

MONTEREY COUNTY REGIONAL FIRE DISTRICT



19900 Portola Drive Salinas, California 93908
(831) 455-1828 Fax (831) 455-0646 www.mcrfd.org

July 26, 2022

Honorable, Stephanie Hulsey
Judge of the Superior Court
240 Church Street
Salinas, CA 93901

Re: Monterey County Regional Fire District's response to the 2021-2022 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury Final Report -- "Consolidation of Two North Monterey County Fire Districts"

Dear Judge Hulsey,

This letter will serve as the Board of Directors of the Monterey County Regional Fire Protection District's response to the Findings and Recommendation of the 2021-2022 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury Final Report -- "Consolidation of Two North Monterey County Fire Districts". As requested by the Civil Grand Jury, the Monterey County Regional Fire Protection District respectfully submits the following responses to the Findings (1-12) and Recommendation (1) as requested in the report.

Civil Grand Jury's Report- Findings

- F1)** *Property values and tax allocations disproportionately underfund fire districts throughout Monterey County.*
The Board of Directors partially disagrees with the finding that property values and tax allocations disproportionately underfund fire districts throughout Monterey County. This is true in the case of the Monterey County Regional Fire Protection District based on the types of properties and the tax allocations of our District. We cannot, however, speak on behalf of the other Fire Districts within the County of Monterey.
- F2)** *NCFPD tax revenue was drastically reduced when Duke Energy sold the decommissioned Moss Landing Power Plant.*
The Board of Directors partially disagrees with the finding. While the District was aware of the Moss Landing Power Plant being sold, to what extent the property taxes were reduced due to the selling of the property is not known. We defer to the North Monterey County Fire District for the impacts of this finding.
- F3)** *In 2018, NCFPD annexed Monterey Regional Waste Management and Monterey One Water Property with increased risk but no increase in tax revenue.*

*Serving the Northern Salinas Valley, Highway 68 Corridor, Communities of Chualar,
East Garrison, Carmel Valley, Mid Carmel Valley & Santa Lucia Preserve*

The Board of Directors agrees with this finding. The Monterey Regional Waste Management and Monterey One Water facilities are publicly owned and thus are exempt from paying property taxes. The Monterey County Regional Fire District has numerous properties and occupancies that are publicly owned, owned by non-profit or tax-exempt entities. These properties do not pay property taxes and are often high users of our services. Some examples include: Fort Ord National Monument, Garland Ranch Regional Park, Toro County Park, and Rippling River Retirement Community.

- F4)** *In 2020, NCFPD laid off six firefighters and considered closing one fire station due to budget constraints.*

The Board of Directors partially disagrees with the finding. While the District was aware of the fiscal constraints of the North Monterey County Fire District, to what extent these constraints required layoff or consideration of closing a fire station is not known. We defer to the North Monterey County Fire District for the impacts of this finding.

- F5)** *Voters in NCFPD had to enact a special assessment fee in 2021 to avert layoffs and station closures.*

The Board of Directors partially disagrees with this finding. While we understand that the North Monterey County Fire District recently passed a special assessment fee, we defer to them to provide the reasoning and justification for the decision to enact the special assessment.

- F6)** *NCFPD fire stations are outdated and fire apparatus needs updating and/or replacement.*

The Board of Directors partially disagrees with this finding. While we know the general age of the Fire Stations within North Monterey County Fire District, to what extent that their stations and fire apparatus needs updating and/or replaced is unknown. We defer to the North Monterey County Fire District for these details.

- F7)** *The number of service calls is similar between NCFPD and MCRFD. North County only has half the personnel and is responding with outdated equipment.*

The Board of Directors partially disagrees with this finding. The call volume between the two District is similar. However, the area of coverage is quite different. Monterey County Regional Fire Protection District services over four hundred square miles through seven stations and 70 total personnel. We defer to the North Monterey County Fire District for the validation of the finding's description of their equipment.

- F8)** *Automatic and mutual aid agreements alone are not sufficient to resolve fire coverage issues in the two districts.*

The Board of Directors agrees with this finding. Monterey County Regional Fire Protection District has executed nine separate automatic aid agreements with neighboring agencies. These agreements ensure that an appropriate number of resources are initially dispatched to emergency incidents. There are times when the incident complexities required an augmented response upon which mutual aid is requested. Occasionally, the incident exceeds or multiple incidents occurring simultaneously overwhelm the mutual aid resources which required the next level of response.

F9) *Distinct differences of EMS services exist between NCFPD (EMTs) and MCRFD (Paramedics).*

The Board of Directors agrees with this finding. Monterey County Regional Fire Protection District deploys firefighter paramedic on District engines and ambulances. These firefighters provide advance life support treatments to injured or ill patients.

F10) *Through National Fire Standards recommend four firefighters per engine, NCFPD only staffs two and MCRFD three.*

The Board of Directors partially disagrees with this finding. On a daily basis, Monterey County Regional Fire Protection District may only be able to deploy two of the District's six engine companies with three personnel. The remaining four engine companies are staffed with two personnel. Staffing levels continue to be constrained by available revenue.

F11) *Consolidation could be supported if all stakeholders are actively involved in the planning process.*

The Board of Directors partially disagrees with this finding. While stakeholder support is imperative to a consolidation effort, this alone will not be sufficient for a successful consolidation of these two agencies. Additional revenue to fully staff both Districts appropriately, upgrade existing facilities and equipment, and support ongoing operational expenses will need to be identified and guaranteed on a continuous basis.

F12) *In consolidation, economies of scale (grant-writing, administrative costs, shared revenue, human resources) could benefit both districts.*

The Board of Directors partially disagrees with this finding. There are some isolated economies of scale that may be obtained in a consolidation such as grant-writing expenses and potentially legal counsel. However, the other items detailed in this finding would provide only residual cost savings. Administrative costs including administrative personnel (Executives, Financial, Human Resources and, Office Staff) would likely remain the same as both Districts are currently working at or over capacity in all aspects of the District's business. On the operational side of the District there would be minimal savings as the services and supply costs are not driven by jurisdiction, but rather the cost to provide those services and supplies. A consolidated District would encompass over 520 square miles requiring the same level of Chief Officer coverage as is currently available within the separate agencies.

Civil Grand Jury Report- Recommendation

R1) *NCFPD and MCRFD hire an outside qualified consultant by December 31, 2022 to study the feasibility of consolidating the two districts.*

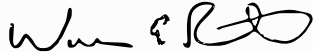
The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted and is unreasonable based on the lack of quantifiable improvements to fire and emergency response, response times and cost savings generated by a consolidation. The Board of Directors does not feel that commissioning a study as has been recommended would be productive to the mission of our District.

Monterey County Regional Fire District enjoys a great working relationship with North Monterey County Fire District. The two Districts collaborate often on various

operational topics at all levels of management and suppression operations. The most obvious example of this is the Monterey County Operational Area Urban Search and Rescue team that is sponsored by both Districts and the City of Monterey. This team, established in the late 1990s, has proven a successful joint effort filling a regional gap in capabilities.

Monterey County Regional Fire District remains open to pursuing potential consolidations that will improve, enhance and sustain the level of services provided to the residents of and visitors to the District.

Respectfully submitted,



Warren E. Poitras

President, Monterey County Regional Fire Protection District Board of Directors

Cc: David Sargenti, Interim Fire Chief