

FROM: The Ad Hoc Fire Committee

FOR: May 17, 2022 Sebastopol City Council Meeting

SUBJECT: FAQ Related to Item #7: Recommendation of the Ad Hoc Fire Committee

1. Question: What is being recommended by the Ad Hoc Fire Committee?

Answer: The Ad Hoc Fire Committee is recommending that the City Council begin the process to consolidate with Gold Ridge Fire Protection District (GRFPD). This includes: continued City financial support of a consolidated fire district; support for an Interim Contract with Gold Ridge to provide the continuation of high quality fire services for our community during the period that the terms of the Consolidation is being negotiated with GRFPD; creation of Ad Hoc Committee for purpose of negotiations only, appointment of two Councilmembers to this newly created Ad Hoc Committee (if creation of a committee is supported); and authorization to begin the LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission) process at the same time negotiations are being discussed.

2. Question: Who is on the "Ad Hoc Fire Committee?"

Answer: The current Committee (which has been in place since December of 2020) consists of two City Council appointed Liaisons: Mayor Patrick Slayter and Councilmember Diana Rich, plus City staff: City Manager Larry McLaughlin, Asst City Manager Mary Gourley, and Fire Chief Bill Braga.

3. Question: Is this the first time the Ad Hoc Committee has reported on its activities?

Answer: The Ad Hoc Fire Committee provided a progress report at the May 18, 2021 Council meeting. The full City Council approved continuing the process and directed the Ad Hoc Committee to consider all available options. The Committee informed the City Council that it expected its inquiry would be broad and would include the consideration of a variety of options, including among them continued operation of the fire department by the City and possible consolidation with another fire district. The Ad Hoc Committee then moved forward to investigate the options as directed by the Council.

4. Question: Has the Fire Department been represented or involved in the meetings that have been held so far?

Answer: Yes, the Sebastopol Fire Department was represented by the Fire Chief, who has been and continues to be an active and involved contributor to the Committee's process.

5. Question: How much time has the Ad Hoc Committee spent investigating the options for the Fire Department? Has this been a thorough process?

Answer: Meetings have been ongoing since early 2020. The current Ad Hoc Fire Committee has made a thorough inquiry into the options for the continued stability of the Fire Department. Just since February of 2021, the calendar shows sixteen meetings, including meetings of the full Ad Hoc Committee, focused outreach meetings with other fire districts and with LAFCO (Local

Agency Formation Commission) and meetings specifically with our Sebastopol volunteer firefighters. In addition to these meetings, the Committee has engaged in research and analysis, with all efforts dedicated to determining the very best course to recommend for the continuation of services to the community.

6. Question: Why weren't individual firefighters included in the Ad Hoc Committee meetings?

Answer: Each department head is responsible for representing their department in City matters and is authorized to speak on their behalf. The head of the Fire Department is the Fire Chief. He has been and continues to actively contribute to the discussion and decision-making and is supportive of the recommendations of this Committee.

7. Question: Was the Ad Hoc Committee informed of the concerns of the firefighters? If so, why is the Ad Hoc recommending consolidation?

Answer: Yes, the Ad Hoc Committee for Fire Department Long Term Staffing Goals and Solution first met with the volunteers in 2018 to discuss long term planning for the Fire Department. This Committee was redefined and a new Fire Ad Hoc Committee was created in 2020-and is fully aware of the concerns of the firefighters. Mayor Slayter and Councilmember Rich met with a group of volunteer firefighters in April 2021 and again on Thursday, May 12, 2022 to present the staff report and listen to their comments, and their level of concern was as expected. The Ad Hoc Committee recognizes that consolidation has the potential for disruption in the Fire Department, but firmly supports that consolidation is best for the community at large.

8. Question: Did the Ad Hoc Committee meet with the firefighters as a group? Why weren't there more meetings with the firefighters as a group?

Answer: In addition to having the benefit of the Fire Chief's presence, the Ad Hoc Committee had two formal meetings with the firefighters as a group. The first was at the launch of the current Ad Hoc Committee, in April of 2021. The second was on May 12, 2022, after the Staff Report was published. The Ad Hoc Committee did not meet further with the firefighters because the Fire Chief had been involved in every meeting and was forthright in conveying both his perspective as well as that of the volunteer firefighters.

9. Question: Why is the Ad Hoc Committee recommending consolidation?

Answer: The Staff Report explains the logic involved in recommending consolidation. After much research, it is the Ad Hoc Committee's conclusion that our City fire services needs an infusion of funding and the support of an infrastructure that will provide efficient 24/7 staffing. The goal is to improve response times to meet the community's needs and to ensure financial and staffing stability into the future. Consolidation with Gold Ridge Fire Protection District can provide that service.

10. Question: What's wrong with the current funding and staffing model at the Fire Department?

Answer: Our response times are increasing, our community's needs are increasing, and our funding is insufficient to cover the ever-higher costs of the Department. The response time of emergency service is important since it is considered as the main aspect for the success of the prehospital care and therefore, for the survival of the victims. The response times have increased because on site staffing at the fire station is limited. During most of the hours in any 24 hour span the fire station has no personnel on site. A call comes in, most firefighters respond from home to the fire station, and are deployed from there. This creates a longer response time, during which our community member in need waits for assistance. As to the increased community needs, it is well known that we have an aging population with more frequent and severity of medical calls. As to funding, the City has currently allocated over \$1 million this fiscal year to the Fire Department, and more than \$1 million more is needed to provide a 24/7 staffing model and to maintain equipment and fund facility improvements. In summary, our fire service needs are double what is currently allocated and available through the City budget. That money is not available in our City budget, nor to any other Department within the City.

11. Question: Why is the May 17, 2022 meeting the first time the public has been made aware of the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendation?

Answer: The Ad Hoc Fire Committee has only recently completed its investigation into options. May 17th was the earliest possible date that the Ad Hoc Committee could provide the City Council and the public its recommendations.

12. Question: Is it true that the firefighters receive no compensation?

Answer: It is inaccurate to say that firefighters receive no compensation. They do receive compensation. The City of Sebastopol compensates firefighters in the form of stipends as well as on a per-call-out basis. When a volunteer responds to a call, the volunteer gets paid for the response and if that call comes during a stipend shift, the volunteer gets paid for the response, plus the stipend shift. When firefighters attend regular Thursday trainings or any special trainings they also receive a stipend. There is also a "retention pay" amount (currently \$80,000) that is shared among all firefighters each year. Firefighters also receive compensation for their work with the California Office of Emergency Services. Transparent California provides firefighter pay information. www.transparentcalifornia.com. Under "Salaries" on the landing page, select "Cities," then "Sebastopol." Enter "firefighter" in the search bar to indicate the position category. The most recent data available on the site is for 2020, but prior years are also available.

13. Question: Why is Gold Ridge Fire Protection District considered the best option recommended by the Ad Committee?

Answer: From the information the Ad Hoc Committee collected from the investigation, as well as the input provided by the Fire Chief, the Ad Hoc Committee concluded that Gold Ridge Fire Protection District can provide the infrastructure needed to efficiently and effectively implement

a 24/7 model in Sebastopol. The Gold Ridge FPD has a culture that values volunteers, already has an existing relationship with our Fire Department and our community, and has declared a willingness to work with us to negotiate a consolidation that will accommodate our town's needs. In addition, Gold Ridge FPD can provide Sebastopol Fire Department with interim leadership to bridge the gap between our Fire Chief's retirement in December and the finalization of negotiations for consolidation. Finally, Gold Ridge FPD has already indicated an openness (subject to negotiation of course) to providing Sebastopol a position on its Board, which would provide Sebastopol with a means to participate in decisions affecting Sebastopol fire services into the future.

14. Question: What is the process going forward?

The City Council will provide direction at the May 17 meeting and, if the City Council supports the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Committee, a new Ad Hoc Committee will be appointed for the purposes of negotiations only. The new Ad Hoc would be tasked with negotiating an interim contract with Gold Ridge FPD, and then negotiate the final contract for the full terms of the consolidation. The steps leading up to final consolidation would include involvement from LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission)-which must approve the consolidation in order for it to move forward, and the opportunity for landowners to weigh in on a parcel tax levied in order to cover the additional funding our Fire Department needs. We expect the entire process to be completed within a year.

15. Question: Why do we need a parcel tax to fund our fire department?

Answer: Our Fire Department needs additional funding to pay for 24/7 staffing and to cover equipment and facility expenses. The funds available from the City (and would commit to continuing under the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Committee) is insufficient to meet those needs.

16. Question: How much of a parcel tax would Sebastopol landowners be facing if consolidation moves forward?

Answer: If Sebastopol consolidates with Gold Ridge FPD, the existing parcel tax for all Gold Ridge FPD parcels would apply to Sebastopol. The current parcel tax for residential landowners is \$265 per parcel, plus \$100 for each additional unit on that parcel. There would be a process for landowners to contest the new parcel tax. Please see the Staff Report for details.

17. Question: Would it be less expensive to continue our own fire department rather than consolidate?

Answer: No, it would not be less expensive to continue to operate our Fire Department independently. The Fire Department needs more funding, no matter what happens with consolidation, for both 24/7 staffing and for equipment replacement and facility upgrades. Sebastopol Fire Department also benefits financially from shared administrative and management services, and gives Sebastopol access to many additional resources that Gold Ridge Fire Protection District has because of its size and prior consolidations.

18. Question: Why does this decision need to be made now?

Answer: Our Fire Chief has announced his retirement, effective December of this year. Our Fire Department requires, and deserves, a plan for continued leadership. This recent development hastened the timeline and the need to move forward immediately.

19. Question: What impact would the proposed consolidation have on my homeowner insurance rates?

Answer: Insurance companies use data provided by a variety of sources to set insurance rates. As we have seen recently statewide, property owners in areas with high fire risks have seen increases in insurance rates, requiring the State Insurance Commission to take action. Sebastopol has enjoyed very positive ratings by these independent rating entities (some are non-profit, others are for-profit) and insurance companies have recognized the quality of Sebastopol's fire protection services evidenced by low fire insurance rates. The proposed consolidation would change nothing about the existing infrastructure that the rating companies analyze: the centrally-located fire station would not move (it would actually be improved) and the comprehensive hydrant network would remain in place, fed by Sebastopol's reliable water delivery system. The changes would likely improve Sebastopol's ratings due to the faster response allowed by 24/7 firehouse staffing and the additional resources devoted to equipment and apparatus improvements.

20. Question: How can members of the public weigh in on this subject?

1. Review the Ad Hoc Fire Committee's Staff Report [HERE](#) so you are fully informed.
2. Attend the City Council meeting Tuesday May 17@6pm to offer your public comment. The Staff Report and Zoom Link are [HERE](#).
3. Email your input to City Clerk/Asst City Manager Mary Gourley (mgourley@cityofsebastopol.org). Open your email with "Dear Mayor and City Councilmembers," Mary will immediately distribute your email to all five on the City Council.

Attachments:

May 17,2022 Staff Report with Recommendations from the Ad Hoc Fire Committee

May 18, 2021 Staff Report with Request for Direction from the Ad Hoc Fire Committee