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Annexation open for public comment

By [Greta Mart](#)
Staff Reporter
April 27, 2010

A 30-day public comment period is underway on the City's environmental documents related to the planned annexation of a large portion of Alhambra Valley.

An Initial Study has been completed for the annexation project, a 101-page document that aims to assess what environmental impacts the annexation will have on the Valley. City staff opened the public comment period on April 19, and those who wish to review the documents – available at City Hall or at

www.cityofmartinez.org/communitydevelopment/specialprojects – and provide input can do so until May 19.

A public hearing on the annexation will occur during the Planning Commission's May 25 meeting.

According to the Initial Study, completed by Oakland-based consultant Urban Planning Partners, Inc., "The proposed project would not increase or significantly change the allowed use, density or scale of development when compared to existing conditions or existing County policies and regulations. The primary difference would be that the City would include language in the Alhambra Valley Districts that would be slightly more restrictive than current County regulations for the annexation area relative to hillside development, as well as the types of structures allowed in agricultural zones."

As City leaders have explained to Alhambra Valley residents opposing the annexation, Martinez is moving forward with the plan at the behest of the Contra Costa County Local Area Formation Commission (LAFCO).

In 2008, LAFCO requested that the City execute approximately 65 outstanding deferred annexation agreements in Alhambra Valley.

"In keeping with LAFCO law, it makes sense for these areas [Alhambra Valley and North Pacheco] to be annexed. We were created to be the boundary guard, to ensure logical boundaries and ensure logical extensions where services are needed," said LAFCO executive officer Lou Ann Texeira on Friday.

Martinez Mayor Rob Schroder sits on the LAFCO board.

In May of last year, the City Council opted to spend \$50,000 in consultancy fees to "prepare the required CEQA document necessary to accompany the formal LAFCO application," despite two City-authorized reports concluding that the annexation does not make financial sense. The reports were prepared by a consultant firm in Berkeley named Economic & Planning Systems, Inc. (EPS) and cost the City an estimated \$30,000, according to EPS principal Richard Berkson.

Texeira said that after LAFCO receives a completed annexation application from the City, if 25 percent of Alhambra Valley landowners or registered voters declare their opposition to the annexation, LAFCO will hold a 'protest hearing.'

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New fire chief faces daunting financial challenges

By Rick Radin
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 04/30/2010 01:43:11 PM PDT

Updated: 05/03/2010 05:34:26 PM PDT

The Contra Costa Fire District's new chief will confront a bleak budget picture when he takes over June 1.

The district will need to cut about \$4.6 million from its \$101.8 million budget for 2010-11 after using about \$2.8 million of its \$13.5 million in reserves, according to a proposal from county Administrator David Twa.

Daryl Louder, as assistant fire chief in Fairfax County, Va., survived three rounds of interviews and bested dozens of applicants from a nationwide search for the right to help the beleaguered district make ends meet.

Louder came highly recommended for his ability to maintain fire service in the midst of daunting financial challenges, said

Supervisor Susan Bonilla of Concord. Fairfax County has cut \$14 million from its \$175 million fire department budget over the past two years, Louder said.

"We were impressed with his ability to work well with people, with all his firefighters," Bonilla said. "He has the strong leadership skills that were looking for to bring about cooperation between all our constituencies."

The county administrator has laid out some stringent mandates, subject to the supervisors' approval.

Twa is proposing to cut the department's overtime budget and begin a rotating closure of four fire stations to save about \$6 million. Firefighters say these closures, called brownouts, can increase response times in the areas around the closed stations.

Overtime has been costly for the department as some firefighters have nearly doubled their salaries by working extra shifts. One firefighter added more than \$136,000 in overtime to his \$96,000 base pay in 2009, according to a county salary report released in April.

It is usually cheaper to pay overtime than hire new firefighters because the cost of

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pensions and benefits is more than 50 percent of their salaries, said county Human Resources Director Ted Cwiek.

"We don't have to make pension payments on the overtime, so that can balance out the higher overtime rate," Cwiek said.

Contra Costa firefighters and sheriff deputies receive pensions that pay 3 percent of their highest salaries for every year they work. The county makes 75 percent of the pension payments and employees pay 25 percent.

None of the proposed cuts for 2010-11 represent a long-term solution for the departments woes, said Supervisor John Gioia of Richmond.

The district receives about 90 percent of its funding from property taxes, and Twa is predicting county property values will fall another 5 percent so that will further erode revenues. Inflation should increase costs, Gioia said.

Louder said he plans to do a lot of listening after he takes over and then draw on his 27 years of experience to bring people together.

"I talked (with the board) about conceptual

things, leadership of the organization through these challenging economic times," he said. "I'm not going to try and make any rash and rapid decisions."

Louder will receive about \$186,000 annually, about the same as interim Chief John Ross, who took over for Fire Chief Keith Richter when he resigned last June, Gioia said. Richter's salary was about \$230,000, including the cost of perks Louder won't receive, he said.

Contact Rick Radin at 925-952-5053.

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