

**MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW
AND SPHERE OF INFLUENCE STUDY
FOR
SONOMA COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT
RANCHO ADOBE FIRE PROTECTION
DISTRICT
AND
COUNTY OF SONOMA, COUNTY SERVICE
AREA 40 – FIRE SERVICES**

**Sonoma Local Agency Formation Commission
November 2025**

PUBLIC REVIEW DRAFT

Project Name: Municipal Service Review and Sphere of Influence Study for Sonoma County Fire District, Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District, and County Service Area 40 – Fire Services

Conducted By: Sonoma Local Agency Formation Commission
111 Santa Rosa Avenue, Ste. 240
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Subject Agencies: Sonoma County Fire District
Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District
County Service Area 40 – Fire Service

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Table of Contents

Municipal Service Review: Scope and Report Format..... 3

Municipal Service Review: Summary Determinations 7

Municipal Service Review: Sonoma County Fire District 18

Municipal Service Review: Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District..... 30

Municipal Service Review: County Service Area 40 - Fire Services

Sphere of Influence Study

MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW: SCOPE AND REPORT FORMAT

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF LAFCO

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

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

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

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

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

PURPOSE OF A MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW

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

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

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

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

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

PURPOSE OF A SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

SCOPE OF STUDY

Note Regarding Terminology

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

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

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

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

ORGANIZATION OF STUDY

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

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

Each agency MSR Study includes:

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

AFFECTED AGENCIES

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

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

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

The affected local agencies for this study are:

- County of Sonoma (various departments and dependent districts)
- Sonoma Resource Conservation District
- Marin/Sonoma Mosquito and Vector Control District
- Sonoma Community College District
- CAL FIRE

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

- Coastal Valleys EMS Agency

MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW: SUMMARY DETERMINATIONS

Growth and Population Projections

Determinations

- **Although there continues to be modest population growth in the territories served by the two fire protection districts and CSA 40, subject agencies point to an array of other factors driving increased call volumes.**
- **These factors include an aging population, a shift to year-round use of homes instead of seasonal or part-time use, an increase in the homeless population, and a dramatic increase in tourist visitors to the region.**
- **Similarly, agencies do not consider land use development a driver of call volume.**

Discussion

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

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

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

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

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

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

Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities

Determinations

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

Discussion

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

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

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

Capacity and Adequacy of Public Facilities and Services

Determinations

- **Both Districts have stabilized funding and staffing through recent increases in revenues, which have accrued through agency reorganizations for Sonoma County Fire, and receipts from a County-wide sales tax that funds fire service agencies.**
- **While a cursory review of response time statistics indicate that subject agencies are meeting National Fire Protection Association guidelines, the statistics are rudimentary and can obscure significant service level deficiencies.**
- **Both agencies have deficient facilities; some revenue from the sales tax measure is intended to help fund improvements or outright facility replacements.**

Discussion

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

Staffing

Rancho Adobe Fire has been able to maintain staffing levels in recent years. Sonoma County Fire has grown significantly through a series of reorganizations that greatly expanded its territory and scope of operations.

- For Sonoma County FD, property tax revenue, special (parcel) tax revenue, and Measure H funding will support the District's wider operations.
- For Rancho Adobe FD, a voter-approved increase in a parcel tax (with an annual adjustment mechanism), and a Measure H funding allocation have stabilized financial resources.
- County Service Area 40 – Fire Services has only three “rump” territories remaining after a major reorganization with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District in 2023. These include “IRP Areas” 56 (Armstrong Woods and Austin Creek), 51 (area due north of Forestville), and about two thirds of the 45 county islands embedded within the City of Santa Rosa. The IRP areas are in practice served by Sonoma County Fire; the City of Santa Rosa serves the island territories by arrangement with the County and Sonoma County Fire District.

The two subject districts rely on paid professional staffing and do not have volunteer programs.

Training

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

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

The Federal government recommends that all active firefighters undertake training for 20 hours per month. The subject agencies typically arrange training programs in house or occasionally in partnership with neighboring agencies.

Call Volumes

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

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

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

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

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

The following chart summarizes historical call volumes for 2020 through 2024 for the subject agencies.

Response Times

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

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

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

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

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

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

Similarly, the statistics simply indicate how long it took to respond to a call and not whether appropriate resources were dispatched.

Emergency Medical Service

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

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

Agencies provide emergency medical services in a variety of ways:

Basic Life Support

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

Rancho Adobe Fire provides BLS service. As part of a proposal to District citizens for a property tax rate increase, the District indicated it would seek to provide Advanced Life Support service (described below).

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

Advanced Life Support/Paramedics

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

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

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

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

Sonoma County Fire District has been awarded the contract to provide ALS/Ambulance services within the Exclusive Operating Area, which includes the central portion of the County centered on the City of Santa Rosa. The District also provides ALS/Ambulance services centered on Bodega Bay and Guerneville. These ambulance territories came to the District by way of agency reorganizations.

Ambulance (Transport) Service

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

Sonoma County Fire runs its own ALS/Ambulance operation.

Facilities

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

Some of these facilities are substandard for their current use, or otherwise require significant upgrades or outright replacement.

Perhaps only two of the subject agency’s stations are fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). While many facilities can accommodate

disabled persons in their public areas (notably meeting rooms that are used for board meetings), a variety of non-compliance issues are evident. (By law, all areas of publicly-owned facilities, which for fire stations includes crew quarters, must be compliant.)

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

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

Table 1 – Facility Inventory

Agency - Facility	Suited for Staff	Upgrade Needed for Staff	Seismic Issues	Rebuild Indicated	Notes
Rancho Adobe – Penngrove (Main)	Yes	No	No	No	
Rancho Adobe - Cotati	Yes	No	No	No	
Rancho Cotati – Liberty Road	No	No	Maybe	Yes	Requires upgrade/replacement
Sonoma County Fire – Station 1, Windsor East (Headquarters)	Yes	No	No	No	
Sonoma County Fire – Station 2, Larkfield	Yes	No	No	No	Poor condition
Sonoma County Fire – Station 3, Windsor West	Yes	No	No	No	
Sonoma County Fire – Station 4, Todd Road	No	No	No	No	Poor condition
Sonoma County Fire – Station 5, Rincon Valley	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Poor condition
Sonoma County Fire – Station 6, Mountain	Yes	No	No	No	Poor condition

Sonoma County Fire – Station 7, Forestville	Yes	No	No	No	
Sonoma County Fire – Station 8, Bennet Valley	Yes	No	No	No	
Sonoma County Fire – Station 9, Guerneville	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Very poor condition
Sonoma County Fire – Station 10, Bodega Bay	Yes	No	No	No	
Sonoma County Fire – Alpine Station	No	No	No	No	

Equipment

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

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

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

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

Subject agencies do not have a dedicated capital reserve fund for equipment.

Financial Ability to Provide Service

Determinations

- **Both of the subject agencies are conducting multi-year financial forecasting.**
- **While some facilities (stations) are in reasonable condition and fit for purpose, there has been little evaluation of capital funding needs for ADA compliance, seismic retrofitting, other facility upgrades (e.g. engine bay ventilation systems and/or crew quarters), or outright facility rebuilds.**
- **Two of the facilities (one for each agency) is nearby to stations of neighboring agencies, and should be considered as opportunities for developing shared stations.**

Discussion

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

There are four general categories of rising expenses:

- To increase salaries and benefits for career firefighters.
- Supplies, equipment maintenance, and equipment replacement costs.
- Facility maintenance and replacement costs.
- Vehicle replacement.

Governance and Accountability

Determinations

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

Discussion

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

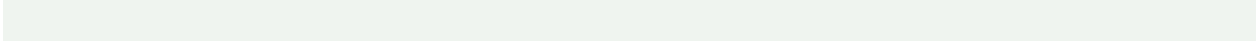
Opportunity for Shared Services

Determinations

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

Discussion

A discussion of the opportunities for combining the subject agencies is included in the Sphere of Influence study portion of this report.



MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW: SONOMA COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT

OVERVIEW

The Sonoma County Fire District ("Sonoma County FD") serves 250 square miles of territory generally surrounding Santa Rosa and Rohnert Park to the east west and north, serving the Town of Windsor and unincorporated areas extending to the lower Russian River communities of Forestville and Guerneville, as well as the coastal region of Bodega Bay.

The District has its genesis in a reorganization that included three fire protection districts and one volunteer fire company in 2019. The District then added the Forestville, Russian River, and Bodega Bay Fire Protection Districts in subsequent reorganizations.

Sonoma County FD now serves a population of about 75,000 residents within district boundaries encompassing territory of 195square miles. The District was also awarded the contract to provide ambulance/advanced life support services in what is called the "exclusive operating area" in the County, which covers the central area centered on Santa Rosa.

The District is funded with property tax revenue, through a special (parcel) tax, and through an ongoing allocation of supplemental funding from the County. The District also receives funding from Measure H (a sales tax), which voters approved in March 2024.

SIGNIFICANT MSR DETERMINATIONS

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

DETERMINATION 1. GROWTH AND POPULATION

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

Determinations

- **The communities served by Sonoma County Fire District will continue to experience minimal development and population growth due to land use policies enacted by the County of Sonoma and managed by Permit Sonoma, and by the Town of Windsor and its Planning Department.**

Discussion

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

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

Resident Population

The areas served by the District have approximately 75,000 residents.

Although the County and the Town of Windsor are working to increase housing supply, the County population as a whole has declined in each of the past five years.

Overall Effect

Sonoma County Fire District serves rural residential communities and the Town of Windsor. Population growth will not drive a marked need for increased service provision.

Transient Population

Fire and emergency services agencies respond to “transient” populations as well as resident populations within their service areas. For Sonoma County Fire District, transient population service needs are primarily driven by visitors to the lower Russian River communities of Forestville and Guerneville and the Bodega Bay region on the coast.

Development

The County of Sonoma and the Town of Windsor have jurisdiction over land use and planning for the areas served by the District. While both entities anticipate accommodation of development – particularly residential development – that is not expected to drive significant increases in needs for services.

DETERMINATION 2. CAPACITY AND ADEQUACY OF PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

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

Determinations

- **The Sonoma County Fire District has experienced call volume growth that exceeds development growth, and despite a decline in population in the past five years. The District has been able to meet response time standards.**
- **Sonoma County FD effectively provides fire and emergency services within its existing service area and can be expected to be able to provide adequate services for the foreseeable future.**

Discussion

Service Volumes

Sonoma County FD provides fire and emergency services within its boundaries, and provides mutual aid support to neighboring agencies. Table 2 indicates the historical frequency of calls generated within Sonoma County FD's territory.

Table 2: Historical Call for Service Volumes – Sonoma County Fire District

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Calls Generated Within District	7,454	7,582	8,169	9,918	10,356
Total Calls	7,454	7,597	11,398	12,567	12,508

Response Standards

Sonoma County FD serves territories with **rural and urban** demands and currently operates crews with “3/0” staffing (three-member crews are dispatched to all calls).

Table 3: Response Time Statistics – Sonoma County FD

Year	Average Response Times (Dispatched to “Arrived On Scene”) Calls Within District
2020	7 minutes 48 seconds
2021	5 minutes 10 seconds
2022	5 minutes 25 seconds
2023	6 minutes 9 seconds
2024	6 minutes 18 seconds

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

Facilities

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

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

Sonoma County FD operates ten facilities.

Staffing

Sonoma County FD operates with paid professional staffing.

DETERMINATION 3. FINANCIAL CONDITION

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

Determinations

- **The District has been meeting its expenses without difficulty and has been able to provide funding for infrastructure needs (primarily vehicle and equipment replacement).**
- **Financial management of Sonoma County FD is sound and is independently audited on an annual basis.**

Discussion

Budgeting

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

Finances

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

Table 4 shows historical and projected budgets for Sonoma County FD.

Table 4: Sonoma County FD Budget Review

Fiscal Year	Revenue	Salaries and Benefits	Operating and Capital Expenditures and Depreciation	Surplus / (Deficit)	Reserves /Fund Balance
20-21	\$18,948,749	\$15,591,314	\$	\$(1,502,146)	\$
21-22	\$18,873,545	\$15,958,488	\$	\$50,814	\$
22-23	\$19,637,353	\$16,437,243	\$	\$269,993	\$
23-24	\$20,390,103	\$16,930,360	\$	\$461,776	
24-25*	\$21,034,120	\$17,438,721		\$527,995	

** Reflects budgeted or projected.*

Reserves

Sonoma County FD maintains cash reserves and manages them per a board-adopted Financial Reserve Policy.

Current reserves include \$13,432,498 in board designated reserves and \$8,031,424 in dedicated reserves, and are intended for general operating expenditures and capital projects and vehicle replacements.

Financial Policies

Sonoma County FD 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.

DETERMINATION 4. SHARED SERVICES AND FACILITIES

Status of, and opportunities for, shared facilities.	Evaluation
a. Are subject agencies currently sharing services or facilities with other organizations? If so, describe the status of such efforts.	No
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?	Yes

Determinations

- **A proposed consolidation with Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District may modestly reduce administrative expenses.**
- **Sonoma County FD may have an opportunity to partner with the City of Santa Rosa for development of a shared fire station in the southern part of the city.**

Discussion

Sonoma County FD manages operations cooperatively with neighboring agencies, notably through mutual response agreements. It also participates 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.

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

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

Table 5: Coordination Best Practices – Sonoma County Fire District

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

POTENTIAL COST SAVINGS FROM CONSOLIDATION

Should the District reorganize with Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District, modest cost savings might accrue from sharing of leadership and administration personnel and potentially from vehicle fleet reduction.

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

DETERMINATION 5. ACCOUNTABILITY, STRUCTURE AND EFFICIENCIES

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

Determinations

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

Discussion

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

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

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

Sonoma County FD undergoes annual financial audits and change auditors regularly.

MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW: RANCHO ADOBE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

OVERVIEW

The Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District ("Rancho Adobe" or "Rancho Adobe FPD") serves the City of Cotati and unincorporated areas to the south. The territory covers 86 square miles with a population of approximately 28,000 people.

The terrain within the district includes the urban and suburban City of Cotati, the unincorporated community of Penngrove, and rural areas with low density residential and agricultural uses.

The agency relies on a paid professional work force supplemented with two-dozen volunteer firefighters, and has three fire stations.

SIGNIFICANT MSR DETERMINATIONS

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

DETERMINATION 1. GROWTH AND POPULATION

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

Determinations

- **The regions served by Rancho Adobe FPD will continue to experience minimal development, but may actually experience a continued decline in population.**

Discussion

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

- The population of residents and workers within the territory

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

Resident Population

The District has a population of about 28,000 residents, with 7,300 in the City of Cotati and the balance in the unincorporated areas.

Transient Population

Fire and emergency services agencies respond to “transient” populations as well as resident populations within their service areas. For Rancho Adobe, transient population service needs are driven by the student population at Sonoma State University.

Development

The County of Sonoma and the City of Cotati have jurisdiction over land use and planning for the areas served by the District. The General Plans of each agency do not anticipate significant development though there is a continued emphasis on residential development opportunities, including promotion of lot splits and accessory dwelling unit additions.

DETERMINATION 2. CAPACITY AND ADEQUACY OF PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

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

Determinations

- **The District has experienced call volume growth that exceeds development growth and despite modest population decline in the past five years. The District has been able to meet response time standards.**
- **Although call response times for the District are within standards, Rancho Adobe is providing firefighter/medic service rather than firefighter/advanced life support (paramedic) service.**

Discussion

Service Volumes

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

Table 6 indicates the historical frequency of calls generated within Rancho Adobe's territory.

Table 6: Historical Call for Service Volumes – Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Calls Generated Within District	1829	2004	2046	2169	2191
Total Calls	2354	2641	2857	2951	3081

Response Standards

Rancho Adobe serves a territory with **urban, suburban and rural** demands and strives to operate crews with “3/0” staffing (three-member crews are dispatched to all calls).

Table 7: Response Time Statistics – Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District

Year	Average Response Times (Dispatched to “Arrived On Scene”) Calls Within District
2020	5 minutes 32 seconds
2021	5 minutes 31 seconds
2022	6 minutes 45 seconds
2023	5 minutes 56 seconds
2024	5 minutes 38 seconds

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.

Rancho Adobe FPD has three facilities: a headquarters station in Penngrove; a station in downtown Cotati; and a station on Liberty Road on the outskirts of the City of Petaluma.

The Liberty Road station needs refurbishment and upgrades, but is also just over a mile away from Gold Ridge Fire Protection District’s Willmar station, which occupies a site leased from a school district. That station is also in need of refurbishment and upgrades to provide lodging for full-time staff.

Staffing

Rancho Adobe FPD is a combined department, with both career and volunteer firefighter staffing. The volunteer roster has generally been stable, with around two-dozen active volunteers.

DETERMINATION 3. FINANCIAL CONDITION

Financial ability of agencies to provide services	Evaluation
a. Does the organization routinely engage in budgeting practices that may indicate poor financial management, such as overspending its revenues, failing to commission independent audits, or adopting its budget late?	No
b. Is the organization lacking adequate reserve to protect against unexpected events or upcoming significant costs?	Yes
c. Is the organization's rate/fee schedule insufficient to fund an adequate level of service, and/or is the fee inconsistent with the schedules of similar service organizations?	No
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

- **Rancho Adobe 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).**
- **Rancho Adobe FPD has deficiencies at its Liberty Road fire station on the outskirts of Petaluma. In order to fund those improvements, the District should consider partnering with Gold Ridge FPD to build a co-use facility.**
- **California State University – Sonoma contributes no revenue to Rancho Adobe FPD despite generating a significant amount of service calls (about 15%). Rancho Adobe should continue to seek a negotiated settlement of this matter with Sonoma State or the CSU system.**

Discussion

Budgeting

The District staff prepares annual budgets in the spring for consideration and approval by the Board of Directors prior to the upcoming fiscal year (July through June). The staff

seeks guidance from the Board, and District residents are able to comment, in successive board meetings prior to budget approval.

Finances

Table 8 shows historical and projected budgets for the Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District.

Table 8: Rancho Adobe FPD Budget Review

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

* Reflects budgeted or projected.

Rancho Adobe FPD faces several challenges related to sustainable funding:

- Costs, particularly for staffing, are increasing at a rate higher than revenues.
- The District has ongoing vehicle and equipment replacement needs.
- The District does have identified reserves for facility improvements at the Liberty Road fire station, but likely not enough to start the project.

Reserves

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

Current reserves amount are \$2,397,889 and are intended for general operating expenditures, and capital expenditures.

The District does have a capital plan for vehicles and equipment, and a facility upgrade/reconstruction plan.

Financial Policies

Rancho Adobe FPD has adopted financial policies to help ensure the proper fiscal management, including:

- Purchasing
- Financial Reserve
- Capital Assets

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

FINANCIAL OPTIONS

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).

Potential Cost Savings from Shared Service Opportunities

The District may have opportunities for reducing costs or otherwise securing funding for facility remodel/replacement by partnering with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District.

Potential Revenue Enhancement – Sonoma State University

CSU Sonoma's campus, located adjacent to the City of Rohnert Park and within the District's service area, generates a significant number of annual service requests (about 15% of total calls).

CSU, as a state agency, does not pay property taxes, so the District receives no property tax increment revenue from the campus. CSU is also exempt from the District's parcel tax, although given the parcel tax rate structure CSU's contributions if not exempted would be only several hundred dollars per year.

The District has engaged with CSU Sonoma leadership regarding this situation but has not been able to secure some type of appropriate and equitable financial contribution from CSU Sonoma recognizing the levels of service provided by the District to the campus.

There does appear to be precedent for state college campuses to provide funding for services provided by neighboring municipalities or special districts. Rancho Adobe has consulted with LAFCO staff regarding detachment of the CSU Sonoma campus from its

service area, but acknowledges that the District would continue responding to calls, with the City of Rohnert Park providing mutual aid coverage.

It is also notable that the campus has faced significant challenges of its own, with a steep decline in enrollment and the financial repercussions attendant with that trend.

Resources:

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

DETERMINATION 4. SHARED SERVICES AND FACILITIES

Status of, and opportunities for, shared facilities.	Evaluation
a. Are subject agencies currently sharing services or facilities with other organizations? If so, describe the status of such efforts.	No
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?	Yes

Determinations

- **Were Rancho Adobe FPD to reorganize with Sonoma County FD there would likely only be modest reductions in total administrative and leadership costs.**
- **Although not analyzed in this report, a consolidated agency might realize modest reductions in fleet costs by eliminating duplicative equipment.**
- **Rancho Adobe FPD has the opportunity to evaluate partnering with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District to share a fire station facility, addressing the redundancy of the District's Liberty Road fire station and Gold Ridge's Willmar Fire station.**

Discussion

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

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

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

Table 9: Coordination Best Practices – Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District

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

POTENTIAL COST SAVINGS FROM CONSOLIDATION

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

While the District does not have any active redundant vehicles or other equipment, there may be a modest opportunity to reduce inventories, particularly of specialized vehicles and equipment, if it joined a regional consolidation program.

DETERMINATION 5. ACCOUNTABILITY, STRUCTURE AND EFFICIENCIES

Accountability for community service needs, including governmental structure and operational efficiencies	Evaluation
a. Are there any issues with meetings being accessible and well publicized? Any failures to comply with disclosure laws and the Brown Act?	No
b. Are there any issues with filling board vacancies and maintaining board members?	No
c. Are there any issues with staff turnover or operational efficiencies?	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 District is governed in a manner that not only complies with all statutes and laws but is fully open to community input. Board directors have been elected and/or appointed appropriately.**
- **Rancho Adobe FPD undertakes annual independent financial and business practice audits and complies with financial regulations and recommended practices.**
- **The District is encouraged to continue discussions regarding opportunities for coordinating service provision to produce efficiencies and cost savings, up to and including potential consolidation of operations in the future.**

Discussion

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

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

Rancho Adobe FPD undergoes annual financial audits and change auditors regularly.

MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW: COUNTY SERVICE AREA 40 - Fire Services

SUMMARY DETERMINATIONS

County Service Area 40 retains a “remainder” of territory that was not reorganized into the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District in 2023. These areas include two regions north of Forestville that include two parks, and a portion of the remaining unincorporated islands within the City of Santa Rosa.

- The County does not provide fire or emergency medical services to these areas. Sonoma County Fire District provides service to the Forestville areas, and the City of Santa Rosa provides service for the portion of islands.

OVERVIEW

County Service Area 40 – Fire Services was established to combine multiple county fire service areas and essentially encompassed all territory in Sonoma County that was otherwise not covered by cities or independent fire protection districts.

The majority of CSA 40 was served by volunteer fire companies or departments, with the County providing limited direct financial support. However, the dozen or so volunteer companies began to face challenges – notably a decline in volunteer ranks and therefore the ability to respond to service calls. Several volunteer companies closed outright.

The County as part of a decade-long effort to reorganize fire and emergency medical service provision throughout the county, sought independent fire protection districts willing to take on portions of the CSA 40 territory. Several volunteer territories (i.e. Mountain VFD, Mayacamas VFD) were reorganized to become part of independent special districts.

In 2023, through a major reorganization proposed by the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District, almost all of the remaining territory of CSA 40, served by eight active volunteer companies, was reorganized into Gold Ridge.

However, four areas of CSA 40 remain:

- Incident Response Area 56 (Armstrong Woods and Austin Creek)
- Incident Response Area 51 (territory due north of Forestville)
- About two thirds of the 44 remaining islands of unincorporated territory surrounded by the City of Santa Rosa.

These “remainder” areas are served by neighboring agencies: Sonoma County Fire for the two Incident Response areas (with no financial compensation from the County) and by the City of Santa Rosa (with remuneration on a per-call basis).

It should be clearly stated that the County does not provide direct fire or emergency medical services to these three areas.

SIGNIFICANT MSR DETERMINATIONS

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

DETERMINATION 1. GROWTH AND POPULATION

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

Determinations

- **The remaining CSA 40 territories are either essentially uninhabited (northern Forestville areas) or fully developed with residential uses (Santa Rosa unincorporated islands). Population growth or increased development will be negligible.**

Discussion

Service calls in the Forestville areas, which include Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve and the Armstrong Creek State Recreation Area are driven by visitor use at these parks. There is some very low-density residential development in the region, with correspondingly low levels of service calls.

The unincorporated islands with the City of Santa Rosa would be expected to generate no more than a few calls per year.

DETERMINATION 2. CAPACITY AND ADEQUACY OF PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

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

Determinations

- **County Service Area 40 – Fire Services does not provide fire and emergency medical services; the neighboring agencies of Sonoma County Fire District and the City of Sebastopol provide service coverage.**

Discussion

Service Volumes

Call volumes for the remainder CSA 40 territories are so rare that an analysis was not conducted for this report.

Response Standards

Similarly, response time statistics for services provided to these areas was not conducted. The unincorporated islands within Santa Rosa would experience the satisfactory response time of the City's fire department in partnership with Sonoma County Fire's ambulance/advanced life support service.

Facilities

The serving agencies do not have any facilities with the remainder territory of CSA 40.

Staffing

Staffing at the serving agencies is sufficient to meet the needs of covering the remainder areas of CSA 40.

DETERMINATION 3. FINANCIAL CONDITION

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

Determinations

- **The County receives a very modest amount of property tax revenue designated for CSA 40 from the remainder areas. This funding should be directed towards the serving agencies.**
- **A reorganization that dissolved CSA 40 would also allow the serving agencies to assess parcel taxes on the remainder areas, generating very modest revenue.**
- **Annexation of the Forestville areas to Sonoma County Fire is the optimum solution for those areas.**
- **The optimum solution for the unincorporated islands is annexation to the City of Santa Rosa. Other options are problematic.**

Discussion

The County has every interest and intent to dissolve CSA 40, surrendering the remainder areas to the neighboring agencies that serve them.

For the areas north of Forestville that agency is Sonoma County Fire District, which serves those areas now.

For the unincorporated islands within the City of Santa Rosa, the ideal solution would be for the City to annex the islands, using the Cortese Knox Hertzberg Act provisions related to island annexations if necessary.

A much less attractive solution would be to have Sonoma County Fire annex the islands (solely for the purpose of providing fire and emergency medical services), with Sonoma County Fire District extending its existing contractual arrangement for serving a set of islands already in its territory that has been reached with the City of Santa Rosa.

That agreement, in basic terms, compares the amount of calls responded to by each agency in the other's territory, to the islands or other areas, and "true up" service costs.

For property owners within the unincorporated islands, property tax increments devoted to fire services would accrue to Sonoma County Fire District. The District would also impose its voter-authorized parcel taxes on the properties, generating very modest additional revenue.

The result of this less attractive arrangement is that property owners in the islands would pay a parcel tax that their neighbors within the City do not pay, in exchange for receiving identical fire and emergency medical service coverage they are receiving now, provided primarily by the City.

DETERMINATION 4. SHARED SERVICES AND FACILITIES

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

Determinations

- **County Service Area 40 – Fire Services relies wholly on Sonoma County Fire District and the City of Santa Rosa for services to the remainder areas. There are no further options for shared services.**

Discussion

None.

DETERMINATION 5. ACCOUNTABILITY, STRUCTURE AND EFFICIENCIES

Accountability for community service needs, including governmental structure and operational efficiencies	Evaluation
a. Are there any issues with meetings being accessible and well publicized? Any failures to comply with disclosure laws and the Brown Act?	No
b. Are there any issues with filling board vacancies and maintaining board members?	No
c. Are there any issues with staff turnover or operational efficiencies?	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?	No
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

- **County Service Area 40 – Fire Services is overseen by the County Board of Supervisors, and managed out of the County Administrator's Office. Governance issues are not evaluated in this report.**

Discussion

None.

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE STUDY

Summary Determination

- **The Sphere of Influence of the Sonoma County Fire District should be amended to include the entirety of the territories of the Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District and County Service Area 40 – Fire Services, allowing Sonoma County Fire the opportunity to propose to Sonoma LAFCO a reorganization (consolidation) of the three agencies.**

Discussion

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

The existing Sphere of Influence for the Sonoma County Fire District is contiguous with the District's boundaries. Staff is recommending that the Commission consider amending Sonoma County FD's sphere to include the Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District territory and at least the Forestville areas within the remainder areas of County Service Area 40.

Th subject agencies have indicated that they will support reorganization proposals that would incorporate all or a portion of County Service Area 40's territory into Sonoma County FD, and the dissolution of the Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District and subsequent annexation of the territory to Sonoma County FD.

It should be noted that for both reorganization proposals, if they are approved by the Commission and not successfully challenged by registered voters or landowners, Sonoma County FD will impose special taxes (in the form of parcel taxes and other assessments) onto the annexed territories. For the Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District territory Sonoma County Fire District may propose continued imposition of Rancho Adobe's parcel tax rate structure on the area.

The Commission, as part of the consideration of the proposals, can designate transfers of liabilities and assets of the County Service Area 40's Fire Department and Rancho Adobe FPD to Sonoma County FD. Staff anticipates that the subject agencies will propose a total transfer of all assets and liabilities, negating the need for a separate agreement.

A tax transfer agreement may be necessary for the transfer of the CSA 40 remainder areas to Sonoma County Fire District.

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

PRESENT AND PLANNED LAND USES IN THE AREA

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

Determinations

- **Existing and potential development within the territories of all three subject areas do not significantly bear on a potential reorganization (combination) of the agencies, therefore a sphere of influence amendment and subsequent reorganization can be supported.**

Discussion

Please refer to discussion related to development and population growth within the Municipal Service Review section of the report.

NEED FOR PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

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

Determinations

- **The territory served by the three subject agencies are receiving adequate fire and emergency services. The territory served by Rancho Adobe does not receive ambulance/advanced life support but potentially could through a reorganization (combination) of the agencies, so a sphere of influence amendment and subsequent reorganization is supported.**

Discussion

The National Fire Protection Association notes that there are no standards for fire and emergency medical services that agencies must meet – instead the organization notes that communities can expect to receive services at the level they can afford.

For example, most fire service professionals consider three-person staffing on a fire engine essential, but rural, volunteer agencies find that bar a difficult one to meet. In Sonoma County, one of the goals of utilizing Measure H (sales tax) funding is to bring three-person engine coverage to the entirety of the county.

For the subject agencies, Sonoma County Fire provides not only three-person crews on engines, but is the provider of ambulance/advanced life support services for the central part of the county.

For the remainder areas of CSA 40, Sonoma County Fire and the City of Santa Rosa Fire Department provide service, again with three-person engine staffing and advanced life support (paramedic) coverage.

Rancho Adobe provides three-person staffing on engines, and has long intended to add engine-based advanced life support (paramedic) service. Financial constraints as well as administrative challenges have thwarted these plans.

Preliminary planning for a reorganized (consolidated) agency includes providing advanced life support service in the Rancho Adobe territory not covered by the City of Petaluma Fire Department and the area covered by Sonoma County Fire's Exclusive Operating Area contract.

CAPACITY AND ADEQUACY OF PROVIDED SERVICES

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

Determinations

None.

Discussion

County Service Area 40 does not directly provide fire and emergency medical services; the service provided by other agencies is adequate.

Communities of Interest

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

Determinations

None.

Discussion

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

Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities

For an update of a SOI of a city or special district that provides public facilities or services related to sewers, municipal and industrial water, or structural fire protection,

the present and probable need for those public facilities and services of any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within the existing sphere of influence.

Determinations

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

Discussion

None.