

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: September 3, 2024

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To: Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers
From: Fire Ad Hoc Committee members
Subject: Sebastopol Fire Department and Gold Ridge Fire Protection District Consolidation
Fire Ad Hoc Committee Duties/Tasks/Duration of Committee

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RECOMMENDATION:

The roles of the Fire Ad Hoc Committee are to include:

1. Negotiate on behalf of the City of Sebastopol with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District throughout the LAFCO process
2. Have primary responsibility for advising the City Council on budget matters related to the fire department.
3. Lead review of extension and possible expansion of contract services with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District for fire chief administration and fire department operational responsibilities, set to expire September 30, 2024.
4. Review Resolution committing to moving forward with the LAFCO Process.
5. Review any Revenue Sharing or Tax-Exchange Agreement, authorizing the exchange of tax revenues between the City of Sebastopol and the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District.
6. Review the LAFCO application, which includes the Plan of Service, to ensure regulatory compliance and thoroughly evaluate the consolidation's feasibility and benefits.
7. Lead public communications concerning the LAFCO process and subsequent consolidation with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

At the City Council Meeting of April 16, 2024, the Council appointed a Fire Ad Hoc Committee to represent the City in negotiations with LAFCO and the Gold Ridge Fire Department and related matters, with a description of tasks, roles, and responsibilities to be presented to the City Council for approval. Those tasks are before the City Council tonight for approval.

DISCUSSION/BACKGROUND:

It is proposed that this Committee negotiate on behalf of the City of Sebastopol with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District while coordinating with LAFCO to achieve a successful process. The Fire Ad Hoc should complete the following to achieve successful consolidation:

1. Primary responsibility to make recommendations to the full City Council related to fire department remaining budget allocations and implementation of Measure H funds.
2. Negotiate the extension and possible expansion of contract services with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District to include fire chief administration and operational responsibilities for the fire department. The final contract will be subject to City Council approval.
3. Review the resolution committing to moving forward with the LAFCO process before seeking Council approval. While not technically required, approving the resolution is highly recommended by LAFCO staff. This resolution provides clear direction to initiate the LAFCO process. It sets the foundation for the consolidation.

4. Review any Revenue Sharing or the Tax-Exchange Agreement, authorizing the exchange of tax revenues between the City of Sebastopol and the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District. The final agreement is to come before the full Council for consideration.
5. Review the LAFCO application, including the Plan of Service, which thoroughly evaluates the consolidation's feasibility and benefits. The review assesses resource allocation, service delivery impacts, and financial implications. It also incorporates community feedback and addresses concerns.
6. Lead public communications to ensure transparency, keep all stakeholders informed, and ensure understanding of the process. This promotes collaboration and a smoother transition during consolidation.

ANALYSIS:

The annexation process is driven by LAFCO's requirements and timelines. The Council will receive a presentation by LAFCO at this same meeting, scheduled to be heard prior to this item. The Fire Ad Hoc Committee should be empowered to negotiate on behalf of the City of Sebastopol with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District. This committee will keep the City Council informed of consolidation efforts.

Financial matters are a key aspect of negotiations. A responsibility of the Fire Ad Hoc will be the fire department budget and the implementation of Measure H funds. The recently approved ½ cent sales tax is dedicated to improving fire departments in Sonoma County. Sebastopol's Measure H funds will address staffing challenges, fire station improvements, and operational concerns. Any changes to the city budget will be brought to the full Council for consideration.

In April, the City Council authorized the City Manager to enter into a short-term agreement with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District to provide Chief Officer services at the Sebastopol fire station during the merger transition period while developing a longer-term agreement subject to the approval of the City Council and Gold Ridge Board of Directors. The existing agreement expires September 30. A contract extension is required to preserve this administrative agreement and maintain Chief Officer oversight throughout the consolidation process. Gold Ridge has drafted a proposed amendment for review by the Ad Hoc Committee. The final contract will be subject to City Council approval on September 17.

The Fire Ad Hoc and City Council will be asked to approve a joint resolution to initiate the LAFCO process. This resolution is essential for providing clear direction and sets the foundation for consolidation. We will work from a draft provided by Gold Ridge.

The Gold Ridge Fire Protection District will coordinate the development of the Plan of Service to evaluate the consolidation's feasibility and benefits thoroughly. This plan assesses resource allocation, service delivery impacts, and financial implications. It also incorporates community feedback and addresses concerns. LAFCO determines the distribution of fire-related assets and liabilities based on the Plan for Service.

The Ad Hoc Committee will negotiate a Revenue Sharing or Tax-Exchange Agreement, which authorizes the exchange of tax revenues between the City and Gold Ridge. A portion of the City's property taxes and/or the General Fund will likely be transferred to Gold Ridge. This agreement ensures the financial aspects of consolidation are addressed equitably. The final agreement will be presented to the full Council for consideration. Gold Ridge will develop an initial proposal.

Public communication is a crucial component of the consolidation process. The Fire Ad Hoc, in coordination with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District, will develop an outreach plan and likely attend public speaking engagements, utilize social media, and conduct mailer campaigns to ensure transparency and keep all stakeholders informed. These efforts will help ensure understanding of the process, promote collaboration, and facilitate a smoother transition during consolidation. We anticipate that this effort will begin toward the end of 2024 or in early 2025. Both the City and Gold Ridge have included funding to support this.

The Ad Hoc will also consider options for expanding staffing, following a pilot Volunteer Firefighter Staffing Expansion Program which the Ad Hoc Committee learned of on June 20. The Ad Hoc Committee will review the results of the pilot program and work with staff to develop a recommendation for the full Council to consider.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

This item has been noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to schedule meeting date.

FISCAL IMPACT: The FY 24-25 budget has dedicated funds for Contract Services, including funding for fire station assessment, staffing, and the LAFCO process. We are not proposing uses for these funds at this time.

OPTIONS:

If the Council does not approve the tasks lists as proposed; the Council can:

1. Approve the tasks lists with amendments;
2. Deny the task list (which would complicate consolidation with Gold Ridge)

ATTACHMENTS

None

APPROVALS:

Department Head Approval: Approval Date: 8-28-2024

CEQA Determination (Planning): Approval Date: 8-28-2024

The proposed action is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

Administrative Services (Financial) Approval Date: 8-28-2024

Costs authorized in City Approved Budget: Yes No N/A

Account Code (f applicable) _____

City Attorney Approval: Approval Date: N/A (will be involved in reviewing documents as this process moves forward.

City Manager Approval: Approval Date: August 28, 2024