

From: [Lee Mathias](#)
To: [City Council](#)
Subject: Is Sebastopol prepared for the changing fire behavior in Sonoma County
Date: Sunday, January 30, 2022 12:54:28 PM

Recently Sebastopol had a fire at a commercial property and another at a home off of Hurlbut. My understanding is that Sebastopol fire response was delayed and that Graton and Gold Ridge arrived ahead of Sebastopol Fire. Obviously fire response times are critically important to keeping our community and its citizens safe.

The Fire Chief for Santa Rosa tonight during a public input session for the County Fire Protection Plan, told those of us from Sebastopol who participated, that his concern was not just Wild land fires but a routine residence fire in Sebastopol during a wind event causing a catastrophic urban fire. We just saw this happen in Colorado in the winter! This risk increases with slow response times or inoperative or inadequate equipment.

For a couple of years it appears Sebastopol has been depending on Graton and Gold Beach to be first responders to daytime fires in the city limits. With the new alignment in the County does the City Council know how this might impact Graton and Gold Ridge response to Sebastopol fire calls?

Issues with Sebastopol Fire meeting staffing and response standards are not new. The 2019 Sonoma LAFCO Municipal Services Review for Sebastopol Fire Department identified the response issue as most critical during daytime responses when volunteers are unable to respond due their full time jobs. The solution at the time was to use voter approved tax revenues to hire two full time fire fighters. Why do we continue to have issues with response to significant fires?

My understanding is that daytime responses prior to 2019 was not a problem because several city employees who are also fire fighters were encouraged by city policy to respond to daytime fire calls. That actually seems like an enlightened and elegant solution to having volunteers available in the township while they provide other city services.

The policy may have been ended due to a non fire-fighter employee complaint. I believe a prior City Council may have also felt medical calls were unworthy of city employees time. As sometimes happens, that led to support for a policy requiring city employees to use vacation time to fight fires.

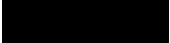
Given the critical nature of fire in the world of climate change and the issue with response times, perhaps you should review and modify Sebastopol City policy that no longer allows city employees who are Sebastopol volunteer fire fighters to use

City time to respond to fire calls.

1. If fire medical response is unnecessary to save lives of local citizens and tax payers then you might reconsider limiting the policy allowing city employee volunteers to make fire response calls during the daytime.
2. Perhaps with two full time fire fighters the need to reach out for city employee volunteers might be limited to days when full timers are on vacation or in an unusual situation where there are more than one fire in the township. The Chief could advise the City Manager when there might be a particular need.
3. The policy could be amended to allow city employees to respond to fires any time there is a high wind warning in effect increasing the risk a simple structure fire could become a catastrophe.

I believe you will soon be reviewing a proposal to purchase a new fire truck. You are also beginning work on next year's budget. Perhaps that can be a springboard to a public review of how our fire department is performing and how these issues are being addressed. Are we prepared for the changing nature of fires in Sonoma County?

I'm sure with a full report from our Chief with a frank discussion of the issues being faced that solutions will present themselves.

Lee Mathias

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Sent from my iPad