

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Mary Gourley](#)
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Fire Dept. Feasibility Study comments
Date: Monday, January 30, 2023 10:23:38 PM

Hello Mary - If you could please pass this on to the council members, I would appreciate it. Not sure if will get to them before tomorrow's meeting, but at least I have it on record. Thanks so much!

-Jim Wheaton

To the City Council:

I have read the summary of the Feasibility Study as published in the Sebastopol Times on Jan. 28th.

(<https://www.sebastopoltimes.com/p/consultants-outline-plan-for-consolidation>)

I have read the complete Feasibility Study by Matrix. (

[https://ci.sebastopol.ca.us/SebastopolSite/media/Documents/Fire_Dept/Final-Sebastopol-FR-01-03-23-\(Feasability-Study\).pdf](https://ci.sebastopol.ca.us/SebastopolSite/media/Documents/Fire_Dept/Final-Sebastopol-FR-01-03-23-(Feasability-Study).pdf))

Based on my reading of things, I do not think we are ready to make the decision to Consolidate yet.

Here are my specific comments:

1) The Matrix Study is poorly written. Just from the matter of the typos, changing typefaces, random spaces in the middle of words and what seems like a copy/paste approach to the content, the study does not inspire confidence. I would refrain from using Matrix in the future unless they can guarantee some sort of proper final pass through a copy editor.

2) Despite the problems with the formatting of the study, my real goal was to read its conclusions and understand its justifications. I found these justifications poorly explained and even hard to find. While the report lists the details of each proposal (consolidation vs. in-house improvements), it maintains on page 81 that "Overall, the delivery of services will remain the same regardless of the path chosen between retention of the current fire department and merging with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District". So why does it recommend consolidation, then?

When it recommends the consolidation option (page 84), it says "In as much as the delivery of emergency services will remain like the existing system, consolidation provides additional administrative support while reducing the cost of duplication. Also, there will be an increase in the availability and number of volunteer staff to provide additional support to the operational aspects of the fire department."

While it is probably true that there is increased "administrative support" in a larger fire dept., and perhaps a small financial case to be made for saving some "cost of duplication" (whatever they mean by that - equipment? people?) the argument that consolidation would cause an increase in the "availability and number of volunteer staff" is based on funding models that are not guaranteed.

3) The financials are the real issue here in some ways. Our town has decided we want to "improve the delivery of emergency services", but how can that happen without an increase in funding? Consolidation would provide further funding **to Gold Ridge** because of the assumed automatic parcel tax of \$265 for home owners in Sebastopol. But, we would still have the "yet to be negotiated" payment of 11% (or more !) of our budget, and we still have aging equipment and the need for improving the firehouse to support a 24/7 staffing model, regardless of the choice here.

So, as an interested and supposedly informed citizen, I am not able to support consolidation at this time. I worry about potential unintended consequences of a consolidation in which some major relationship and financial pieces are left to further "negotiations". But, I am not opposed to changing things when presented with proper justification. And that doesn't mean there aren't problems with the existing model, especially with the high costs of paying our "volunteers"!

Finally, I am not opposed to a parcel tax (as a home owner I'm already taxed over \$1000 per year for 16 different "agency charges and special assessments"). So, maybe we should tax ourselves for this and increase our own budget for firefighting?

So at this point I am in the "better the devil you know" camp. We know we need to raise more money for lots of things, lets focus on that.

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