

DATE: MARCH 28, 2021

TO: Board of Directors of the Gold Mountain Community Services District

FROM: Tom Cooley, Chair – Local Emergency Services Study Group
Cary Curtis, Vice Chair

SUBJECT: LOCAL EMERGENCY STUDY GROUP – RE-ORGANIZATION OF FIRE PROTECTION & EMERGENCY SERVICES IN EASTERN PLUMAS COUNTY

The six Study Group agencies have been meeting since February of 2020 to discuss the current state and challenges that lie ahead for sustaining volunteer fire fighting and emergency medical response services in Eastern Plumas County. Leading up to the formation of the Study Group, various presentations were made by Jennifer Stephenson, Executive Officer of Plumas LAFCo, providing framework for restructuring options that could be pursued to address issues that are common to the six agencies and that have reached critical levels across the State and country. Additionally, the 2019 Plumas County Grand Jury Report included a finding that fire agencies in the county should evaluate restructuring and recognize the benefits provided. From these presentations and findings, the Study Group was formed to collaborate on solutions to common issues with the goal of identifying a path forward for sustainable fire protection and emergency medical response services in Eastern Plumas County.

The statements contained here about the performance of volunteers in fire service as well as their district boards should not be construed as criticism. The scope of those responsibilities has increased dramatically over the recent period while the structure of our institutions has not kept pace nor adapted. It is simply time to adapt to changing conditions.

Common issues identified by the Study Group are broken into three categories –

1. **Volunteers** – significant decline in volunteerism, inability to attract fully-qualified individuals, high turnover, increased demand for training and certification, increased regulatory requirements and accreditation required of volunteer Chiefs, training officers and administrators, and specific response techniques are not consistent, but expectation is for agencies to perform as one unit.
2. **Financial Constraints** – inconsistent year over year revenue, limited county tax sharing, minimal parcel taxes that do not include inflation factors, and increasing operating costs.
3. **Outdated District Boundaries** – growth patterns not updated, islands of property that are not part of a district even though the parcels are encircled by a district. These “islands” receive services from the closest fire department but do not contribute to the cost for those services.

Below is a summary of actions the Study Group has taken to support the selection of a reorganizational option to improve the safety and economy of fire and emergency medical services.

Key Action	Outcome
Group discussion with CALFIRE Unit Chief Scott Packwood	Identification of minimal resources supported by CALFIRE that could assist the Group's effort
Presentation of options by Jennifer Stephenson, Executive Officer Plumas LAFCo	Understanding of 4 restructuring options* available to the Group with a recommendation from LAFCo of forming a new District as most viable option
MOU adopted by participating 6 agencies	Cohesive group with common goals that is working well together
Request for Plumas LAFCo to consider fee waiver	LAFCo agrees to waive \$12,000 in fees. Current estimate of LAFCo fees before waiver is \$25,000
Presentations of reorganization options by legal counsels for Beckwourth Fire and City of Portola	Viewpoint based on experience and legal requirements of the four restructuring options available to the Group with an opinion of forming a new District as the approach that fits the need of the 6 agencies
Vote by the 6 participating board representatives on reorganization option to pursue	October 7, 2020 – a vote of the 6 agency board representatives unanimously agreed to move forward with considering forming a new district and to request approval of this option from each of their respective boards.
Vote by Gold Mountain Board of Directors on option to form a new district in Eastern Plumas County for Fire Protection and Emergency Service Response	Unanimous vote by GMCSO board to move forward with the option of formation of a new district at a Special Meeting of the Board held on Nov. 6, 2020. Note: 5 of the 6 participating agencies board of directors have now voted and confirmed desire to move forward with the recommendation to form a new fire protection district in Eastern Plumas County. <i>Sierra Valley Fire has not responded with the formality of a vote of their board.</i>
Consultation with Plumas County Administrator and County Counsel to explore finance and tax sharing options for the proposed new fire district.	Discussions were had on Nov. 18, 2020. County representatives recognized challenges faced by fire districts in the county, agreed to look at standardizing existing tax sharing dollars across all parcels of a new district but would not commit to additional funding for a new fire district.

*Four restructuring options –

- 1) Joint Powers Agreement for some or all services. Often ends in dissolution.
- 2) Consolidation of districts with substantially similar resolutions.
- 3) Annexation into one surviving agency.
- 4) Dissolution of all and formation of an entirely new district.

Decision to Form a New District

At its October 7, 2020 meeting the Study Group unanimously approved a motion to advance the restructuring study with the goal of establishing a new fire district. The Study Group examined the benefits to the four available options; creating a new district stood out as the preferred solution. With this solution an entirely new agency is formed, and existing providers are dissolved. Dissolution and/or cessation of fire services occurs by resolution of each governing board, application to LAFCo, and a protest hearing. The application to LAFCo for formation of the new district is by resolution of the City Council or petition of 25% of registered voters. Upon approval by LAFCo, the formation is submitted to the voters within the new district for approval by a simple majority. (Election may be waived if petition to initiate formation is signed by at least 51% of registered voters.) Dissolution of the agencies can be contingent upon successful formation of the new district.

Benefits Aligned with Formation of a New District

- a) Greater ability to attract qualified individuals for volunteer firefighter positions.
- b) Centralized fire planning and provisions, improved coordination with area fire districts and agencies.
- c) Better leveraging of resources.
- d) Consistency in policies and practices.
- e) Cost savings/efficiencies – elimination of duplication such as administration.
- f) Improved uniform training standards, performance, incident oversight.
- g) Possible enhanced positioning for grant application and awards with larger fire district.
- h) New logical service boundaries.
- i) Could address funding with tax measure that includes all served properties.
- j) Regional planning and implementation.
- k) A fresh start that creates one identity for all served.
- l) A single board of directors comprised of registered voters from the newly formed district.

Recommendations from the Study Group

Fire Study Group request that a Resolution prepared for each participating agency be presented to their respective boards to affirm:

- 1) By adoption of the Resolution, the agency is obligated as a Participating Agency in the completion of a feasibility study.
- 2) By adoption of the Resolution, the agency is obligated to its share of cost of such study, as mutually agreed to by all the Participating Agencies, through the completion of said feasibility study.

A Request for Proposal for a consultant or consulting firm to develop a Feasibility Study has been drafted by the Study Group and will soon be reviewed by legal counsel and editors. This will pave the way for publishing the RFP for a cost proposal for services.

Discussion on shared cost were discussed at the March 23, 2021 Study Group meeting. Data obtained (appendix A), to potentially help identify an equitable share cost or percentage of shared cost is inconclusive for formulating a recommendation. There are no legal requirements regulating how much any participating agency would need to contribute to a restructuring process. The cost sharing

recommendations from the Study Group will require a vote of acceptance from each respective participating board. Board agreement to move forward with examination of the formation of a new fire district in no way obligates the agency to take part in future steps beyond the feasibility study.

At the March 23, 2021 Study Group meeting, an initial estimated cost for the project was shared. The immediate figure that the Study Group is looking to fund is for the Initial Project Cost to Start, of \$45,500.

COST ESTIMATE

Description and order due	Fee paid to	Cost
1. RFP Legal Review	Agency Attorney	\$500 estimate
2. Municipal Service Review/Sphere of Influence Update	LAFCo	n/a
3. Consultant Feasibility Study	Consultant	\$40,000
4. Initial Community Outreach	As needed	\$5,000
Initial project cost to start.		\$45,500
*Decision Point to Continue		
5. Formation application	LAFCo	\$10,450
6. CEQA Notice of Exemption	LAFCo	\$400
7. GIS Deposit	LAFCo	\$200
8. Dissolution x 3 @ \$2,000 ea. (SVFD, BFD, EPRFD)	LAFCo	\$6,000
9. Relinquishment x 3@\$2,750 ea. (C-Road CSD, GMCSO, City of Portola)	LAFCo	\$8,250
LAFCo approved fee reduction		-\$12,000
Total LAFCo application and approval costs.		\$13,300

Description and order due	Fee paid to	Cost
*Board of Supervisors place formation and taxation proposals on ballot for voters within boundaries of proposed new fire district		
*Note: Plumas County Fees would not be due until the next regular election cycle.		
10. Plumas Election Costs	Plumas County	*Pending
*New district and funding approved by voters.		
11. Mapping and Legal Description	Surveyor	\$5,000
12. Plumas County Tax Assessor fees	Plumas County	No charge
Total Plumas County Fees		\$5,000
13. Board of Equalization costs over 2,000 acres (can be deferred for a year w/business plan)	State of CA	\$3,500
Total Project Costs		*\$67,300

*Plus, pending election costs.

Next Steps for GMCS D Board

A reading of the Resolution occurred at the March 19, 2021 GMCS D board meeting. A recommendation was made to organize a board workshop where more information is shared, and questions asked.

The suggested workshop is scheduled for Mar. 31, 2021.

It has been recommended that each participating agency determine a maximum dollar figure for which the board would be willing to commit to the Initial Project Cost to Start of \$45,500.

The Resolution of continued participation and financial commitment will be presented for consideration at the April 19, 2021 GMCS D Board meeting.