



“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!”

Good Advice

Findings of the Local Emergency Services Study Group

What are the next steps?



DATE: June 22, 2021

TO: Board of Directors and Council Members –
Eastern Plumas Rural Fire Protection District, Sierra Valley Fire Protection District,
Beckwourth Fire Protection District, City of Portola, Gold Mountain Community
Services District, C-Road Community Services District

FROM: Tom Cooley, Chair – Local Emergency Services Study Group
Cary Curtis, Vice Chair

SUBJECT: LOCAL EMERGENCY STUDY GROUP – RE-ORGANIZATION OF FIRE PROTECTION &
EMERGENCY SERVICES IN EASTERN PLUMAS COUNTY

Status as of May 25, 2021

The six Study Group agencies have been meeting since February of 2020 to discuss the current state and challenges that lie ahead for sustaining volunteer fire fighting and emergency medical response services in Eastern Plumas County. Leading up to the formation of the Study Group, various presentations were made by Jennifer Stephenson, Executive Officer of Plumas LAFCo, providing framework for restructuring options that could be pursued to address issues that are common to the six agencies and that have reached critical levels across the State and country. Additionally, the 2019 Plumas County Grand Jury Report included a finding that fire agencies in the county should evaluate restructuring and recognize the benefits provided. From these presentations and findings, the Study Group was formed to collaborate on solutions to common issues with the goal of identifying a path forward for sustainable fire protection and emergency medical response services in Eastern Plumas County.

The statements contained here about the performance of volunteers in fire service as well as their district boards should not be construed as criticism. The scope of those responsibilities has increased dramatically over the recent period while the structure of our institutions has not kept pace nor adapted. It is simply time to adapt to changing conditions.

Common issues identified by the Study Group are broken into three categories –

1. **Volunteers** – significant decline in volunteerism, inability to attract fully-qualified individuals, high turnover, increased demand for training and certification, increased regulatory requirements and accreditation required of volunteer Chiefs, training officers and administrators, and specific response techniques are not consistent, but expectation is for agencies to perform as one unit.
2. **Financial Constraints** – inconsistent year over year revenue, limited county tax sharing, minimal parcel taxes that do not include inflation factors, and increasing operating costs.

3. **Outdated District Boundaries** – growth patterns not updated, islands of property that are not part of a district even though the parcels are encircled by a district. These “islands” receive services from the closest fire department but do not contribute to the cost for those services.

Below is a summary of actions the Study Group has taken to support the selection of a reorganizational option to improve the safety and economy of fire and emergency medical services.

Key Action	Outcome
Group discussion with CALFIRE Unit Chief Scott Packwood	Identification of minimal resources supported by CALFIRE that could assist the Group’s effort
Presentation of options by Jennifer Stephenson, Executive Officer Plumas LAFCo	Understanding of 4 restructuring options* available to the Group with a recommendation from LAFCo of forming a new District as most viable option
MOU adopted by participating 6 agencies	Cohesive group with common goals that is working well together
Request for Plumas LAFCo to consider fee waiver	LAFCo agrees to waive \$12,000 in fees. Current estimate of LAFCo fees before waiver is \$25,000
Presentations of reorganization options by legal counsels for Beckwourth Fire and City of Portola	Viewpoint based on experience and legal requirements of the four restructuring options available to the Group with an opinion of forming a new District as the approach that fits the need of the 6 agencies
Vote by the 6 participating board representatives on reorganization option to pursue	October 7, 2020 – a vote of the 6 agency board representatives unanimously agreed to move forward with considering forming a new district and to request approval of this option from each of their respective boards.
Consultation with Plumas County Administrator and County Counsel to explore finance and tax sharing options for the proposed new fire district.	Discussions were had on Nov. 18, 2020. County representatives recognized challenges faced by fire districts in the county, agreed to look at standardizing existing tax sharing dollars across all parcels of a new district but would not commit to additional funding for a new fire district.

*Four restructuring options –

- 1) Joint Powers Agreement for some or all services. Often ends in dissolution.
- 2) Consolidation of districts with substantially similar resolutions.
- 3) Annexation into one surviving agency.
- 4) Dissolution of all and formation of an entirely new district.

Decision to Form a New District

At its October 7, 2020, meeting the Study Group unanimously approved a motion to advance the restructuring study with the goal of establishing a new fire district. The Study Group examined the benefits to the four available options; creating a new district stood out as the preferred solution. With this solution an entirely new agency is formed, and existing providers are dissolved. Dissolution and/or cessation of fire services occurs by resolution of each governing board, application to LAFCo,

and a protest hearing. The application to LAFCo for formation of the new district is by resolution of the City Council or petition of 25% of registered voters. Upon approval by LAFCo, the formation is submitted to the voters within the new district for approval by a simple majority. (Election may be waived if petition to initiate formation is signed by at least 51% of registered voters.) Dissolution of the agencies can be contingent upon successful formation of the new district.

Benefits Aligned with Formation of a New District

- a) Greater ability to attract qualified individuals for volunteer firefighter positions.
- b) Centralized fire planning and provisions, improved coordination with area fire districts and agencies.
- c) Better leveraging of resources.
- d) Consistency in policies and practices.
- e) Cost savings/efficiencies – elimination of duplication such as administration.
- f) Improved uniform training standards, performance, incident oversight.
- g) Possible enhanced positioning for grant application and awards with larger fire district.
- h) New logical service boundaries.
- i) Could address funding with tax measure that includes all served properties.
- j) Regional planning and implementation.
- k) A fresh start that creates one identity for all served.
- l) A single board of directors comprised of registered voters from the newly formed district.

At the March 23, 2021, Study Group meeting, an initial estimated cost for the project was shared. The immediate figure that the Study Group is looking to fund is for the Initial Project Cost to Start, of \$45,500.

Cost Estimate

Description and order due	Fee paid to	Cost
1. RFP Legal Review	Agency Attorney	\$500 estimate
2. Municipal Service Review/Sphere of Influence Update	LAFCo	n/a
3. Consultant Feasibility Study	Consultant	\$40,000
4. Initial Community Outreach	As needed	\$5,000
Initial project cost to start.		\$45,500
*Decision Point to Continue		

Description and order due	Fee paid to	Cost
5. Formation application	LAFCo	\$10,450
6. CEQA Notice of Exemption	LAFCo	\$400
7. GIS Deposit	LAFCo	\$200
8. Dissolution x 3 @ \$2,000 ea. (SVFD, BFD, EPRFD)	LAFCo	\$6,000
9. Relinquishment x 3@\$2,750 ea. (C-Road CSD, GMCSO, City of Portola)	LAFCo	\$8,250
LAFCo approved fee reduction		-\$12,000
Total LAFCo application and approval costs.		\$13,300
*Board of Supervisors place formation and taxation proposals on ballot for voters within boundaries of proposed new fire district. Note: Estimated timing is Fall 2022		
*Note: Plumas County Fees would not be due until the next regular election cycle.		
10. Plumas Election Costs	Plumas County	*Pending
*New district and funding approved by voters.		
11. Mapping and Legal Description	Surveyor	\$5,000
12. Plumas County Tax Assessor fees	Plumas County	No charge
Total Plumas County Fees		\$5,000
13. Board of Equalization costs over 2,000 acres (can be deferred for a year w/business plan)	State of CA	\$3,500
Total Project Costs		*\$67,300

*Plus, pending election costs.

Development and Acceptance of a Request for Proposal for a Feasibility Study

Key Action	Outcome												
<p>Study Group representatives agreed that the City of Portola will act as the contracting agency for the Feasibility Study, Request for Proposal.</p>	<p>It was determined that the City is in the best position to act as the contracting agency for the Feasibility Study as the City can accept and distribute payments. Daniel Smith, Beckwourth Fire Protection District, will represent the Study Group as the RFP Manager.</p>												
<p>Completed development of a Request for Proposal (RFP), in the form of a Feasibility Study focused on examination of the viability of forming a new Fire Protection and Emergency Services District that encompasses the boundaries of the six participating agencies.</p>	<p>Feasibility Study RFP document finalized. Review and input received from Jennifer Stevenson, Executive Officer of Plumas LAFCo to ensure the RFP requirements meet LAFCo criteria. RFP reviewed by City of Portola legal counsel. Input and edits from LAFCo and legal counsel accepted into the RFP document.</p>												
<p>A Resolution was developed for each of the participating agency boards/council with a request that each Study Group representative place on their Board/Council agenda the Resolution for consideration by their respective board. The Resolution –</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Obligates the agency as a Participating Agency in the completion of a Feasibility Study that is acceptable to the Participating Agencies and to LAFCo requirements. 2) Obligates the agency to its share of the cost of such study, as determined by each of the agencies respective Boards/Council, with an “not to exceed” cost of share amount. 3) The City of Portola will act as the contracting agency for the Feasibility Study. 	<p>May 25, 2021 – Five of the six participating agency Boards, (C-Road CSD excluded), adopted the Resolution with a confirmation and determination of their share of cost for the Feasibility Study.</p> <p>Not to exceed Cost of Share as Agreed Upon by a Vote of each representative Board/Council –</p> <table data-bbox="836 1239 1404 1501"> <tr> <td>City of Portola</td> <td>\$20,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Beckwourth Fire</td> <td>\$20,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gold Mountain CSD</td> <td>\$15,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Eastern Plumas Rural FD</td> <td>\$1,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sierra Valley FPD</td> <td>\$1,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C-Road CSD</td> <td>TBD</td> </tr> </table>	City of Portola	\$20,000.00	Beckwourth Fire	\$20,000.00	Gold Mountain CSD	\$15,000.00	Eastern Plumas Rural FD	\$1,000.00	Sierra Valley FPD	\$1,000.00	C-Road CSD	TBD
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<p>Proposal for Establishment of Cost Shares for “Phase One” Expenses reviewed by Study Group.</p>	<p>May 25, 2021 – Representatives agreed the proposal which breaks down examples of cost sharing by dollar and percentage for each participating agency is reasonable and adopted the proposal as presented.</p>												

<p>On June 22, 2021, written notification received from C-Road Community Services District notifying Tom Cooley, Study Group Chair of C-Road CSD Board of Directors' decision to withdraw from the Study Group's efforts.</p>	<p>Withdraw notification received from C-Road CSD accepted by Tom Cooley, Study Group Chair.</p> <p>As a result of the withdrawal by C-Road CSD, the five agencies who adopted the Resolution to continue in the completion of the Feasibility Study and a commitment to their respective cost of share will need to be brought back with a vote of the each of the five participating agencies with a revised Resolution. The original Resolution adopted by the five agencies will need to be rescinded by a vote of each participating Board/Council.</p>
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Next Steps as of May 25, 2021

- 1) The Resolution Confirming Continuing Participation in the Reorganization of Regional Fire and Emergency Services has been updated to reflect withdrawal by C-Road CSD from the Study Group. On May 26, 2021, each of the remaining five agencies received an updated Resolution specific to their agency. The updated Resolution will be reviewed by the respective boards/council of the five agencies and accepted by vote of each respective board/council. The five remaining agencies are - Beckwourth FPD, Eastern Plumas RFPD, Gold Mountain CSD, City of Portola and Sierra Valley FPD. The Fire Study Group requests the updated Resolution prepared for each participating agency be presented to their respective boards/council to affirm:
 - a) By adoption of the Resolution, the agency is obligated as a Participating Agency in the completion of a feasibility study.
 - b) By adoption of the Resolution, the agency is obligated to its share of cost of such study, as mutually agreed to by all the Participating Agencies, through the completion of said feasibility study.
 - c) The original Resolution that included C-Road CSD and adopted by vote of the five remaining agencies will require each board/council to rescind the original Resolution, placing the newly updated Resolution as the current document.

- 2) The Feasibility Study Request for Proposal will be modified to remove C-Road CSD as a participating agency in the Feasibility Study and as a participating agency in the Study Group going forward. The Request for Proposal for a consultant or consulting agency for the purposes of a Feasibility Study will be released to prospective consultants for their review and response once all participating agencies submit their updated and adopted Resolution. It is estimated that once released, response time from consultants to the Feasibility Study RFP will be four-six weeks.