>The Mountain Volunteer Fire Department serves a portion of County Service Area 40, encompassing ten and a half square miles, with the Knights Valley VFC (CSA 40) to the north, Napa County to the east, and Rincon Valley FPD to the south and west.</p> <p>The Department serves 229 parcels of land with an estimated 399 residents (based on the 2010 census).</p>
Enabling Legislation	Fire Protection District pursuant to Health and Safety Code Sections 13800 et seq.
Authorized Services	<p>The Health and Safety Code authorizes the following services, which the District provides:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fire protection services</li> <li>2. Rescue services</li> <li>3. Emergency medical services</li> <li>4. Hazardous material emergency response services</li> </ol>
Aid Agreements (mutual or automatic), for Mountain VFD	Rincon Valley Fire Protection District CALFIRE
Properties and Facilities Managed	The VFD has one fire station at 5198 Sharp Road, Calistoga
Department Funding Sources	The department is primarily funded by a non-profit association, with additional financial and administrative support from CSA 40.
Department Staffing and Employees	Mountain VFD is an all-volunteer department. (Volunteer fire organizations in Sonoma County are called



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**SONOMA LAFCO MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW/SPHERE OF INFLUENCE STUDY**

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	"Companies", with the exception of Mountain, which has historically been called a "Department."
Contact Information: County Fire and Emergency Services	Mailing Address: 2300 County Center Drive, Suite 220B, Santa Rosa, CA 95403 Phone Number: (707) 565-1152
Contact Information: Mountain Volunteer Fire Department	Mailing Address: 5198 Sharp Road, Calistoga, CA 94515 Phone Number: (707) 578-7761
Web Sites	<a href="http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Fire-and-Emergency-Services/">sonomacounty.ca.gov/Fire-and-Emergency-Services/</a> <a href="http://www.mountainvolunteerfire.com">www.mountainvolunteerfire.com</a>





Figure 2: Map of Existing Windsor Fire Protection District Boundaries

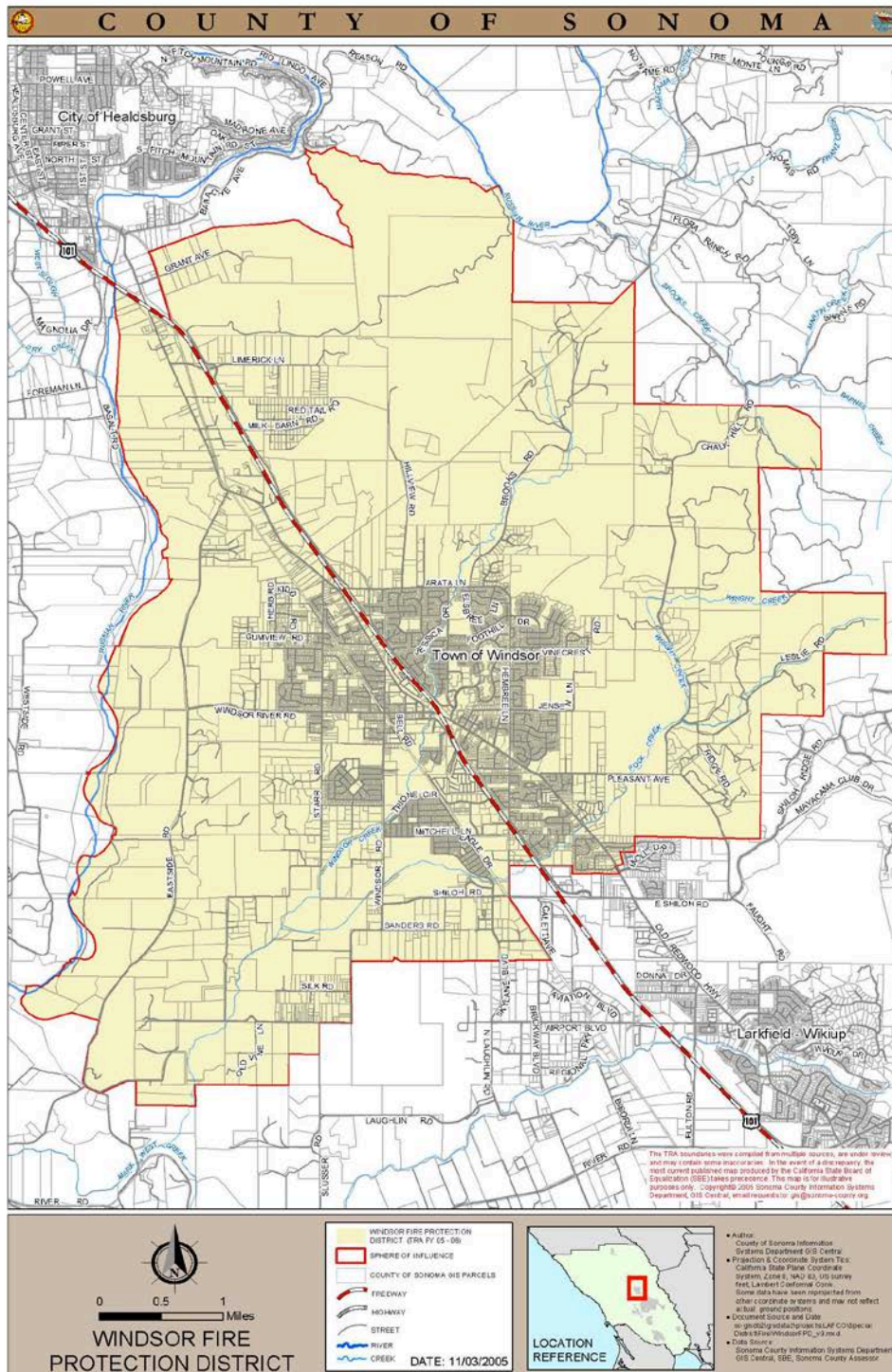


Figure 3: Map of Existing Rincon Valley Fire Protection District Boundaries

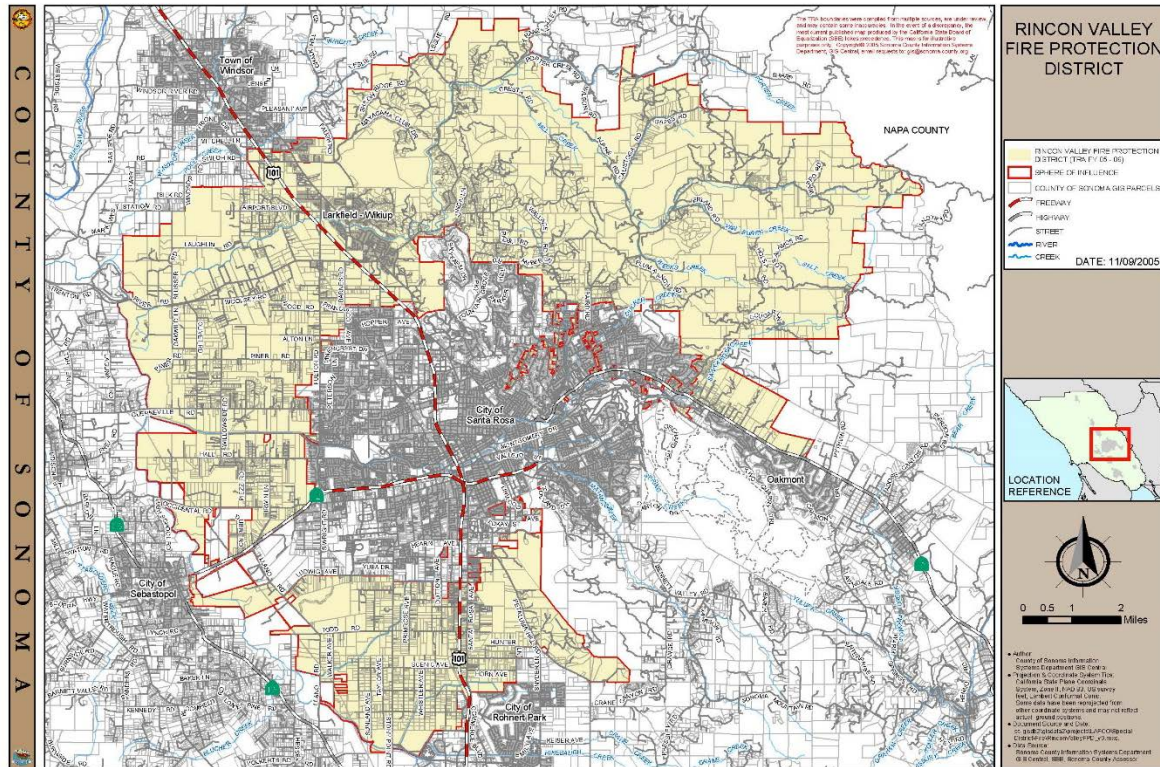
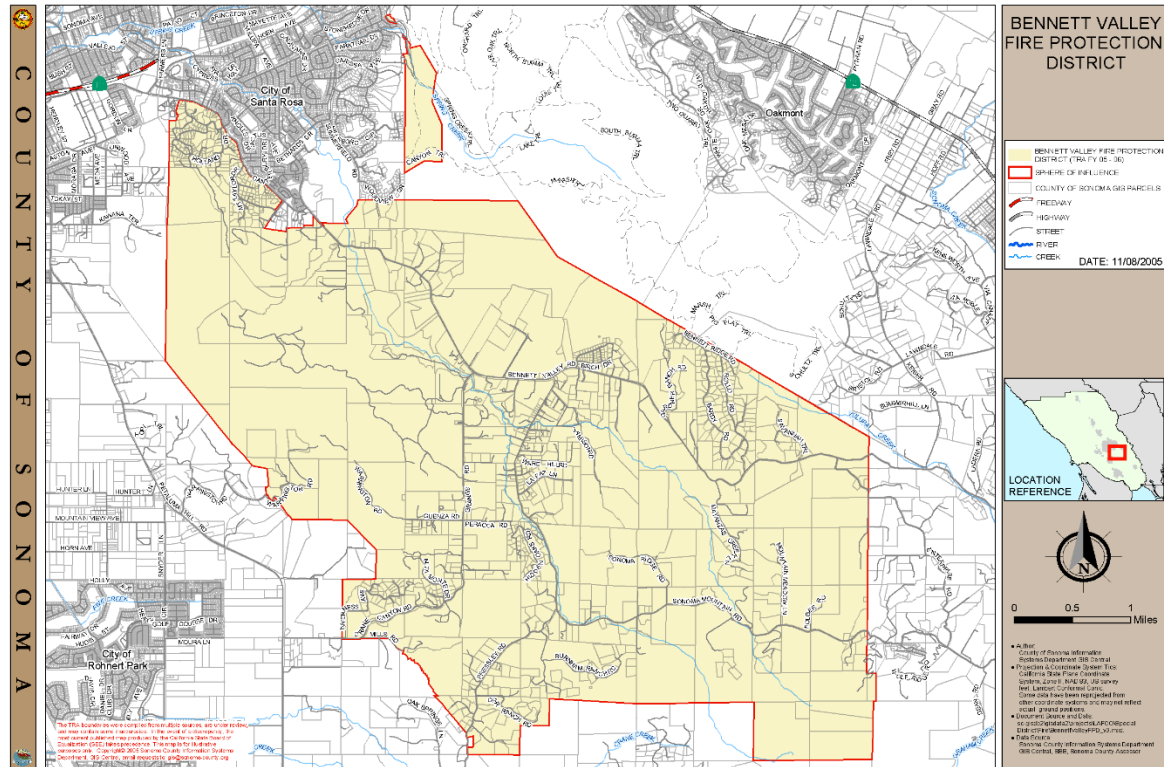




Figure 4: Map of Existing Bennett Valley Fire Protection District Boundaries



**MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW****POTENTIALLY 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 on the following pages.

**DETERMINATION 1. GROWTH AND POPULATION**

Growth and population projections for the affected area.

	YES	MAYBE	NO
a. Is the agency’s territory or surrounding area expected to experience any significant population change or development over the next 5-10 years?	Yes		
b. Will population changes have an impact on the subject agency’s service needs and demands?	Yes		
c. Will projected growth require a change agency service boundaries?			No

**Determinations**

- The regions served by the subject agencies 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).

**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.

*Population – Town of Windsor*

The Town of Windsor is the only incorporated area within a subject agency's territory (Windsor FPD); the balance of the affected territory is unincorporated and therefore land use planning is the responsibility of the County of Sonoma's Permit Sonoma.

The Association of Bay Area Governments adopted "Plan Bay Area 2040" in 2017. The plan includes projected population growth for urban areas of cities and counties between 2010 and 2040.

The report indicates that Windsor's population will grow from 5,610 in 2010 to a projected 7,760 in 2040, for a total growth rate over that period of 38%. (That growth rate is comparable to the larger cities in the County).

#### *Population – Unincorporated Areas*

The County General Plan 2020 divides the County into nine planning areas. Planning Area Objectives and Policies recognize the circumstances of each of the nine planning areas of the County and the fact that each area warrants its own unique policies. These policies also provide specific guidance regarding the use of individual properties. Most urbanized growth is expected to occur within Urban Service Areas.

The County has two goals that reinforce the philosophy of City centered growth. These goals, as stated in the County General Plan 2020 are as follows:

- GOAL LU-2: Accommodate the major share of future growth within the nine existing cities and their expansion areas and within selected unincorporated communities, which are planned to have adequate water and sewer capacities.
- GOAL LU-3: Locate future growth within the cities and unincorporated Urban Service Areas in a compact manner using vacant "infill" parcels and lands next to existing development at the edge of these areas.

The General Plan enumerates a series of policies that strictly limit development of all types and directs that development occur within existing urban and suburban areas that have municipal services (sanitation and water).

The Windsor FPD and Mountain VFD serve territory almost wholly within the "Healdsburg Planning Area;" Rincon Valley and Bennett Valley FPDs serve territory within the "Santa Rosa Planning Area."

The County General Plan describes the features of each planning area and expected population growth as follows (emphasis added):

#### *Healdsburg Planning Area:*

"The land use plan anticipates a total population of 51,460, an increase of 10,664 residents over the 2000 level. **Most future growth is expected in Healdsburg and Windsor.**"

#### *Santa Rosa Planning Area:*

"Most of the population in this area lives along the Highway 101 and 12 corridors. Significant amounts of rural residential development are located south and west of the cities and in isolated pockets in the east and northeast part of the planning area.

This region is projected to add 32,652 people by 2020 and grow to a population of 223,400. Assuming full annexation of Santa Rosa's Urban Growth Boundary, the City's population would be 195,300, **with the remaining 28,100 people in the unincorporated area.**"

The County General Plan population projections for the Planning Areas are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: County of Sonoma Planning Area Projected Growth**

Planning Area/Urban Service Area	1980	1990	2000	Projected 2020	Projected Change 2000-2020
Unincorporated Area Outside of Healdsburg and Windsor Urban Service Areas	4,917	7,247	6,799	8,000	1,201
Town of Windsor	6,160	11,809	22,744	30,300	7,556
Unincorporated Area Outside Santa Rosa Urban Service Area	21,153	24,714	24,899	28,100	3,201

Sources: U.S. Census, Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and PRMD. Notes: (1) County totals for historical data are from U.S. Census. (2) All historical city data include unincorporated Urban Service Areas (USAs), as estimated by ABAG. (3) Projections for cities reflect General Plans or estimates, and include existing unincorporated USAs. (4) Projections for unincorporated areas are by PRMD, and reflect modifications to ABAG's "Projections 2002."

The total growth rate projected between 2000 and 2020 for the unincorporated area outside of Healdsburg and Windsor in the Healdsburg Planning Area is 17.7 %, yielding an annual growth rate projection (compounded) of 0.8 %.

The total growth rate projected between 2000 and 2020 for the Town of Windsor in the Healdsburg Planning Area is 33.2 %, yielding an annual growth rate projection (compounded) of 1.4 %.

The total growth rate projected between 2000 and 2020 for the unincorporated area outside of Santa Rosa in the Santa Rosa Planning Area is 12.9 %, yielding an annual growth rate projection (compounded) of 0.6 %.

#### *Overall Effect on Subject Agencies*

Rincon Valley and Bennett Valley FPDs and Mountain VPD serve predominantly rural residential communities. Growth in those unincorporated areas is low and therefore will not drive a marked need for increased service provision.



Rincon Valley FPD may see unexpected growth in the Airport/Larkfield/Wikiup area if planning restrictions are amended to facilitate residential development.

Windsor FPD is similarly expected to see low growth in the unincorporated areas it serves but will continue to see more robust growth in the Town of Windsor.

The District has foreseen the need to consider building and operating a third station in the northern part of the Town in response to population growth and development, and a likely annexation of territory into the town north of Arata Lane and east of Highway 101. Proposed development in the annexation area will include residential units and potentially a school.

#### *Agency-Specific Growth Trends*

- Three of the subject agencies were affected by the October 2017 fire disaster, with the following levels of property loss:
  - Rincon FPD had approximately 1,339 properties destroyed, and 102 partially damaged within its service area, primarily in the Larkfield and Wikiup communities and the hills to the east. The majority of the properties destroyed were residences.
  - Bennett Valley FPD reports that 155 homes were destroyed in the fires, representing something on the order of 12% of the homes in its service area.
  - Mountain VFD experienced the highest proportional loss, with 70 homes destroyed. With only 233 taxable parcels in the VFD territory, this represents a 30% loss in occupied parcels.
- Windsor FPD is anticipating the additional service needs that projected growth in the Town of Windsor will require, evidenced by planning for a new fire station in the northeastern part of the Town. (The potential site for the new station is within a proposed annexation area north of Arata Lane and adjacent to Highway 101 to the east).

The Town of Windsor has also been considering commercial development (hotels) of four stories. To serve that type of development, the District has indicated a need for the acquisition of a ladder truck and an appropriate facility to house it.

- Rincon Valley FPD is also responsible for fire and EMS protection at the Sonoma County Airport. The fire station at the airport is not staffed. Airport maintenance personnel are trained to operate rescue vehicles for crash responses, but Rincon Valley provides emergency response to all incidents from the Larkfield Station.

Due to increasing passenger traffic, the need for a staffed fire station at the airport is being discussed with airport management.

The County has granted a permit for a four-story hotel near the airport; again, a ladder truck is nominally required to serve this type of development. (While Windsor FPD has a ladder truck, Rincon Valley FPD does not and does not have a facility that can house one).

The County has been considering a variety of initiatives to spur the development of additional housing, and these potential programs may drive an increase in development in the unincorporated Airport/Larkfield/Wikiup area, creating further service capacity needs for Rincon Valley FPD.

#### *Transient Population*

Fire and emergency services agencies respond to “transient” populations as well as resident populations within their service areas. For some agencies, the service needs for transient populations can greatly exceed the needs for resident populations.

For the subject agencies, services to transient populations represent only a small proportion of their call volume and no significant growth is expected for this area.

#### *Development*

The County of Sonoma and the Town of Windsor have jurisdiction over land use and planning for the areas served by the subject agencies.

The County General Plan does not anticipate significant development in the unincorporated areas served by the subject agencies, although increased growth may be anticipated in the Airport/Larkfield/Wikiup area depending on the implementation of potential programs to promote housing development.

New development will therefore primarily affect Windsor FPD as the Town of Windsor grows.

**DETERMINATION 2. DISADVANTAGED UNINCORPORATED COMMUNITIES**

The location and characteristics of any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within or contiguous to the sphere of influence.

	YES	MAYBE	NO
a. Does the subject agency provide public services related to sewers, municipal and industrial water, or structural fire protection?	Yes		
b. Are there any "inhabited unincorporated communities" (per adopted Commission policy) within or adjacent to the subject agency's sphere of influence that are considered "disadvantaged" (80% or less of the statewide median household income)?			No
c. If "yes" to both a) and b), is it feasible for the agency to be reorganized such that it can extend service to the disadvantaged unincorporated community. If "no" to either a) or b), this question may be skipped.			No

**Determination**

- There are no LAFCO-designated disadvantaged unincorporated communities within the territories served by the subject agencies, and 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.

On October 12, 2012, LAFCO adopted a policy for the definition of 'Inhabited Territory' for the Implementation of SB 244 Regarding Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities", which identified twenty-one inhabited unincorporated communities for purposes of implementing SB 244. Of these, seven communities are designated as disadvantaged.

CKH Act Section 56375(a)(8)(A) prohibits LAFCO from approving an annexation of more than ten acres if a DUC is contiguous to the annexation territory but not included in the proposal, unless an application to annex the DUC has been filed with LAFCO. The legislative intent is to prohibit "cherry picking" by cities and districts of tax-generating land uses while leaving out under-served, inhabited areas with infrastructure

deficiencies and lack of access to reliable potable water and wastewater services. DUCs are recognized as social and economic communities of interest for purposes of recommending SOI determinations pursuant to Section 56425(c).

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 the agency's sphere of influence is not required.

Further, there are no areas within the subject agencies territories that are designated as disadvantaged unincorporated communities.

**DETERMINATION 3. CAPACITY AND ADEQUACY OF PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES**

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

	YES	MAYBE	NO
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 to sewers, municipal and industrial water, and structural fire protection within or contiguous to the agency's sphere of influence?			No

**Determinations**

- The Windsor Fire Protection District has experienced call volume growth commensurate with population and development growth. The District has been able to meet response time standards.
- The Windsor Fire Protection District effectively provides fire and emergency services within its existing service area and is expected to be able to serve population and development growth for the foreseeable future. However, without an increase in funding the District would likely implement reductions in crew staffing that could impair service quality. The District is understaffed according to NFPA standards.
- The Rincon Valley Fire Protection District has experienced call volume growth that is likely commensurate with population and development growth. The District has been able to meet response time standards. The District is understaffed according to NFPA standards.

- The Rincon Valley Fire Protection District provides fire and emergency services within its existing service area with significant mutual aid support from the City of Santa Rosa. The District also faces significant costs to renovate or replace three existing fire stations, which are substantially deficient. The District also has significant vehicle replacement and acquisition needs.
- The Bennett Valley Fire Protection District effectively provides fire and emergency services within its existing service area, with mutual aid support from the City of Santa Rosa, and is expected to be able to serve population and development growth for the foreseeable future.
- The Mountain Volunteer Fire Department has maintained effective service levels with Mutual Aid support from Rincon Valley FPD, and has maintained a successful volunteer program. The VFD will face the challenge of maintaining a volunteer program due to changing demographics and perhaps due to the aftereffects of the October 2017 fire disaster. Mountain could likely benefit from becoming part of a combination department to ensure consistent service levels in the future. However, if the area requires staff support (rather than wholly volunteer), it should be noted that the Mountain VFD station is seriously deficient, lacking fundamental municipal services that would be required for a staffed facility.

## Discussion

### Service Volumes

#### *Windsor Fire Protection District*

Windsor FPD provides fire and emergency services within its boundaries, and provides mutual aid support to neighboring agencies. Table 6 indicates the types of incidents that the District responds to and their historical frequency.

**Table 6: Historical Call for Service Volumes – Windsor Fire Protection District**

Type of Call for Service	2015	2016	2017	Total	Percentage
Emergency Medical/Rescue/Auto Accidents	1,622	1,663	1,764	5,049	61 %
Fire	173	130	185	488	6 %
Rupture/Explosion	2	2	5	9	-

<b>Type of Call for Service</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Other / Public Assistance	842	878	1,019	2,739	33 %
Total	2,639	2,673	2,973	8,285	
Response time (% within 5 minutes for turnout and travel time)	70 %	69 %	66 %		

The District undertook an analysis of call volumes compared to client population since 2000 and determined that call volume growth is essentially commensurate with population growth.

*Rincon Valley Fire Protection District*

Rincon Valley FPD provides fire and emergency services within its boundaries, and provides mutual aid support to neighboring agencies. Table 7 indicates the types of incidents that the District responds to and their historical frequency.

**Table 7: Historical Call for Service Volumes – Rincon Valley Fire Protection District**

<b>Type of Call for Service</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Emergency Medical/Rescue/Auto Accidents	2,979	2,958	3,043	8,980	61 %
Fire	273	246	289	808	6 %
Rupture/Explosion	7	5	7	19	-
Other / Public Assistance	1,441	1,535	1,897	4,873	33 %
Total	4,700	4,744	5,236	14,680	

<b>Type of Call for Service</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Response time (% within 5 minutes for turnout and travel time)	49 %	50 %	49 %		

Although the District has not undertaken a comparison of call volume to population, it is expected that call volumes have grown at a similar rate to population growth.

*Bennett Valley Fire Protection District*

Bennett Valley FPD provides fire and emergency services within its boundaries, and provides mutual aid support to neighboring agencies. Table 8 indicates the types of incidents that the District responds to and their historical frequency.

**Table 8: Historical Call for Service Volumes – Bennett Valley Fire Protection District**

<b>Type of Call for Service</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Emergency Medical/Rescue/Auto Accidents	124	130	122	376	49 %
Fire	11	19	22	52	7 %
Rupture/Explosion	-	-	-	-	-
Other / Public Assistance	106	112	125	343	45 %
Total	241	261	269	771	
Response time (% within 5 minutes for turnout and travel time)	22.0%	17.0%	24.0%		

*Mountain Volunteer Fire Department*



Mountain VFD provides fire and emergency services within its boundaries and actually responds to more mutual aid calls (primarily to Rincon Valley FPD territory) than calls within its service area. Table 9 indicates the types of incidents that the Department responds to and their historical frequency.

**Table 9: Historical Call for Service Volumes – Mountain Volunteer Fire Department**

Type of Call for Service	2015	2016	2017	Total	Percentage
Emergency Medical	14	14	10	38	15 %
Fire	2	1	1	4	-
Hazard	4	7	6	17	7 %
Vehicle	8	5	4	17	7 %
Other	2	7	5	14	6 %
Out of District	46	49	69	164	65 %
Total	76	83	95	254	

County Fire and Emergency Services (CSA 40) lists Mountain VFD's call volume at 37 in-house and 65 out-of-district calls on average over a three-year period.

A large majority of Mountain VFD's out of district responses are in support of Rincon Valley FPD; these calls are typically hazard or vehicle accident related. The Department responds to in-area calls in just over 20 minutes on average, and to mutual aid calls in 42 minutes on average.

### **Response Standards**

There are no mandatory federal or state regulations directing the level of fire service response times and outcomes for suppression or fire engine-based Emergency Medical Services (EMS). The body of regulations on the fire suppression service provides that if fire services are provided, they must be done so with the safety of the firefighters and citizens in mind.

However, over the last twenty years a number of state and federal laws, regulations, and court cases based on firefighter safety have affected the flexibility of fire agencies

in determining their staffing levels, training, and methods of operation. Some of these are given an abbreviated overview below:

1. 1999 OSHA Staffing Policies – Federal OSHA applied the confined space safety regulations for work inside tanks and underground spaces to America’s firefighters. This requirement pertains to atmospheres that are “IDLH” (Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health): teams of two members inside and two members outside must be in constant communication: the outside team has to be equipped and ready to rescue the inside team. This situation occurs in building fires where the fire and smoke conditions are serious enough to require the wearing of self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA). This is commonly called the “2-in/2-out” policy. This policy requires that firefighters enter serious building fires in teams of two, while two more firefighters are outside and immediately ready to rescue them should trouble arise.
2. May 2001 National Staffing Guidelines – The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard on Career and Combination (volunteer) Fire Service Deployment provides guidance to local districts and has been widely adopted as a response standard.

NFPA 1720 Section 4.1 on Fire Suppression Organization states that “fire suppression operations shall be organized to ensure that the fire department’s fire suppression capability includes sufficient personnel, equipment, and other resources to deploy fire suppression resources efficiently, effectively, and safely.”

Table 10 shows the staffing and response time recommendation contained in the NFPA standards.

**Table 10: NFPA #1720 Response Time Standards**

Demand Zone	Demographics	Staffing and Response Time – FF/Minutes	Percentage of Completion
Urban	>1000 people/mi. <sup>2</sup>	15/9	90
Suburban	500–1000 people/mi. <sup>2</sup>	10/10	80
Rural	< 500 people/mi. <sup>2</sup>	6/14	80
Remote*	Travel distance $\geq$ 8 mi.	4	90

*\*Upon assembling the necessary resources at the emergency scene, the fire department should have the capability to safely commence an initial attack within 2 minutes ninety percent of the time.*

### *Windsor Fire Protection District*

Windsor FPD serves a territory with both **suburban and rural** demands and currently operates crews with “3/0” staffing (three-member crews are dispatched to all calls).

Table 11: Response Time Statistics – Windsor Fire Protection District

Year	Average Response Times (Dispatched to Arrived On Scene)
2015	5 minutes 7 seconds
2016	5 minutes 12 seconds
2017	5 minutes 15 seconds

These statistics indicate that Windsor FPD meets NFPA response time standards for suburban/rural areas for calls that are generated from within the District territory.

#### *Rincon Valley Fire Protection District*

Rincon Valley FPD serves a territory with **rural** demands.

Table 12: Response Time Statistics – Rincon Valley Fire Protection District

Year	Average Response Times (Dispatched to Arrived On Scene)
2015	6 minutes 12 seconds
2016	6 minutes 2 seconds
2017	6 minutes 2 seconds

These statistics indicate that Rincon Valley FPD meets NFPA response time standards for rural areas for calls that are generated from within the District territory.

#### *Bennett Valley Fire Protection District*

Bennett Valley FPD serves a territory with **rural** demands.

Table 13: Response Time Statistics – Bennett Valley Fire Protection District

Year	Average Response Times (Dispatched to Arrived On Scene)
2015	8 minutes 25 seconds
2016	9 minutes 22 seconds
2017	10 minutes 23 seconds

These statistics indicate that the Bennett Valley meets NFPA response time standards for rural areas for calls that are generated from within the District territory.

### *Mountain Volunteer Fire Department*

Mountain VFD serves a territory with **remote** demands.

**Table 14: Response Time Statistics – Mountain Volunteer Fire Department**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Average Response Times (Dispatched to Arrived On Scene)</b>
2015	14 minutes 27 seconds
2016	12 minutes 54 seconds
2017	14 minutes 22 seconds

These statistics indicate that the department meets NFPA response time standards for remote areas.

### ***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 subject agencies have reported the following specific conditions and issues with regard to facilities:

- Windsor FPD has identified the need to construct a new station in northern Windsor, potentially within an area north of Arata Lane and east of Highway 101 that is being pre-zoned by the Town in anticipation of annexation.
- Rincon Valley FPD reports that all of its existing stations have a range of deficiencies that will require significant reconstruction or outright replacement. The district has identified a need for a new station at the southern end of Santa Rosa, and may enter into an agreement with the City of Santa Rosa to construct and operate the station cooperatively.
- The Mountain VFD facility is unsuited for staffing, and would therefore require upgrades in order to accommodate posting firefighters there.

### ***Staffing***

#### *Windsor Fire Protection District*

Windsor FPD is a “combined” department, with both paid and volunteer firefighter and EMT staffing. (Districts that have a paid chief and administration employees, with all other staff serving on a volunteer basis, are typically classified as a “volunteer” department).

The District reports that it does not have any challenges recruiting and maintaining its paid professional workforce but that volunteer availability (particular during normal weekday work hours) is low despite a robust and vibrant program. (The District has a roster of eleven volunteers).

It is critical to note that Windsor FPD staffs engines with two paid professional firefighters and one apprentice firefighter. The apprentices are paid using funds from a federal grant that will expire in two years, and the district does not have funds to continue apprentice staffing when the federal grant expires.

NFPA recommends staffing engines with four firefighters; the “standard” staffing level in California is three firefighters per engine. Furthermore, NFPA recommends staffing levels of three firefighters per 10,000 population served; the District has paid staffing at less than half of this level.

#### *Rincon Valley Fire Protection District*

Rincon Valley FPD is a “combined” department, with both paid and volunteer firefighter and EMT staffing.

The District reports that it does not have any challenges recruiting and retaining its paid professional workforce but that volunteer availability (particular during normal weekday work hours) is low despite a robust and vibrant program. (The District has a roster of sixteen volunteers).

Similar to Windsor FPD, Rincon Valley’s paid staffing is at about half the NFPA recommended rate of three per 10,000 population served.

#### *Bennett Valley Fire Protection District*

Bennett Valley FPD is a “combined” department, with both paid and volunteer firefighter and EMT staffing.

The District reports no difficulties in retaining employees for its three paid professional positions and, with an hourly-rate stipend program, has a roster of six volunteers, a decline from a peak roster of ten volunteers. However, staff believes that an ageing population in the area, combined with an increasing prevalence of part-time residents and vacation rental conversions, will present a challenge to the District’s volunteer program.

#### *Mountain Volunteer Fire Department*

As its name suggests, Mountain VFD is an all-volunteer operation.

Despite a small region to draw from, the VFD has managed to maintain a stable, if aging, pool of eleven volunteers. However, with so many residences destroyed in the October 2017 fire disaster, it is unclear if the department can sustain a meaningful program.

If the department's program falters, mutual aid from Rincon Valley FPD (or a regional fire agency, if one is pursued) can clearly provide coverage to the territory. However, if volunteer ranks fail to recover or decline further, it would be clearly logical to pursue a reorganization that would provide direct responsibility for service in the area to Rincon Valley FPD or a regional agency.

Regional fire and emergency service planning efforts pursued by the Sonoma County Fire Service Commission indicate a need to station a firefighter at the Mountain station on weekend day times to account for a particular problem in accessing available volunteers during those hours.

(Windsor, Mountain, and Rincon Valley have initiated a process to merge the three volunteer programs into one program to enhance training, recruitment/retention, and operational responses).

**DETERMINATION 4. FINANCIAL ABILITY**

Financial ability of agencies to provide services

	YES	MAYBE	NO
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?			No

**Determinations**

- The Windsor Fire Protection District has been meeting its expenses without difficulty and has been able to provide funding for infrastructure needs (primarily vehicle and equipment replacement). However, projections indicate that Windsor FPD will not be able to cover expenses within as few as three years.
- Windsor FPD will require additional, sustained revenue to support its current operations, which includes a "3/0" staffing program for engine companies.
- Windsor FPD is seeking additional financial support from the Town of Windsor, perhaps in the form of an AB8 rate adjustment, and also has the ability to seek voter approval for a higher parcel tax schedule.
- The Rincon Valley Fire Protection District has been meeting its expenses without difficulty but is projected to fail to cover costs in as few as two years.

- Rincon Valley FPD will require additional, sustained revenue to support operations, including providing staffing at the Sonoma County Airport, and to address critical station upgrades or replacements.
- Rincon also has a mutual aid contract arrangement with the City of Santa Rosa that may not be sustainable in its present form and might require Rincon to make higher payments to Santa Rosa or to otherwise raise staffing and coverage levels internally.
- Rincon Valley FPD has the ability to seek voter approval for a higher parcel tax schedule.
- The Bennett Valley Fire Protection District has been meeting its expenses without difficulty and has been able to provide funding for infrastructure needs (primarily vehicle and equipment replacement).
- Bennett Valley FPD may require additional, sustained revenue to support operations if its volunteer program becomes unsustainable.
- Bennett Valley FPD has the ability to seek voter approval for a higher parcel tax schedule.
- Financial management of Windsor, Rincon Valley, and Bennett Valley FPDs is sound and is independently audited on an annual basis.
- The Mountain Volunteer Fire Department provides “on-the-ground” services on behalf of Sonoma County Fire and Emergency Services (County Service Area 40 – Fire Services), and receives training and some funding support from the County. However, the County is encouraging volunteer fire companies to become part of newly-consolidated regional agencies, which can provide support that is tailored to regional needs.
- The County of Sonoma should fairly negotiate a tax exchange agreement that would provide Rincon Valley FPD or a regional agency sufficient funding to at least maintain if not enhance service provision to the Mountain area. Rincon Valley FPD or a regional agency would also have the opportunity to seek voter approval of parcel taxes that could additionally support sustainable service provision.

## **Discussion**

### *Agency Finances*

#### *Windsor and Rincon Valley Fire Protection Districts - Budgeting*

The shared Windsor/Rincon Valley staff prepares annual budgets in the spring for consideration and approval by the Board of Directors of each agency prior to the upcoming fiscal year (July through June). The staff seeks guidance from the Boards, and District customers are able to comment, in successive board meetings prior to budget approval.

#### *Windsor Fire Protection District - Finances*

Windsor FPD paid 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 15 shows historical and projected budgets for Windsor FPD.

**Table 15: Windsor FPD Budget Review**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Revenue</b>	<b>Salaries and Benefits</b>	<b>Operating and Capital Expenditures</b>	<b>Surplus / (Deficit)</b>	<b>Reserves</b>
14-15	\$3,907,956	\$3,401,458	\$883,845	(\$377,347)	\$1,631,365
15-16	\$3,825,156	\$3,232,810	\$780,709	(\$188,363)	\$1,601,091
16-17	\$4,325,316	\$3,490,997	\$497,378	\$336,941	\$1,981,137
17-18*	\$4,643,987	\$3,726,049	\$605,620	\$312,318	\$2,293,454
18-19*	\$4,381,860	\$3,536,212	\$734,173	\$111,475	\$2,404,928
19-20*	\$4,514,130	\$3,404,648	\$986,266	\$123,216	\$2,528,143
20-21*	\$4,434,816	\$3,434,421	\$1,238,687	(\$238,292)	\$2,289,852
21-22*	\$4,399,758	\$3,456,334	\$1,047,954	(\$104,530)	\$2,185,322
22-23*	\$4,403,436	\$3,576,725	\$1,052,578	(\$225,867)	\$1,959,455

\* Reflects budgeted or projected.

Windsor faces several challenges related to sustainable funding:

- Costs are increasing at a rate higher than revenues.
- The District has inadequate staffing when compared to studies conducted in 2006 and does not meet current NFPA standards. Firefighter positions are being funded by temporary grants that do not provide full benefits and require the District to share in a portion of the costs; the grants are set to expire in two years.
- The District faces potential capital costs for building a new station in northern Windsor to meet increasing service needs.
- The District has ongoing vehicle and equipment replacement needs.

Reserves

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

Current reserves amount to approximately \$2,293,454, 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 also 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*

Windsor 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.

#### *Rincon Valley Fire Protection District - Finances*

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

Rincon Valley FPD paid staff are enrolled in the CalPERS retirement system.

Table 16 shows historical and projected budgets for Rincon Valley FPD.

**Table 16: Rincon Valley FPD Budget Review**

Fiscal Year	Revenue	Salaries and Benefits	Operating and Capital Expenditures	Surplus / (Deficit)	Reserves
14-15	\$5,456,292	\$4,157,813	\$1,290,816	\$7,663	\$1,598,700
15-16	\$6,310,424	\$4,461,646	\$1,042,826	\$805,952	\$2,621,859
16-17	\$6,416,137	\$4,200,046	\$1,384,797	\$831,294	\$3,453,153

Fiscal Year	Revenue	Salaries and Benefits	Operating and Capital Expenditures	Surplus / (Deficit)	Reserves
17-18	\$6,909,783	\$4,276,300	\$1,237,163	\$1,396,320	\$4,849,472
18-19*	\$6,160,207	\$4,680,839	\$1,284,663	\$194,705	\$5,044,178
19-20*	\$6,241,627	\$4,590,873	\$2,049,539	(\$398,785)	\$4,645,393
20-21*	\$6,323,590	\$4,845,844	\$1,189,315	\$288,431	\$4,933,823
21-22*	\$6,406,109	\$5,078,721	\$1,555,061	(\$227,673)	\$4,706,150
22-23*	\$6,489,198	\$5,333,025	\$2,178,297	(\$1,022,124)	\$3,684,027

\* Reflects budgeted or projected.

Rincon Valley faces several challenges related to sustainable funding:

- Costs are increasing at a rate higher than revenues.
- The parcel tax for the District does not have an escalation factor, so is diminishing in value over time.
- The District will experience a decline in both property tax and parcel tax revenue due to the loss of residences in the October 2017 fire disaster. The County Assessor has estimated that Rincon Valley will experience a decline in property tax revenue of \$521,800 for Fiscal Year 2018-19. The District estimates that there will be a loss of approximately \$75,000 in parcel tax revenue beginning in 2018-19. (Property tax loss, due to reassessments of damaged or destroyed homes, may be partially offset by higher assessments for properties that are reassessed after a sale).
- The District faces capital costs for upgrading or rebuilding three fire stations. (Issues include mold, ADA compliance, inadequate equipment bays, and substandard living quarters).
- The District has an aging vehicle fleet and will require significant capital funding to upgrade vehicles within the next five years.

#### Reserves

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

Current reserves amount to approximately \$4,849,472, and are intended for capital expenditures and operational deficits, as needed. Rincon Valley maintains a capital improvement fund reserve account.

#### *Financial Policies*

Rincon Valley 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.

#### *Bennett Valley Fire Protection District - Finances*

Bennett Valley FPD 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 customers are able to comment, in successive board meetings prior to budget approval.

Bennett Valley FPD paid staff are enrolled in the CalPERS retirement system.

Table 17 shows historical and projected budgets for Bennett Valley FPD.

**Table 17: Bennett Valley FPD Budget Review**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Revenue</b>	<b>Salaries and Benefits</b>	<b>Operating and Capital Expenditures</b>	<b>Deficit</b>
13-14	\$795,481	\$424,520	\$280,977	\$89,984
14-15	\$960,304	\$551,339	\$311,368	\$97,597
15-16	\$951,807	\$534,771	\$271,785	\$145,251
16-17	\$989,297	\$492,413	\$336,637	\$160,247
17-18*	\$874,597	\$501,600	\$372,997	\$0

*\* Reflects budgeted or projected.*

The Bennett Valley FPD is projecting that within about a five-year timeframe it will reach a financial position where vehicle replacements, equipment replacements, equipment and building maintenance, or building improvements will no longer be feasible. The board has discussed this issue, and has noted that staffing cuts may be the only other viable means to address a coming financial shortfall.

#### *Reserves*

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

Current reserves amount to approximately \$822,077, and are intended for capital expenditures and operational deficits, as needed. Bennett Valley maintains a five-year “capital plan”, which predicts major expenses such as vehicle and equipment replacements. Bennett Valley assigns a nominal portion of reserves to capital improvements.

#### *Financial Policies*

Bennett Valley 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.

#### *Mountain Volunteer Fire Department - Finances*

The Mountain Volunteer Fire Department relies on donations from local residents and financial and administrative support from County Fire and Emergency Services.

### **FINANCIAL OPTIONS FOR SUBJECT AGENCIES**

The following sections describe options for the subject agencies to increase revenues and decrease costs, either as stand-alone agencies or through a regional consolidation program.

#### **Revenue Sources**

The following section describes revenue source options for the subject agencies.

#### *Property Tax*

Property tax revenues are the largest revenue source for fire protection districts, but there is considerable variance in the distribution of property tax revenue to local government agencies.

Districts that were formed prior to the passage of Proposition 13 were allocated post-Proposition 13 property tax revenues on a pro-rata basis. For example, if a district received ten percent of the property tax revenue within a tax rate area prior to 1978, then it would receive ten percent of the reduced, post-Proposition 13 tax revenue.

Districts formed after Proposition 13 receive a property tax allocation based on a negotiation with other local agencies (usually the County but sometimes a city or other local agency).

While there may be many tax rate areas underlying a district's territory, with varied tax allocation rates, the average property tax allocation rate shows the diversity in funding levels for fire protection districts (Figure 18).

The other primary factor in determining the actual tax revenue allocated to a given district is the property tax "base" – the value of land and improvements that are being assessed property taxes.

Factors that affect the property tax base in a given area include:

- Type of development (i.e. residential, commercial, etc).
- Rate of growth of development
- Property turnover, resulting in reassessment of value
- Proportion of property removed from tax rolls (e.g. property purchased for open space preservation or public use)
- Reassessments due to a decline in property values (e.g. housing market declines, loss of structures due to disaster)

These factors can prove to be substantially impactful for districts serving predominantly rural communities, where development densities are low and substantial land may be removed from property tax rolls for public uses.

Figure 18: Property Tax Rates for Sonoma County Fire Protection Districts

District	Percentage of Property Tax
Windsor	3.37%
CSA 40 – Mountain VFD	3.5%
CSA 40 – Range for VFDs	3.0 to 4.2 %
Bodega Bay	3.90%
Geyserville	4.36%
Schell Vista	4.37%
Cloverdale	4.44%

Gold Ridge	4.89%
Graton	6.39%
Bennett Valley	8.22%
Rincon Valley	8.23%
Kenwood	9.01%
Timber Cove	10.41%
Glen Ellen	10.97%
Rancho Adobe	11.04%
Forestville	11.89%
Russian River	12.23%
Monte Rio	12.56%
<b>Median</b>	<b>8.23%</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>7.89%</b>

#### *Adjusting Property Tax Allocation Rates*

Theoretically, and practically, property tax allocation rates can be changed. One public agency can “cede” a portion of its property tax allocation to another. This happens quite regularly when a city or special district forms, or otherwise annexes territory. In these cases, the agency ceding a portion of its tax allocation is almost always the County.

(In Sonoma County, a Master Tax Exchange Agreement governs allocations when districts are formed or annexations occur, obviating the need for individual negotiations).

Ceding a tax allocation, when there is no city or district formation or no annexation of territory, has not occurred in Sonoma County to our knowledge. It is conceivable that the County or a city might be amenable to a tax exchange agreement with a special district for reasons other than a reorganization.

#### *Direct County Contributions*

As part of a negotiation between an agency proposing to annex CSA 40 – Fire Services territory, the County may consider making one-time financial contributions (beyond property tax exchanges) to address specific deficiencies, such as necessary facility improvements or vehicle replacements.

#### *Special Taxes*

Special districts have the authority to seek tax revenue directly from landowners within their territory through special taxes. Special taxes are subject to voter approval; for special districts a two-thirds-plus-one hurdle is required to enact a tax.

#### *Parcel Taxes*

Parcel taxes can be used to raise general revenue and are generally assessed and collected by the County on behalf of agencies through property tax bills. Parcel tax measures may or may not have a “sunset” date and may or may not include an escalation mechanism.

These taxes can be structured on a “flat rate” basis, where every parcel (or every parcel of a given type – e.g. developed or undeveloped) is assessed the same tax.

For fire protection districts, parcel taxes are often structured on a “unit of risk” basis, which differentiates tax rates based on a set of factors that might include building type or size.

#### *Mello-Roos Taxes*

Mello-Roos taxes are enacted to pay for a specific project or improvement, i.e. construction of a new firehouse. In effect, they have the same characteristics as a bond, with a repayment schedule and a sunset date.

#### *Transient Occupancy Tax*

A Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) is usually assessed by cities and counties to travelers when they rent accommodations or lodging for shorter than a designated period. It is typically understood that TOT taxes are intended to help municipalities pay for the impacts caused by transient populations.



In Sonoma County, some fire protection districts assert that a significant portion of their call volume comes from transients and that TOT taxes should be directed to them by municipalities to pay for this impact on service provision. The County has directed some TOT revenue to the fire and emergency service agencies in the County by taking responsibility for paying central emergency dispatch system costs, obviating assessments for fire districts.

It is unclear whether the County would entertain further redirection of TOT revenue to fire agencies generally or for districts that have disproportionate impacts from transients requiring services.

#### *Contract for Service*

Fire and emergency service agencies have the opportunity to enter into contracts to provide services to neighboring agencies. Nominally, these arrangements do not provide revenue above and beyond the cost of providing services, but they could provide an agency with an opportunity to allocate leadership and administrative costs over a broader "base."

In accordance with state law, LAFCO has the responsibility to review and authorize fire service contracts under specific conditions.

#### *County-wide Fire and EMS Sales Tax*

There has been discussion that the County may pursue a sales tax measure to support fire and emergency service agencies. It is unclear what level of funding the measure might raise, if approved by voters, or how the funding would be allocated to agencies in the County.

### **Revenue Source Options for Subject Agencies**

#### *Windsor FPD*

The Windsor Fire Protection District was formed in 1986, after the passage of Proposition 13. Property tax allocations for the District were determined at formation, and, as shown in Figure 18, the District has the lowest average property tax allocation in the County.

Windsor FPD does have a well-structured 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 also features an escalation factor. (The District did not apply the escalation factor for many years but has "trued up" parcel tax rates to reflect escalation, and now raises rates according to the factor every year).

Windsor's parcel tax structure could be considered ideal, but it is also set at a fairly high level. Annual parcel taxes for homes are generally in the \$150 to \$180 range depending on house size.

Given this revenue structure, the District might best raise additional revenue through an adjustment of its property tax allocation rate accommodated by the Town of Windsor or the County, or both.

An increase to parcel tax rates would appear a less-promising avenue for raising revenue, given that the current tax is at the high-end of parcel taxes for fire districts in the county and would necessitate the District having three special tax calculation line items on property owners' tax bills. Furthermore, the existing square footage-based tax measure narrowly passed in 2006, after the District reduced the amount of the tax it was seeking by roughly half in response to voter polling feedback.

The District would likely find it difficult to seek an ongoing stream of TOT revenue from the County given the low level of transient activity and accordant revenue in the unincorporated territory it serves. The Town of Windsor likely collects more TOT revenue than the County does (within the District territory) and might therefore consider using that source of revenue to support the District.

#### *Rincon Valley FPD*

Rincon Valley has a property tax allocation rate that is exactly at the median (and above the average) for fire districts in the County. The District also has a parcel tax that is based on units of risk, but does not include an inflation adjustment mechanism. (Revenues from the measure have therefore declined in real value by 91% since the measure was passed in 2000).

Rincon's parcel tax is also very low, with residential owners assessed a flat rate of \$36 per year.

Perhaps the best option for Rincon Valley to raise revenue would be to increase its parcel tax, and to add an inflation escalation mechanism. The District could pursue a new parcel tax measure but would need to secure voter approval.

Alternately, the District could consolidate with Windsor FPD, should Sonoma LAFCO approve a reorganization involving dissolution of the Rincon Valley Fire Protection District and annexation of Rincon's territory to Windsor FPD. As part of the action, Windsor's two parcel taxes would be extended to the territory that had been in Rincon FPD. Voters within Rincon Valley FPD would have the opportunity to protest LAFCO's determination.

By adopting Windsor's parcel tax schedule, the Rincon Valley area would generate approximately \$1,978,000 in additional annual revenue.

The District also faces the need to substantially upgrade or outright rebuild several stations and might consider seeking voter approval for a Mello-Roos tax to support that activity.

Rincon Valley perhaps has few grounds for seeking either a property tax allocation adjustment or TOT allocation from the County, given that the current property tax

allocation is at the median for fire agencies and there is little transient activity and TOT collection in its territory.

#### *Bennett Valley FPD*

Bennett Valley has a property tax allocation just under the median for fire agencies in the County and slightly above the average rate. The rate for Bennett Valley is comparable to that for Rincon Valley.

In 2002, the residents of the District approved a parcel tax which is based on “units of risk.” A single family home is judged to have four units of risk; each unit is charged at \$45 per year, yielding a \$180 tax for a single family home. Homes with accessory dwelling units have more units of risk, and therefore pay higher taxes.

Similar to Rincon Valley, Bennett Valley perhaps has few grounds for seeking either a property tax allocation adjustment or TOT allocation from the County, given that the current property tax allocation is near the median for fire agencies and there is little transient activity and TOT collection in its territory.

#### *Mountain VFD*

The Mountain Volunteer Fire Department is indirectly supported by property tax revenue that is collected for County Service Area 40. If the Mountain territory were to be subsumed by Rincon Valley FPD or a broader regional agency, a portion or all of the property tax collected for fire services within the territory could be transferred to Rincon Valley or the regional agency.

Property tax allocations to CSA 40 from the Mountain VFD area are approximately \$40,000 per year.

Further, there are no parcel taxes collected within CSA 40. If the territory were annexed to an agency with a parcel tax, that tax could be applied to property owners in the area, raising further revenue to support service delivery to the Mountain territory. If Windsor FPD’s parcel tax were applied to the Mountain VFD territory, it would generate on the order of \$20,000 per year.

(For context, Windsor/Rincon recently responded to a request from County Fire and Emergency Services to provide an estimate of the cost to serve the Mountain VFD territory. The “bid”, included the cost of staffing the Mountain station with a firefighter during weekday daytime hours, was approximately \$250,000 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 the subject agencies, some of these efficiencies are possible, but are unlikely to deliver anything but modest cost savings.

Perhaps the primary advantage of a regional consolidation would be to extend Windsor/Rincon's leadership and administrative functions to Mountain and Bennett Valley. This would not generate any cost savings at Mountain but would obviate the need for Bennett Valley to maintain a contract for leadership and administrative support. (The contract cost is approximately \$102,000 per year).

Operationally, it is unclear if a regional district would result in changes to station locations or staffing of those stations that would result in cost savings. However, leadership of a regional district would have the potential opportunity to re-evaluate station locations when considering a new station in northern Windsor and refurbishment or replacement of Rincon Valley facilities.

Lastly, a combined district would certainly have the opportunity to re-evaluate equipment needs, as it is often the case that districts 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 three fire districts.

**DETERMINATION 5. SHARED SERVICES AND FACILITIES**

Status of, and opportunities for, shared facilities.

	YES	MAYBE	NO
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?		Maybe	

**Determinations**

- Should the subject agencies reorganize and consolidate, modest reductions in total administrative and leadership costs could be realized.
- Although not analyzed in this report, a consolidated agency might realize modest reductions in fleet costs by eliminating duplicative equipment.

**Discussion**

The four subject agencies manage 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.

The three fire protection districts are insured through the Fire Agencies Insurance Risk Authority (FAIRA), and are members 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 Windsor and Rincon Valley, and Bennett Valley is presented in Tables 19 and 20 (Windsor and Rincon Valley are reviewed together given their shared administration).

**Table 19: Coordination Best Practices – Windsor and Rincon Valley Fire Protection Districts**

Best Practice	Observation and findings
The Districts participate in the Redwood Empire Dispatch Communications Authority (REDCOM)	Yes
The Districts have mutual aid agreements with other agencies.	Yes
The Districts contract for accounting and audit services with other districts or the County.	No. Each district manages finances independently.
The Districts participate with other districts or the County for equipment purchasing or leasing.	Yes
The Districts participate in joint insurance programs.	Yes
The Districts have an “Amador Contract” with CalFire.	No
The Districts participate in joint training with other districts or the County.	Yes
The Districts participate with another district or the County for joint administration services.	Yes. Windsor and Rincon Valley FPDs currently share administrative services.
The Districts share facilities with other districts.	No. In the event of a region-wide reorganization, there may be opportunities to evaluate the status and staffing of fire stations.
The Districts share a fire chief or other staff with another District.	Yes. Windsor and Rincon Valley FPDs share a chief and administrative staff.
The Districts participate in joint recruitment with other districts.	Not at this time.

**Table 20: Coordination Best Practices – Bennett Valley Fire Protection District**

Best Practice	Observation and findings
The District participates in the Redwood Empire Dispatch Communications Authority (REDCOM)	Yes

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**SONOMA LAFCO MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW/SPHERE OF INFLUENCE STUDY**

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Best Practice	Observation and findings
The District has mutual aid agreements with other agencies.	Yes
The District contracts for accounting and audit services with other districts or the County.	Yes. The Gold Ridge Fire Protection District provides accounting services under contract, and auditing services are secured under contract.
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.	Yes
The District participates with another district or the County for joint administration services.	Yes
The District shares facilities with other districts.	No. In the event of a region-wide reorganization, there may be opportunities to evaluate the status and staffing of fire stations.
The District shares a fire chief or other staff with another District.	Yes. Bennett Valley and Gold Ridge FPDs share a chief and administrative staff.
The District participates in joint recruitment with other districts.	Not at this time.

### *REGIONAL AGENCY CONSOLIDATION*

All of the subject agencies have undertaken discussions regarding consolidation.

LAFCO staff continue to monitor fire and emergency services agency consolidation discussions throughout the County and believe that Region 7 remains at the forefront of possible action in the near term, in part due to the existing operational coordination between Windsor and Rincon Valley FPDs.

A discussion of recommended regional consolidation is included in the sphere of influence amendment portion of this report.

### *POTENTIAL COST SAVINGS FROM CONSOLIDATION*

Should the four subject agencies consolidate in the future, modest cost savings would accrue from further sharing of leadership and administration personnel and potentially from vehicle fleet reductions.

Bennett Valley FPD currently secures leadership and administrative services from Gold Ridge Fire Protection District at a cost of just over \$100,000 annually. Should Bennett Valley become part of a regional consolidation program, it is likely that leadership and administrative staff at Windsor/Rincon Valley could absorb these functions at no cost.

If Mountain VFD became part of a regional consolidation program, there would be a benefit of securing leadership and administrative services from Windsor/Rincon Valley, with attendant cost savings accruing to CSA 40 from a reduction in administrative support. (CSA 40 is seeking to “wind down” support services to volunteer fire companies in the County by supporting annexation of territory to fire protection districts or contracted support service from fire protection districts).

It should be reiterated, however, that the Mountain fire station is suitable only for volunteer staffing – if staff were assigned to the facility, it would require significant upgrades.

While Windsor/Rincon Valley do not have redundant vehicles or other equipment, there may be a modest opportunity to reduce inventories, particularly of specialized vehicles and equipment, if Bennett Valley and Mountain joined a regional consolidation program.



**DETERMINATION 6. ACCOUNTABILITY, STRUCTURE AND EFFICIENCIES**

Accountability for community service needs, including governmental structure and operational efficiencies

	YES	MAYBE	NO
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?			No
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?			No

**Determinations**

- The three subject fire protection districts are 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.
- The three subject fire protection districts undertake annual independent financial and business practice audits and are in compliance with financial regulations and recommended practices.
- The subject agencies are 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 subject fire protection districts are in compliance with all public noticing requirements for board meetings. There have been no noted Brown Act violations by the district directors.

The subject districts make files available to the general public when requested, and pertinent files for Windsor and Rincon Valley FPDs are available on the district web sites. The Bennett Valley FPD web site is not updated with current relevant documents.

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

The subject districts undergo annual financial audits and change auditors regularly.

District staffs and board members have supported discussions regarding operational and governance options in Region 7, up to and including a region-wide reorganization and consolidation of fire and emergency service agencies.

While this report focuses on and supports a consolidation of the subject agencies, there may be opportunities to partner contractually with the City of Santa Rosa to capture operational efficiencies.

For example, Rincon Valley (or a consolidated regional agency) and the City of Santa Rosa could consider a joint station plan in southern Santa Rosa and could consider codifying a mutual aid agreement that recognizes the imbalance of support between the two agencies that will likely continue if the future.

### **SPHERE OF INFLUENCE STUDY**

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The Municipal Service Review identifies and supports the need to change the subject agency Spheres of Influence. Therefore, SOI determinations are presented in this section of the report to support the recommended amendments.

The existing Spheres of Influence for the three fire protection districts are contiguous with their boundaries. Staff is recommending that the Commission consider amending Windsor FPD's sphere to include the territory served by Rincon Valley FPD, Mountain VFD, and Bennett Valley FPD. Rincon Valley and Bennett Valley would have their spheres set to "zero."

Please note that the Commission does not have an adopted policy regarding a "zero" sphere designation, but that term can be defined as: a transitional sphere of influence designation assigned to a local agency indicating that the public service responsibility and functions of the agency should ultimately be abandoned or re-allocated to another government agency. (Staff is not recommending changes to the SOI for CSA 40, considering both the boundaries and sphere of the Area as coterminous with any areas of the County not served by another fire and emergency services agency or city fire department).

This recommendation is not intended to preclude any other regional consolidation proposals that might involve the subject agencies, but rather to acknowledge that consolidation of these agencies is a logical step towards moving fire and emergency service provision to a regional provider model in the central portion of the County. Staff would note that other agencies that might be considered for a consolidation program in the central county include:

- The City of Healdsburg. The City might consider whether there are potential cost savings and operational efficiencies from transitioning its fire department to a regional agency. If such a transition were made, it would likely occur by joining a central county agency rather than the rural regional agency forming in Region 6 (Geyserville and Cloverdale Fire Protection Districts and CSA 40 territories).
- County Service Area 40 – Fire Services (Sotoyome and Knights Valley Volunteer Fire Companies). Both of these areas are being considered for inclusion in a regional agency in the north-County (Region 6) centered on the Geyserville Fire Protection District. The Knights Valley VFD territory has been included in Geyserville's sphere of influence and will be considered for annexation in near future, and the District has expressed a desire to annex additional territory including the Sotoyome VFC and Geysers areas.
- Forestville and Graton Fire Protection Districts. If these districts were considered for a regional consolidation program, it is unclear at this time whether they would be better situated with a central county agency or a Russian River/West County agency.

- The City of Sebastopol and Gold Ridge Fire Protection District. There are several options to consider for these agencies should they consider joining a regional consolidation program. The City could become part of a central county agency or an agency formed in Region 8. Gold Ridge FPD could conceivably be included in a central county agency (or perhaps a portion of the District defined by the Local Responsibility Area) or could be included in a Region 8 agency.
- The City of Rohnert Park. It appears highly unlikely that the City would ever consider joining a regional agency for fire protection services, particularly because it currently operates a public safety department combining police and fire and emergency services.
- Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District. Rancho Adobe could be a candidate for joining either a central county agency or a regional agency formed in Region 9. The District is currently contracting with the City of Petaluma in Region 9 for leadership and administrative services.
- Glen Ellen and Kenwood Fire Protection Districts. These districts have expressed an interest for joining a regional agency in the Sonoma Valley (Region 3). Glen Ellen FPD is currently contracting for comprehensive services from Valley of the Moon Fire Protection District (operating as the Sonoma Valley Fire Protection Authority).
- A newly-formed regional fire and emergency services district encompassing fire protection districts and CSA 40 territory in the West County. LAFCO has not yet completed an analysis of what agencies might be included in such a district, but a “big bang” movement to form a much larger central and west county regional entity could be considered. At this time, staff considers an effort of that scope to be premature.

From staff’s perspective, the most apt additions to a central county regional fire and emergency services agency in the near term would be the City of Healdsburg followed by the City of Sebastopol and the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District. Staff believes it likely that the Forestville and Graton Fire Protection Districts are candidates for inclusion in a West County regional agency. In the long term, a central county agency formed from the consolidation of the four subject agencies could be expanded to include other neighboring regions.

## **Benefits of Regional Consolidation**

### ***Financial***

If the Commission concurs with the recommended sphere of influence amendments, Windsor FPD would be eligible to seek annexation of the territories now served by the other three agencies.

If those annexations were approved by the Commission and survive the voter and landowner protest proceeding, the parcel tax rates of Windsor would be applied to the annexed territories. This would raise significant revenue from the Rincon Valley FPD territory, modest revenue from the Mountain VFD territory (due to the modest number of parcels in the territory), and perhaps a nominal amount of revenue from the Bennett Valley FPD territory (because Bennett Valley has a parcel tax rate essentially comparable to Windsor's).

(The residents of the three fire protection districts had been subject to a parcel tax levied by the state to support CALFIRE, which was \$117.33 annually. Residents in Mountain VFD area were assessed \$152.33 annually. This tax has been rescinded, and local fire agencies could make the case that residents support tax measures at a similar rate to support local service provision).

Windsor FPD is also seeking a negotiated increase in its property tax allocation rate with the Town of Windsor and may seek an increase from the County of Sonoma for the unincorporated territory the District serves. Windsor FPD might also seek dispensation from the County for services provided to the Sonoma County Airport.

Windsor FPD has indicated that it would seek annexation of the Mountain VFD territory (CSA 40) only if a suitable tax exchange agreement could be negotiated with the County. A tax exchange agreement might include addressing the need to retrofit and upgrade the Mountain fire station. The revenue that would be generated from the applied parcel tax in the Mountain territory should be factored into a tax exchange agreement negotiation.

Staff notes that the area served by the Mountain Volunteer Fire Department generates just over \$40,000 in annual property tax revenue devoted to fire and emergency services (the revenue goes to CSA 40 – Fire Services). Application of Windsor FPD's parcel tax to the territory would likely generate under \$20,000 in annual revenue.

Windsor FPD responded to a request from County Fire and Emergency Services to cover the Mountain VFD territory and indicated an annual cost of \$250,000 for services, which indicates a large gap between revenue and proposed costs. (The bid did not include costs for upgrading the Mountain VFD station to make it suitable for staff).

Annexing the Bennett Valley FPD territory into a regional agency could produce direct cost savings on the order of \$100,000 annually if the regional agency could provide leadership and administrative support services with existing staff.

### ***Operational***

The Windsor and Rincon Valley FPD partnership has resulted in a capable, professional leadership and administrative operation, and the Mountain VFD and Bennett Valley FPD would benefit from being functionally within that organization.

Three of the four subject agencies have already begun a joint program to recruit and train volunteers, and Bennett Valley would benefit from being part of that effort.

There are two other operational benefits of a regional consolidation that are worth noting:

- A larger regional operation may offer more opportunities for career advancement for volunteers, apprentices, and paid professionals. A consolidated agency would be in a better position to add paid staff in the future (subject to funding), and would provide a broader leadership and administrative organization offering better opportunities for career movement.
- Three of the subject agencies (Windsor, Rincon Valley, and Bennett Valley) have extensive mutual aid interactions with the City of Santa Rosa, as they all border the City. There is some tension between the City and at least one of the subject agencies with regard to whether the contractual mutual aid agreement is financially equitable. While a consolidation of the three agencies would not “solve” this issue, it would provide the basis for a negotiation between just two parties rather than potentially four. Perhaps more importantly, mutual aid coordination between the City of Santa Rosa and a single surrounding regional agency would likely be superior than the present circumstances.

## POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT SOI DETERMINATIONS

## SOI DETERMINATION 1. NEED FOR PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

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

	YES	MAYBE	NO
a. Would the SOI conflict with the Commission's goal to increase efficiency and conservation of resources by providing essential services within a framework of controlled growth?			No
b. Would the SOI expand services that could be better provided by a city or another agency?		Maybe	
c. Does the SOI represent premature inducement of growth or facilitate conversion of agriculture or open space lands?			No
d. Are there any areas that should be removed from the SOI because existing circumstances make development unlikely, there is not sufficient demand to support it or important open space/prime agricultural land should be removed from urbanization?			No
e. Have any agency commitments been predicated on expanding the agency's SOI such as roadway projects, shopping centers, educational facilities, economic development or acquisition of parks and open space?			No

## Determinations

- The recommended sphere of influence amendments, if followed by a regional consolidation through annexations, would provide modest operational and cost efficiencies, though these efficiencies would not ensure the continued viability of the new agency.
- A regional consolidation would, **if appropriately financed** through a variety of methods, ensure continued service levels for three of the subject agencies, and potentially superior services for the fourth (Mountain VFD). It could also address significant service needs, including new or retrofitted stations for three subject agencies (Windsor and Rincon Valley FPDs and Mountain VFD), new apparatus

(a ladder truck to serve new development in the airport area), and paid staffing positions (continued apprentice positions, staffing at Mountain).

## **Discussion**

The financial and operational advantages of a consolidated, regional fire and emergency services agency comprised of the territories of the four subject agencies have been outlined in the opening portion of this section of the report.

It is worth reiterating that while a regional agency would realize some modest cost savings as well as a significant revenue increase, in combination these benefits will not be sufficient to safeguard existing levels of service provision or to address significant staffing and infrastructure costs that need to be determined to ensure ongoing sustainability of the subject agencies separately or in aggregate.

Regardless of whether the subject agencies petition LAFCO for reorganization into a regional entity, other sources of additional revenue must be secured to ensure ongoing viability of service provision in the region. Nevertheless, staff is recommending that the spheres of influence of the subject agencies be amended to allow for a regional reorganization.



**SOI DETERMINATION 2. 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.

	YES	MAYBE	NO
a. Are there any issues regarding water availability for the proposed SOI territory?			No
b. Are there any issues regarding the agency's willingness and ability to extend services?			No
c. Are there any issues with the agency's ability to maintain an adequate level of service currently and/or with future extension of services per the proposed SOI?	Yes		

**Determinations**

- The Windsor and Rincon Valley FPDs are supportive of seeking an immediate consolidation pending approval of the recommended sphere of influence amendments by the Commission, albeit recognition of the need to seek revenues beyond the extension of Windsor's parcel tax structure to the Rincon Valley area.
- Windsor and Rincon Valley FPDs are open and willing to adding the Mountain VFD to a regional agency if a suitable tax exchange agreement can be negotiated with the County. That agreement could encompass a property tax exchange (potentially including an increase in the property tax allocation rate), a contribution for station improvements and staffing increases, and a recognition of the revenue from application of Windsor's parcel tax structure to the area.
- While there is no apparent predisposition for Bennett Valley FPD to join a regional agency encompassing the four subject agencies, there are operational benefits and potentially modest cost savings that could be achieved. Furthermore, Bennett Valley FPD is less suited for inclusion in any other potential regional agency.

**Discussion**

The boards of the Windsor and Rincon Valley Fire Protection Districts have actively considered reorganization, and operated the district under a joint powers agreement

for many years. Although the joint powers agreement has been terminated, the two districts continue to conduct board meetings together, with separate proceedings but opportunities for intra-district discussion.

Both boards are supportive of pursuing a reorganization subsequent to an amendment of their respective spheres of influence.

Windsor and Rincon Valley FPDs are also open to taking on service responsibility for the CSA 40 territory now covered by the Mountain VFD, predicated on a reasonable financial agreement with the County that recognizes the need for paid staffing and facility improvements. The volunteers and association members of Mountain VFD recognize the service and infrastructure improvement needs, and have given an indication that they are open to a reorganization that would include the territory in a regionally-consolidated agency.

It is not apparent that the Bennett Valley FPD board is actively considering joining a regional consolidation effort at this time, but from a regional perspective, staff concludes that the District is best positioned to join the other three subject agencies rather than any other new regional agency.

As noted in previous sections of this report, the subject agencies are all likely to experience difficulty in maintaining existing levels of service provision, without regard to whether regional consolidation is pursued or not.