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Tom Cooley

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Sherrie Thrall

Bill Powers

Pat Morton, Alt.

Kevin Goss, Alt.

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Executive Officer:

Jennifer Stephenson

Clerk:Cheryl Kolb

Plumas LAFCo

*The Local Agency Formation Commission
Serving Plumas County*

February 11, 2019

Plumas County Board of Supervisors
520 Main St. Room 309
Quincy, CA 95971

RE: 1) Support of a Master Tax Sharing Agreement to Promote Annexations to Fire Districts and 2) Request to Send a Letter to CAL FIRE Supporting a Volunteer Firefighters Training Level

Dear Chair Sanchez and Supervisors:

Fire services have leapt to the forefront of discussions amongst governing agencies after the widespread destruction that wildfires have wrought in the State over the last two years. Additionally, here in Plumas County local conditions and challenges have underscored the need for a focused effort at making improvements to fire service structure and efficiencies. LAFCo is charged with ensuring logical boundaries and efficiency of municipal services, and as such, has determined that the issues faced by the fire agencies are a concern in need of addressing proactively and in collaboration with all stakeholders county and statewide, which includes the County on multiple levels.

Some background information sheds light on the numerous issues at hand. There are 20 agencies authorized to provide local fire services in Plumas County. While not all territory within the County has a designated local fire protection provider, all territory within the County has a determined first responder for dispatch and response as staffing resources allow. These fire agencies have agreed to respond outside of their LAFCo-approved boundary to provide fire and medical emergency response when an incident is not within the purview of the U.S. Forest Service. Providers do not receive compensation for these responses outside of their bounds unless the agency has a fee system in place to charge the caller for the response. Of the County's total population, approximately 4.56 percent of residents live in areas without designated structural fire protection services—primarily in existing communities established from the late 1800's

rather than planned communities. Larger communities not in a fire district are: Belden, Caribou, Storrie, Twain, Mohawk Vista, Keddie, Clio, Blairsden, Canyon Dam, Johnsville, Bucks Lake, Little Grass Valley, and Warner Valley.

As a result of these disjointed service areas, in 2013, LAFCo and the County Office of Emergency Services worked together to clarify the annexation process for the public and develop a streamlined approach to annexation for those older developed properties that are outside of a local fire provider's boundaries. As a result of this process and with the intent of promoting annexations in favor of public safety interests, in 2014, LAFCo approved a reduced fee structure for annexations of previously developed properties to fire providers. Unfortunately, few applications for annexation have capitalized on these reduced fees. The public cited a lack of understanding of the fee structure as one reason that there had been a limited number of annexations. LAFCo is seeking to address this concern by promoting a question and answer sheet developed in 2013 and by developing an easy to understand one-page brochure that clarifies the fees involved and summarizes the annexation process. The other reason cited for the limited number of annexation applications was the often lengthy tax sharing negotiation period through which each application must go. If a master tax sharing agreement were already in place, the length of each application from submittal to approval by LAFCo could take less than two months. LAFCo requests that the Supervisors consider developing a master tax sharing agreement applicable to fire district annexations in order to expedite and promote annexations in the interest of public safety.

Beyond these service area concerns, fire providers have faced several other challenges over the decade in providing an adequate and sustainable level of services, primarily a result of ever increasing costs associated with equipment, training requirements, gas, etc., combined with severely constrained funding from declining tax revenues, State tax shifts, and lack of support for new tax measures. Providers that rely heavily on volunteer firefighters and administration have been most impacted by these constraints.

Given the rural nature of Plumas County and structure of several small fire districts developed around individual communities, fire providers face these challenges, as well as several others, including but not limited to:

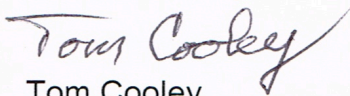
- Lack of sufficient funding
- Declining volunteerism
- Disjointed services with lack of consistency amongst providers
- Areas outside of boundaries of designated local fire provider, yet receiving services
- Duplication of services – administration, governance etc.
- Divided voices, which limits influence (i.e., grant funding)
- Lack of regional planning for location and type of facilities and equipment

LAFCo has become aware that several fire agencies are struggling to address these issues and are searching for service structure changes to manage or, at the least, alleviate some of the burden created by these challenges.

At a recent LAFCo meeting, several Plumas fire providers took part in a discussion regarding the issues faced and the manner in which LAFCo could assist and support the agencies in addressing the issues. A common constraint for a majority of the fire providers present was the elimination of the Volunteer Firefighter certification and the need for all firefighters to train to a Firefighter I level regardless of if the firefighter is in a paid or volunteer position. The Commission has decided to write a letter to CAL FIRE in support of reinstating a Volunteer Firefighter certification to alleviate some of the burden on these small fire agencies that are already facing struggles with declining volunteerism. LAFCo invites the Supervisors, the City of Portola, and the Plumas fire districts to also send a letter to CAL FIRE Office of the State Fire Marshal expressing a similar sentiment in the hopes that more voices will encourage action.

LAFCo looks forward to engaging in continued discussions with the County on ways to promote positive change for our fire service providers.

Yours sincerely,



Tom Cooley

Chair, Plumas Local Agency Formation Commission

cc: City of Portola
Beckwourth Fire Protection District
C-Road Community Services District
Chester Public Utility District
Crescent Mills Fire Protection District
Eastern Plumas Rural Fire Protection District
Gold Mountain Community Services District
Graeagle Fire Protection District
Greenhorn Creek Community Services District
Hamilton Branch Fire Protection District
Indian Valley Community Services District
La Porte Fire Protection District
Long Valley Community Services District
Meadow Valley Fire Protection District
Peninsula Fire Protection District
Plumas Eureka Community Services District
Prattville-Almanor Fire Protection District
Quincy Fire Protection District
Sierra Valley Fire Protection District
West Almanor Community Services District