

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: July 16, 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

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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 the 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.

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 will 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 must complete the following recommendations 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. This resolution is essential for providing clear direction to initiate the LAFCO process. It sets the foundation for the consolidation of the Sebastopol Fire Department with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District.

4. Review the Tax-Exchange Agreement, authorizing the exchange of tax revenues between the City of Sebastopol and the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District. A portion of sales and property taxes will likely be transferred to the consolidating agency (i.e., 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:

To meet LAFCO timelines, 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 primary 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 limited-term agreement expires September 30. A contract extension is required to preserve this administrative agreement and maintain Chief Officer oversight throughout the consolidation process. The final contract will be subject to City Council approval.

A resolution is required to initiate the LAFCO process. This resolution is essential for providing clear direction and sets the foundation for consolidating the Sebastopol Fire Department with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District. The City Council would approve the resolution.

Review the Tax-Exchange Agreement, which authorizes the exchange of tax revenues between the City of Sebastopol and the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District. A portion of sales and property taxes will likely be transferred to the consolidating agency, the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District. This agreement ensures the financial aspects of consolidation are addressed equitably. The final agreement will be presented to the full Council for consideration.

The Gold Ridge Fire Protection District will initiate the LAFCO application by coordinating 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. This process is crucial for informed decision-making and achieving successful consolidation. After reviewing the completed application, the Fire Ad Hoc and City Council will be required to approve the joint resolution

Public communication is a crucial component of the consolidation process. The Fire Ad Hoc, in coordination with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District, will 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.

Anticipated Upcoming Schedule (Subject to Change)

August 12 Council meeting

- Briefing on the LAFCO process and the anticipated timeline. The Ad Hoc has asked that this include more information on the potential for Monte Rio to be part of the LAFCO process. The Ad Hoc learned at the last meeting that Monte Rio is interested in going through the process in tandem with Sebastopol. The Ad Hoc is interested in knowing how this might affect the timing and other aspects of consolidation. According to Gold Ridge, Monte Rio's participation is a LAFCO decision and will not impact Sebastopol's process. See attachment.

September 17 Council meeting

- Council and Gold Ridge Board of Directors will seek concurrent Resolutions addressing the LAFCO requirement setting minimum time/duration for the merger years (Code 56855). The resolution will seek to dissolve and transfer City responsibilities to the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District. LAFCO desires this resolution to demonstrate the City's commitment to the reorganization.
- Plan of Service. Gold Ridge will develop and seek approval in September
- Extend the current service contract with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District. Fire Ad Hoc will review the extension and possible expansion of the current contract, including assessing fire station needs and plan to address them, subject to City agreement

To be determined: City Council consideration of Tax Exchange Agreement

To be determined: Consideration of Volunteer Firefighter Staffing Expansion Program, which the Ad Hoc Committee learned of on June 20. Sebastopol Fire Department will be seeking approval for 24/7 volunteer staffing using existing funds for stipends. The Ad Hoc Committee will review the results of a 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:

1. Draft Preliminary Timeline
2. Memo from Gold Ridge Fire Protection District re: Monte Rio

APPROVALS:

Department Head Approval: Approval Date: 7-9-2024

CEQA Determination (Planning): Approval Date: 7-9-2024

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

Administrative Services (Financial) Approval Date: 7-9-2024

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

Account Code (f applicable) _____

City Attorney Approval: Approval Date: 7-9-2024

City Manager Approval: Approval Date: July 9, 2024

Annexation Procedural Schedule

- **July 2024** - Coordinate with Sonoma LAFCO Executive Officer regarding timeline feasibility and confirmation of preferred LAFCO template for the reorganization application
- **August** - Briefing to each District Board and City Council on LAFCO procedures, timing and application preparation
- **September** - each District Board and City Council considers and approves Concurrent Resolution to be included in the LAFCO Application
- **October** - LAFCO application drafted and concurrent review with LAFCO staff; community outreach and education re: plan for service and LAFCO schedule for areas to be annexed
- **TBD-Funding and Tax Shift Agreement**
 - **November** - Completion and submission of LAFCO application
 - **January 2025** - LAFCO sends out notice of hearing on the merits
 - **March 5, 2025** - LAFCO hearing on the merits of the LAFCO application and reorganization; LAFCO adopts approval Resolution; notice sent out for protest hearing
 - **May 7, 2025** - LAFCO protest hearing - if less than 25% continue; if greater than 25% election scheduled for November 4, 2025
 - **June 2025** - LAFCO records Certificate of Completion with March approval Resolution
 - **July 2025** - early in month, reorganized District holds Special Meeting to adopt implementation Resolutions for "Go Live" effective 7/1/25



GOLD RIDGE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

Proudly serving the communities of Hessel, Twin Hills, Freestone, Fort Ross, Camp Meeker, Bodega, Valley Ford, Bloomfield, Two Rock, Wilmar, San Antonio, and Lakeville

Memorandum

To: City of Sebastopol Fire Ad-Hoc

From: Chief Schroth-Cary

Re: LAFCO inclusion of Monte Rio

In August 2018 the County of Sonoma Board of Supervisors expressed the desire to reduce the number of fire agencies in the County for the purpose of creating a more efficient and effective county-wide fire service. Recognizing and understanding the desire and goals of the County, Gold Ridge Fire District (GRFD) board and staff evaluated the feasibility and appropriateness of consolidating County Fire Service Area 40 (CSA40) into the District and concluded that consolidation of this territory was appropriate and met the goals of a sustainable fire service model.

During the consolidation process with CSA40 it was recognized by both the GRFD and Monte Rio Fire District (MRFD) governing boards and staff that a consolidation with MRFD aligned with the goals of reducing the number of fire agencies as well as creating improvements to fire service delivery for both districts.

The MRFD governing board expressed a desire to be consolidated into GRFD dating back to the beginning of the consolidation process with CSA40. Since that time GRFD and MRFD have had regular planning meetings, entered into a shared service agreement for administrative staff and made a formal request to LAFCO to include MRFD in the sphere of influence study (SOI)

When approached by the City of Sebastopol to explore the annexation of the City's fire services, a similar analysis was conducted by GRFD board and staff which concluded that moving forward with annexation was in the best interest of all parties.

The District's decision to proceed with the annexation of Sebastopol fire services and the consolidation of MRFD was made after careful consideration and met the following criteria: that it would provide a sustainable and improved fire service, is mutually beneficial, and aligns culturally. The inclusion of MRFD has no impact on our ability to annex the City of Sebastopol's fire services.

Ultimately, the decision lies with the Sonoma County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). The LAFCO staff and commissioners will evaluate all relevant factors and determine the most appropriate path forward.