

North County Fire Protection District

of Monterey County

July 26, 2022



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

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

Dear Judge Hulseley,

This letter will serve as the Board of Directors of the North County 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 North County 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 agrees with the finding that property values and tax allocations disproportionately underfund fire districts throughout Monterey County. This is true in the case of the North County Fire Protection District, as we receive 9¢/\$1. According to the 2020 Municipal Service Review and Sphere of Influence Study by LAFCO of Monterey County, Table ES-2, the average portion of the County's 1% Property Tax received by the Counties fire districts varies from 0¢/\$1 to 25¢/\$1.

F2) *NCFPD tax revenue was drastically reduced when Duke Energy sold the decommissioned Moss Landing Power Plant.*

The Board of Directors agrees with the finding. From 2001 to 2020, the depreciation of the Moss Landing Power Plant (MLPP) has

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reduced the North County Fire Protection District's revenues by hundreds of thousands of dollars. However, since 2021, improvements to the MLPP have reversed that trend, and higher property values have significantly increased the previously reduced revenue.

- F3)** *In 2018, NCFPD annexed Monterey Regional Waste Management and Monterey One Water Property with increased risk but no increase in tax revenue.*

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.

- 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. In June 2019, the North County Fire Protection District laid off five firefighters hired initially through a three-year federal grant. Although the reduction of personnel made daily operations challenging, no fire stations were closed, nor did any calls for emergency service go unanswered.

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

The Board of Directors agrees with this finding. In June 2021, the property owners of the North County Fire Protection District overwhelmingly passed a Proposition 218 Benefit Assessment. In February of 2022, the North County Fire Protection District hired five firefighters to fill the vacant positions created during the layoffs of 2019.

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

The Board of Directors agrees with this finding. Two fire stations were built in the 1950s, and the newest fire station was built in 1987. All the District's fire stations need repairs and upgrades. The District has hired a consultant to develop a Capital Facilities Plan to help determine the priority of repairs or replacements of its facilities.

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- 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 agrees with this finding. The call volume between the two Districts is similar. However, the coverage area is different. North County Fire Protection District services 125 square miles through three fire stations and 30 total personnel. The North County Fire District is responding with older equipment, most of which has been with the District for twenty years or longer.

- 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. The North County Fire Protection District has entered into automatic aid agreements with all its neighboring fire agencies. These agreements ensure that an appropriate number of resources are initially dispatched to specific emergency incidents without depleting the resources of any one agency at the same time. In cases where the incident requires more resources than the initial dispatch provides, mutual aid is requested.

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

The Board of Directors agrees with this finding. North County Fire Protection District deploys firefighters on District engines for every response. These firefighters provide Basic 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. Daily, North County Fire Protection District may only be able to deploy one of the District's three engine companies with three personnel. The remaining two engine companies are staffed with two personnel. Staffing levels are directly impacted by available revenue. We defer to the Monterey County Regional Fire District for the impacts of this finding.

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- 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 crucial to a consolidation effort, this alone will not be sufficient for a fiscally sound consolidation of these two Districts. 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 continuously.

- 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. Some isolated economies of scale may be obtained through consolidation, such as grant-writing expenses. However, the other items detailed in this finding would not provide savings. Administrative costs, including administrative personnel, and office staff, would likely remain the same as both Districts currently work 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, a large area requiring additional Chief Officer coverage than 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 followed because the recommendation fails to recognize what the goal of such a study would provide and how any such study would improve the mission and effectiveness of the North County Fire Protection District.

First and foremost, such a study of any kind would require funding of which

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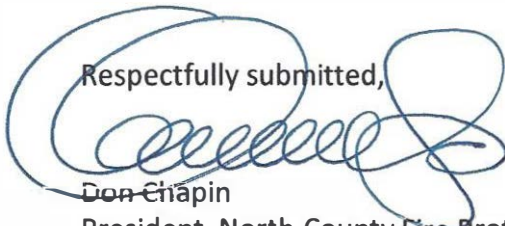
this District does not have available. The objective of any study would need to identify what measurable improvements to operations of the North County Fire Protection District and Monterey County Regional Fire District are sought or deemed to need improvement. A favorable improvement would improve, enhance, and sustain the level of services that we now provide. A study about potential consolidation does not achieve that goal. The Board of Directors opines that commissioning of the recommended feasibility study could be counterproductive and likely negatively impact an otherwise excellent working relationship that the Districts now have.

Today the Districts corroborate on many operational and administrative projects, including grant writing, fire training, fire prevention activities, and care & maintenance of safety equipment. Working together, both agencies comprise twenty of the thirty Monterey County Urban Search and Rescue Team members.

The funding of the North County Fire Protection District and Monterey County Regional Fire District is what needs to be further studied, and such study should be undertaken by the County of Monterey. This funding issue has already been identified as the area that needs improvement.

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

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Don Chapin', written over a large, circular blue scribble.

Don Chapin

President, North County Fire Protection District Board of Directors

Cc: Joel Mendoza, Fire Chief