

**Public Review Draft**

**MUNICIPAL SERVICES REVIEW  
FOR SOUTH COUNTY TERRITORY OF  
COUNTY SERVICE AREA 40 (FIRE SERVICES)**

**Subject Areas Include Territories Served By:**

**Lakeville Volunteer Fire Company  
San Antonio Volunteer Fire Company (Inactive)  
Willmar Volunteer Fire Company  
Two Rock Volunteer Fire Company**

**February 2023**

Prepared by

Sonoma Local Agency Formation Commission

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**Project Name:** Municipal Service Review for Southern Territories of County Service Area 40 – Fire Services

**Conducted By:** Sonoma Local Agency Formation Commission  
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**Date:** February 2023

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## **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 Services 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.

### **Purpose of a Municipal Services Review**

As described above, MSRs are designed to equip LAFCO with relevant information and data necessary for the Commission to make informed decisions on establishment or amendment of spheres of influence (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.

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.
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.

### **Scope of Study**

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.

This report reviews four territories in the southern most portion of the County Service Area 40 (Fire Services) (CSA 40) that were not addressed in a previous MSR conducted in 2019. These are the Lakeville VFD, San Antonio VFD (now served by Willmar VFD), Willmar VFD, and Two Rock VFD.

This report is specifically not evaluating any sphere of influence amendments. It is intended that a separate sphere of influence study would be completed, relying on the information in this MSR and the one completed in 2019.

### **Organization of Study**

The format of the MSR is 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 one appendix:

Appendix 1: Guide to Response Time Standards

### **Affected Agencies**

CKH only designates notification requirements for affected agencies for Sphere of Influence amendments and reorganizations, not for Municipal Services Reviews. However, draft copies of this report have been provided to the following agencies:

- CALFIRE
- Coastal Valleys EMS Agency
- Gold Ridge Fire Protection District
- Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District
- North Bay Fire, Inc.
- City of Petaluma
- Sonoma County Service Area 40 (Fire Services)

## **DETERMINATIONS**

### **Summary Determinations**

- **The County of Sonoma does not directly provide fire and emergency services to the territories in the southern area. Services are provided by three volunteer fire companies, which are, in turn supported by North Bay Fire. Inc. which receives funding from the County.**
- **North Bay Fire, Inc. is operated under contract by the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District.**
- **The County has embarked on an effort to support reorganizations that would eventually eliminate CSA 40.**

### **Overview**

The County of Sonoma, through the dependent district of County Service Area 40 (CSA 40), supports the provision of fire and emergency services to areas in the County that are not served by City departments or independent special districts. Historically, that support has been directed towards Volunteer Fire Companies, in limited cases through contracts with independent special districts, and through mutual aid response from special districts.

There are currently seven Volunteer Fire Companies and another seven IRP areas serviced by CSA 40, located in the north, west, and south portions of the county.

In the past five years, the County has endeavored to cede CSA 40 territory to willing independent special districts, in response to guidance from the fire serves community throughout the County. As part of that effort, the County has effectively closed its fire services department, which provided support to the Volunteer Companies.

In its place, the County has entered into a multi-year contract with North Bay Fire, Inc., which was formed as a 501.3(c) and is made up of representatives from the remaining Volunteer Companies. North Bay Fire, Inc. in turn contracts with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District to provide administrative and other support to the remaining Volunteer Companies.

There are four CSA 40 territories in South County including the Lakeville VFD, San Antonio VFD (now served by Willmar VFD), Willmar VFD, and Two Rock VFD.

All four areas are rural in character, with the Willmar territory having the largest population. The San Antonio and Lakeville areas are very sparsely populated; services to these areas predominantly involve vehicle accidents on Highway 37, Lakeville Highway, and US 101.

Combined, the area receives approximately 600 calls per year for service.

## Growth and Population Projections

### Determinations

- **Although there continues to be modest population growth in the subject territories, an array of other factors drives increasing call volumes.**
- **These factors include an aging population, vehicular traffic volumes, and an increase in reliance on emergency medical services.**
- **Similarly, land use development is a negligible driver of call volume.**

### Discussion

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

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

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

- An aging population, which drives an increase in medical service calls.
- A steady increase in tourism, bringing visitors to the area, as well as increased traffic on the roadways throughout the region. This population drives rescue and 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.

It is difficult to imagine sources of information that would accurately quantify the service impacts that these trends would engender.

## Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities

### Determinations

- **There are no LAFCO-designated disadvantaged unincorporated communities within the territories served by the subject agency.**

### 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:

- Boyes Hot Springs
- Cazadero
- Glen Ellen
- Guerneville
- Monte Rio
- Temelec
- Valley Ford

Because CSA 40, in its southern territory, does not provide fire and emergency medical services to disadvantaged unincorporated communities, a determination regarding the lack of appropriate services to these territories is not warranted.

While Sonoma LAFCO expects to refine its definition of Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities using smaller geographical areas for analysis, it is not expected that that work would substantively change the determinations presented here.

## **Capacity and Adequacy of Public Facilities and Services**

### Determinations

- **The three volunteer fire companies providing service to the subject territories report no imminent challenges in maintaining staffing levels or availability. It should be noted that one volunteer company (San Antonio) has disbanded due to a lack of volunteers; that area is now covered by Willmar VFC and the Petaluma Fire Department.**
- **Potential staffing challenges that may arise in the future include:**
  - **A decline in active volunteer ranks**
  - **Declines in volunteer availability during particular shifts/times**
- **Improvements to stipend programs for volunteers may enable the volunteer companies to address staffing challenges without transitioning fully to career-professional staffing, which the companies and County cannot support financially.**

- **The facilities used in the subject territories are owned by a variety of private and non-profit entities. While minimally sufficient for housing vehicles and equipment, none feature quarters that can house staff. None of the three volunteer fire companies maintain a facility maintenance and improvement financial model.**
- **The equipment used by the volunteer fire companies is generally in good condition, but none of the three volunteer companies maintains a vehicle replacement financial model.**

### 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*

The three active volunteer fire companies in the territory report that they are maintaining adequate volunteer ranks, and that volunteer availability is not currently a problem. It is recognized that maintaining staff availability during weekday daytimes may become difficult.

There are five broad categorizations of fire and EMS staff:

1. Leadership – Chiefs, and in limited cases captains, who can be full-time paid, part-time paid, stipend paid, or not paid.
2. Administration – Generally part-time paid positions, with responsibility for records, purchasing, financial processing, and a myriad of other activities.
3. Firefighters/medical technicians – Generally classified as firefighters or engineers, with emergency medical technician or paramedic training, on a full-time or part-time career status.
4. Volunteer firefighters/medical technicians – With the same training and capability expectations as above (save paramedic training), but serving on a voluntary, non-employee status, often provided with stipends based on shifts, call response, or training session attendance.
5. Interns/Trainees – Generally volunteers who have not completed mandatory training but who are enrolled in a training program either provided by the agency or by an institution (notably the Santa Rosa Junior College program).

For the volunteer fire companies operating in the subject territory, leadership and administration services are provided by Gold Ridge FPD under contract to North Bay Fire, Inc., though each company maintains a volunteer fire chief position. None of the companies employ firefighters or provides Advanced Life Support (paramedic) or ambulance transport service.

## *Training*

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

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

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

The Federal government recommends that all active firefighters undertake training for 20 hours per month.

North Bay Fire, Inc. and their contractor, Gold Ridge FPD, are coordinating training for the volunteer fire companies.

## *Call Volumes*

REDCOM, the joint powers agency that provides dispatch services to almost all the fire and EMS service providers in the County, logs calls for service in a variety of ways. (Cloverdale FPD relies on CALFIRE dispatch services located in St. Helena).

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. The Lakeville, San Antonio, and Two Rock areas average about one hundred to 125 calls per year; Wilmar responds to about 200 calls per year.

Further analysis could 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.)

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

## *Response Times*

The volunteer fire companies in the area appear to nominally meet National Fire Protection Association standards, which are discussed in Appendix 2. Average response times are generally below ten minutes, easily meeting the fifteen-minute standard for rural and remote areas.

Although it is clearly crucially important to evaluate an emergency service provider on the basis of response times, the statistics require clarification and understanding.

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

However crucial factors may not be reflected in a simple analysis of response times.

For example, if a provider 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 the “base” provider.

Clearly, mutual aid response is the ideal course of action, but the response time statistics make no distinction regarding why a provider 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.

Therefore, although it appears that calls are responded to in compliance with NFPA standards in the southern CSA 40 territories, they do not present a complete picture of standards of service.

### *Emergency Medical Service*

The fire service community in Sonoma County reports 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*

The volunteer fire companies 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.

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*

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.)

The southern territories of CSA 40 are provided ALS coverage by the City of Petaluma Fire Department.

*Ambulance (Transport) Service*

The City of Petaluma Fire Department provides ambulance transport services in the southern territories of CSA 40 and has an exclusive right to serve that territory.

*Facilities*

The three active volunteer fire companies maintain facilities to house equipment and vehicles. None of these facilities is suitable for staff housing. The facilities are owned by a variety of entities, including by non-profit entities and private parties.

None of the three VFCs maintain facilities plans that anticipates necessary maintenance or improvements (this is not an uncommon circumstance for fire and EMS agencies in the County).

A facility inventory for the three VFCs is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Facility Inventory**

Facility	Suited for Staff Housing	Upgrade Needed for Housing Staff	Seismic Issues	Rebuild or Remodel Indicated	Owner
Lakeville VFC	No	No	No	No	Private party
Willmar VFC)	No	Yes	Unknown	If staffed	Building: Willmar Fire, Inc. Site: Wilson School
Two Rock	No	No	No	No	Two Rock Fire Department, Inc.

## Equipment

The volunteer fire companies utilize a variety of equipment, including “typical” engines, “wildland” engines, water tenders, and other specialized equipment.

“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.

Most fire and EMS agencies 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 past their useful life, generally speaking the volunteer fire company vehicle fleets are in reasonable condition.

The volunteer fire companies do not prepare a rigorous capital program analysis, nor has North Bay Fire, Inc. or their contractor Gold Ridge FPD. It is therefore not possible to evaluate whether vehicle and facility costs can be adequately funded. This is not an uncommon circumstance for Fire Protection Districts in the County.

## Financial Ability to Provide Service

### Determinations

- **The volunteer fire companies providing services in the subject territory require financial support to provide needed services. Historically, the County provided support services through a County-run Fire and Emergency Services Department, but now provides support through a contract with North Bay Fire, Inc.**
- **Sources for funding support services could include redirection of property taxes for fire services collected by the County; supplemental funding from the County, and collection of special taxes (parcel taxes) either through a voter-approval process or through reorganization of the territories into a District with an existing special tax levy.**

### Discussion

The County of Sonoma collects a portion of property tax assessments that are designated for fire and emergency services within CSA 40 territories.

Table 2 summarizes CSA 40 property tax receipts.

**Table 2. CSA 40 Fire and Emergency Service Property Tax Receipts by Area**

Territory	Area (square miles)	Population (2010 Census)	# of Parcels	Property Tax Revenue (Fire)
Lakeville VFD	34	437	266	\$61,000
San Antonio VFD (Inactive)	15	471	307	\$50,000
Willmar VFD	15	3,470	1064	\$163,000
Two Rock VFD	22	757	243	\$47,000

CSA 40 relies solely on ad valorem property taxes, which rise only as property values are re-assessed (modest annual re-assessments, or reassessments when property is sold).

*Potential for Additional Revenue*

A potential additional source of revenue would be the imposition of special taxes in the form of parcel assessments. These taxes can be imposed based on an affirmative vote from landowners in the area, or through the reorganization that involves annexation of the territories by an agency with an existing authorized special tax.

It is difficult to precisely assess how much additional revenue could be collected in the southern CSA territories through a parcel tax, because these taxes are assessed at different rates depending on property use (e.g., developed/undeveloped), residence size, and commercial operation characteristics.

Most districts have established special tax rates for commercial properties based on a “units of risk” basis, which evaluates facility area and use as criteria for assessments. Additionally, many of the parcels within the CSA 40 territories are likely to be undeveloped; these parcels would typically be assessed at a much lower rate than parcels with residential development.

Nevertheless, with almost 2000 parcels within the CSA 40 areas, a typical \$200 per parcel annual assessment would result in something on the order of \$250,000 to \$300,000 in additional annual revenue.

The County has offered to provide additional funding above and beyond the property taxes collected across the southern territories, as well as the areas served by the Bloomfield, Valley Ford, Bodega, Camp Meeker, and Fort Ross VFD territories, to Gold Ridge FPD if a proposal for reorganization into the district is completed.

### *Cost Pressures*

Like other fire and EMS agencies in the County, the volunteer fire companies and their consortium (North Bay Fire, Inc.) face increasing expenses. There are four general categories of rising expenses:

- The need to implement stipends for volunteer firefighters, to increase stipend levels.
- Supplies, equipment maintenance, and equipment replacement costs.
- Facility maintenance and replacement costs.
- Vehicle replacement costs.

### **Governance and Accountability**

#### Determinations

- **County Service Area 40 – Fire Services is a dependent district of the County of Sonoma.**
- **Although the County regularly responds to open meeting, noticing and other accountability inquiries, there have been no instances reported that are directly related to oversight of CSA 40.**

#### Discussion

The County of Sonoma is contacted regularly regarding the varied requirements regarding noticing, conducting public proceedings, and the Brown Act which governs elected representative communications, but there are no known complaints directly related to the oversight of County Service Area 40.

### **Opportunity for Shared Services**

#### Determinations

- **Any proposed reorganizations of the southern CSA 40 territory, or continuation of the existing contractual service arrangement with North Bay Fire, Inc., are unlikely to generate significant cost savings.**



- **There are a variety of options for potentially reorganizing the subject territories.**

### Discussion

The opportunities to achieve cost savings through a regional consolidation that involves the subject territories are likely to be negligible - any savings would nominally have been realized through the existing contractual arrangement with North Bay Fire, Inc.

That said, there are a plethora of options for including the subject territories in reorganizations, or in fact to consider maintaining the current organizational arrangement.

These options include, but are not limited to:

- The County of Sonoma could end the contract with North Bay Fire, Inc., and return to direct management of the County Service Area.
- The County could extend the current organizational arrangement, contracting with North Bay Fire, Inc. to support the volunteer companies that serve CSA territory. North Bay Fire, Inc., in turn, could continue contracting for support services from Gold Ridge FPD, could deliver support services on its own, or could select another agency to provide support services.
- The County could end the contract with North Bay Fire, Inc., and seek other contractual partners to manage and provide services to the volunteer fire companies operating in CSA 40 territory.
- The southern territories (with or without other territories of CSA 40 that are served by volunteer companies) could be annexed to Gold Ridge FPD (as proposed by the district), or to other fire and EMS agencies. Although there has been no activity to pursue forming a Fire Protection District in the southern portion of the county, including the City of Petaluma and surrounding CSA 40 territory, the City does provide all ALS and ambulance transport services in the region, and this concept therefore has potential operational advantages.

Currently, from the perspective of the volunteer companies in the southern area, of North Bay Fire, Inc., of Gold Ridge FPD, and of the County, a reorganization involving the annexation of all of the territory within CSA 40 that are served by volunteer companies to Gold Ridge is preferred.

**Draft Resolution**

111 Santa Rosa Ave. Ste. 240  
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**March 1, 2023**

Resolution of the Local Agency Formation Commission of the County of Sonoma, State of California, Making Findings and Determinations Related to Information Contained in the Municipal Service Review for the South County Territory of County Service Area 40 – Fire Services, a Dependent District of the County of Sonoma, Determining Exemption from the California Environmental Quality Act, and Adopting the Determinations of the Municipal Service Review

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

**1. Procedural History**

1.1 County Service Area 40 – Fire Services, a subsidiary district of the County of Sonoma (“the Subject Agency”) requested that the Commission prepare a Municipal Service Review (“MSR/SOI Study”) of the District pursuant to the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000, Government Code section 56000 et seq. (“the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act”).

1.2 The Executive Officer considered the request and prepared, using consultant services, a Municipal Service Review (“MSR”).

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

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

1.5 The Executive Officer considered written comments received on the MSR and prepared a staff report (“the Executive Officer’s Report”) which included a recommendation for the MSR. The Executive Officer furnished copies of the Executive Officer’s Report to all persons entitled to copies under the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act.

1.6 The Commission conducted a noticed public hearing to consider the MSR on March 1, 2023. At the hearing, the Commission heard and received all relevant

oral and written testimony and evidence presented or filed and considered the Executive Officer's Report and the MSR. All interested persons were given the opportunity to hear and be heard. At the conclusion of public testimony, the Commission closed the public hearing and adopted the determinations in the MSR.

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

## **2. CEQA Compliance**

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

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

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

2.3 Confirmation of the Sphere of Influence of the Subject Agency will not result in a physical change to the environment in and of itself. Any future actions for change of organization would be further subject to separate environmental determination.

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

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

3.1 The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act directs LAFCOs to review and update Agency Spheres of influence, as necessary, every five years and further to conduct municipal service reviews prior to, or in conjunction with such updates. With regard to the southern territories of County Service Area 40 – Fire Services, the Commission makes the following determinations:

## 3.2 Summary Determinations

3.2.1 The County of Sonoma does not directly provide fire and emergency services to the territories in the southern area. Services are provided by three volunteer fire companies, which are, in turn supported by North Bay Fire, Inc. which receives funding from the County.

3.2.2 North Bay Fire, Inc. is operated under contract by the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District.

3.2.3 The County has embarked on an effort to support reorganizations that would eventually eliminate CSA 40.

## 3.3 Growth and Population Projections

3.3.1 Although there continues to be modest population growth in the subject territories, an array of other factors drives increasing call volumes.

3.3.2 These factors include an aging population, vehicular traffic volumes, and an increase in reliance on emergency medical services.

3.3.3 Similarly, land use development is a negligible driver of call volume.

## 3.4 Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities

3.4.1 There are no LAFCO-designated disadvantaged unincorporated communities within the territories served by the subject agency.

## 3.5 Capacity and Adequacy of Public Facilities and Services

3.5.1 The three volunteer fire companies providing service to the subject territories report no imminent challenges in maintaining staffing levels or availability. It should be noted that one volunteer company (San Antonio) has disbanded due to a lack of volunteers; that area is now covered by Willmar VFC and the Petaluma Fire Department.

3.5.2 Potential staffing challenges that may arise in the future include a decline in active volunteer ranks and/or declines in volunteer availability during particular shifts/times.

3.5.3 Improvements to stipend programs for volunteers may enable the volunteer companies to address staffing challenges without transitioning fully to career-professional staffing, which the companies and County cannot support financially.

3.5.4 The facilities used in the subject territories are owned by a variety of private and non-profit entities. While minimally sufficient for housing vehicles and equipment, none feature quarters that can house staff.

None of the three volunteer fire companies maintain a facility maintenance and improvement financial model.

3.5.5 The equipment used by the volunteer fire companies is generally in good condition, but none of the three volunteer companies maintains a vehicle replacement financial model.

### 3.6 Financial Ability to Provide Service

3.6.1 The volunteer fire companies providing services in the subject territory require financial support to provide needed services. Historically, the County provided support services through a County-run Fire and Emergency Services Department, but now provides support through a contract with North Bay Fire, Inc.

3.6.2 Sources for funding support services could include redirection of property taxes for fire services collected by the County; supplemental funding from the County, and collection of special taxes (parcel taxes) either through a voter-approval process or through reorganization of the territories into a District with an existing special tax levy.

### 3.7 Governance and Accountability

3.7.1 County Service Area 40 – Fire Services is a dependent district of the County of Sonoma.

3.7.2 Although the County regularly responds to open meeting, noticing and other accountability inquiries, there have been no instances reported that are directly related to oversight of CSA 40.

### 3.8 Opportunity for Shared Services

3.8.1 Any proposed reorganizations of the southern CSA 40 territory, or continuation of the existing contractual service arrangement with North Bay Fire, Inc., are unlikely to generate significant cost savings.

3.8.2 There are a variety of options for potentially reorganizing the subject territories.

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

The Commission is confirming County Service Area 40's existing sphere of influence without amendment.

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

1. The foregoing findings and determinations are true and correct, are supported by substantial evidence in the record, and are adopted as hereinabove set forth.
2. The Commission has reviewed and considered the information contained in the final MSR for the southern territories of County Service Area 40 – Fire Services.
3. The Commission adopts the determinations made in the MSR.

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

**THE FOREGOING RESOLUTION** was introduced at a regular meeting of the Commission on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of March 2023 and ordered adopted by the following vote:

Commissioners:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

**WHEREUPON**, the Chair declared the foregoing resolution adopted and

**SO ORDERED.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mark Bramfitt, Executive Officer

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

ATTEST:

BY: \_\_\_\_\_

Clerk