

Commission delays decision on fate of Mt. Diablo health district

By Sandy Kleffman
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 07/13/2011 07:52:23 PM PDT

Updated: 07/13/2011 11:00:41 PM PDT

MARTINEZ -- A regulatory agency postponed a decision Wednesday about whether to seek elimination of a health district that four grand juries have called a waste of taxpayers' money but others have argued is a benefit to the community.

The fate of the Mt. Diablo Health Care District will remain uncertain for several more months.

The Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission decided to delay a decision until Gov. Jerry Brown signs or vetoes AB 912, a measure on his desk that would enable such districts to be eliminated without a public vote.

If Brown rejects the bill, LAFCO would need to call an election in Central Contra Costa before the district could be dissolved.

The election cost, which could run as high as \$150,000, would be paid by the health district, regardless of the vote's outcome.

The district has generated controversy for years.

It encompasses about 200,000 residents in Concord, Martinez, Clyde, Pacheco and portions of Lafayette and Pleasant Hill, and collects about \$230,000 in property taxes annually.

The district was formed in 1948 to oversee construction and operation of then-Mt. Diablo Medical Center in Concord.

But in 1997, the board merged the hospital with the private John Muir Health system, giving up control of the facility and much of its power.

Critics argue that it no longer has a purpose.

Grace Ellis, who chairs the district board, told LAFCO members the district has

provided CPR training to 6,000 freshmen in the Mt. Diablo Unified School District, has provided defibrillators at schools and community meeting sites, and engaged in other activities.

"We have very few funds, but what we do have we try to spend on the community

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wisely," she said. "It is a good, worthwhile program."

In a June report, a Contra Costa County grand jury noted that from 2000 to 2009, the district received more than \$2.45 million in property taxes and contributions from John Muir Health but used less than 10 percent of that money for community grants.

During that same period, the district spent more than \$360,000 on lifetime health benefits for Ellis and a former board member and their spouses and dependents, the report noted. Such lifetime benefits are no longer provided to other district board members.

"The point is their overhead costs are so huge compared to what meager benefit is provided to the community that it is an outrage to me," said Wendy Lack, a member of the Contra Costa Taxpayers Association, which has recommended the district be eliminated.

LAFCO members did not indicate how they will vote, but they decided to send a letter to Brown urging him to sign AB 912 before the Oct. 9 deadline.

They also asked LAFCO staff to report back Aug. 10 with details about the study that would be required before LAFCO could move to dissolve the district.

If the study is approved, it would cost an estimated \$25,000 to \$30,000 and could be paid for out of LAFCO's contingency fund, Executive Officer Lou Ann Texeira said.



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East Contra Costa Fire District considers 'enhancement zones' as way to boost services

By Rowena Coetsee
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 07/14/2011 04:15:57 PM PDT

Updated: 07/14/2011 05:56:33 PM PDT

BRENTWOOD -- East Contra Costa Fire District officials this week voted to consider having communities decide for themselves whether they want to pay more for equipment and services above standard fare.

Board director Pat Anderson floated the idea as a way to keep the financially troubled agency solvent and intact.

In May, Brentwood initiated a process that could result in the city withdrawing from the fire district and taking residents' property taxes with it, further exacerbating the agency's already-precarious situation.

Currently deficit-spending \$2.7 million, the district expects to have exhausted its savings before the end of the 2012-13 fiscal year.

Anderson proposed establishing "enhancement zones" as one facet of the budgeting scenarios that she and fellow directors on Monday agreed to explore.

One possibility is for the fire district to live within its means, operating only on the revenue it collects.

This lowest level of operations would mean slashing the preliminary budget the board adopted last month and making immediate cuts in personnel and equipment.

In an April staff report, fire district Chief Hugh Henderson indicated that operating in the black would require scaling back to three fire stations and 29 firefighters.

The district currently has six stations and 48 firefighters.

A second option is to preserve existing services by adopting a final budget that's the same or very similar to the

current \$11.1 million one, along with a plan for bridging the gap between revenue and expenses.

The third choice is to devise a budget that will provide all the fire stations and personnel that district residents want.

Not only would this scenario likely require every property owner to pay a parcel tax but, as Anderson is proposing, those communities that want more than the basic level of service would have to agree to bear that additional cost.

The fire board directed its executive committee -- a five-member group consisting of Henderson, the Oakley and Brentwood city managers, and a county representative -- to figure out how many fire stations and firefighters the district could afford in each of these three scenarios.

The committee is scheduled to present at least some of that information at the district's Aug. 1 meeting.

At that point, Anderson said she hopes her colleagues will be prepared to decide whether to reduce spending or ask voters to supplement the district's revenue with a parcel tax and, if so, for how much.



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She also wants the fire board to determine whether it wants to establish the zones.

The notion is a viable one, said Anderson, noting that the two consultants she discussed it with before the meeting agreed that it might work.

The concept is similar to the way area libraries are funded, she added: The county gives each branch a certain amount of money, and cities that want their local libraries to provide additional bells and whistles dip into their general fund to make that happen.

While the executive committee is gathering information, a second one that the fire district formed last month already has started down a parallel track.

The ad hoc group has been charged with calculating how much money it would take to operate differing numbers of stations staffed at varying levels.

That committee also is trying to ascertain whether it would be more cost-effective to merge with the Contra Costa Fire District, as well as when it should hold a parcel tax election.



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Contra Costa Times editorial: Health district outlived its usefulness

Contra Costa Times editorial
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Posted: 07/17/2011 04:00:00 PM PDT

IT'S TIME to dissolve the gravy train called the Mt. Diablo Health Care District that has put taxpayers on the hook for more than \$700,000 of benefits for a current and former director.

It's a disgraceful waste of money. As the Contra Costa County grand jury reported, the district collected \$2.2 million in property taxes from 2000-09. It also received \$250,000 in grants from John Muir Health. Yet, today the district has just \$899,000 in assets. Worse, after accounting for its liabilities, it's net worth is just \$91,000.

That would be fine if the district had spent its money on programs that helped improve the health of residents in the district, which includes Martinez, Pleasant Hill, Concord and parts of Lafayette. But the district has provided just \$244,000 of grants for health programs, the primary reason for its existence. Only 10 percent of its revenues actually went to help people.

Where has the rest of the money gone? A huge chunk has gone into the greedy hands of Director Grace Ellis and former Director

Ron Leone, now a Concord city councilman. The two are collecting health care and dental benefits for them and their families under a unconscionable deal providing lifetime coverage for directors serving at least 12 years on the board. Taxpayers are stuck with the tab unless Ellis or Leone voluntarily give up the benefits.

The grand jury found that the district had spent more than \$360,000 for health coverage for the two

during the 10-year period it surveyed. An actuarial report estimates that the present value of the benefits they will receive in the future is \$714,000.

Leone is expected to be the bigger recipient because, at age 60 at the time of the 2010 year-end report, he is much younger than Ellis, then 84. Hence, he is expected to receive health benefits for much longer.

They should both be ashamed.

Past directors have said the district should be dissolved. The grand jury and the Contra



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Costa Taxpayers Association agree. Today, we add our voice. The time has come to do away with a district that has outlived its usefulness.

The district was formed in 1948 to oversee the construction and operation of the Mt. Diablo Medical Center in Concord. But in 1997, the board agreed to merge the hospital with the private John Muir system.

While the board in the early days after the merger served as a watchdog on John Muir, it also wasted about \$600,000 on a misguided and unsuccessful lawsuit against the health system.

The Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission is looking at disbanding the district or calling a vote of residents in the district to dissolve it. Unfortunately, the latter option could cost as much as \$150,000. But if that's what it takes to end the waste of far more, it's well worth it.

The district's tax revenues come from a slice of the 1 percent annual tax on property owners. If the district were dissolved, that share would be distributed to other public agencies that serve those residents. Or, if the county auditor could broker a deal, the money could be redirected to the county to provide additional health services for the communities in the district.

Either option is a much better deal than the status quo for the residents and for the health of the community. We urge LAFCO to end this debacle.



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CSDA e-News

Monday, July 18, 2011

The San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District is proud to announce the formation of the PulsePoint Foundation. The new nonprofit organization has been established to guide, enhance and expand the reach of the Fire Department CPR notification app released earlier this year. The Fire Department app empowers everyday citizens to provide life-saving assistance to victims of Sudden Cardiac Arrest. The app crowdsources Good Samaritans to events where the potential need for bystander CPR is high, said Fire Chief Richard Price. The vital work of the PulsePoint Foundation has already begun, added Price. PulsePoint is set to begin partnering with nearly two hundred fire and EMS agencies that have expressed interest in deploying the application in their communities.


Although the application was pioneered and tested in the San Ramon Valley, the Fire District has always been anxious to share its life saving potential. Forming an independent and external foundation to distribute and support the application will help facilitate and speed adoption by other communities.

The application has received several international awards including the Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association (CTIA) 2011 VITA Wireless Samaritan Award, a 2011 Computerworld Honors Program Laureate Award for Innovation, an American Heart Association Life Saver Heart Partner Award, and an IADAS Webby Official Honoree award for the Best Use of GPS or Location Technology. The Public Service Announcement designed to promote awareness and adoption of the application also received two Telly Awards.

The potential of the application also caught the attention of some of the countrys leading resuscitation experts, including partners of The HeartRescue Project, a five-state effort funded by the Medtronic Foundation designed to improve cardiac arrest survival rates.

We know that improved survivor rates begin with improved bystander response, says Dr. Michael Sayre, an associate professor of emergency medicine at The Ohio State University and the HeartRescue Project medical director. By taking advantage of advances in mobile technology, we can bring nearby lifesavers right to the scene to begin CPR, saving precious seconds. One of the first states planning to deploy the application is Arizona, a HeartRescue Project participant.

Both the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District and Northern Kentucky University and its College of Informatics have generously donated all rights from their original work on the application to the foundation for the benefit of society.

 Person [Lance Howland](#): Heard some news you want us to check out? Let me know:
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Wednesday, July 20, 2011

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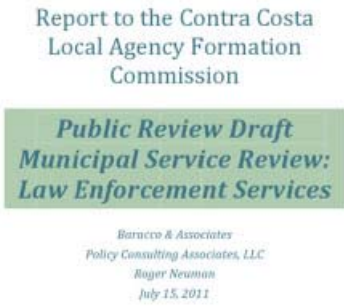
County Publishes Law Enforcement Review

A detailed report of Contra Costa County law enforcement agencies used by the county to determine jurisdiction adjustments was published Friday.

By [Adalto Nascimento](#) [Email the author](#) July 20, 2011 [Print](#) [0 Comments](#)

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The closure of three police substations in Concord has reduced the effectiveness of police protection, according to a study released Friday.

[The report](#), published by the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) analyzes the efficiency and ability of the Contra Costa Sheriff's Office and local police departments.

Because of current reductions city-wide, the report found that the [Concord Police Department's](#) biggest challenge is maintaining service in the face of budget cuts.

Concord Police Department Chief Guy Swanger said he disagreed with the report's findings. The substations were more like store fronts used to assist the public with paperwork and non-emergency services, he said.

"Crime is going down and we're getting satisfactory reviews from the community," said Swanger.

"The closure of those store fronts happened before I got here, but those are just budgetary realities – I disagree that they affect [our ability]".

What else did the Municipal Service Review find?

The study found that the average response time for Concord Police Department is of 12 minutes and 15 seconds. The county average is five minutes, 4 seconds.

Response Time

The longer response time, though, is attributed to the size of Concord – 30.5 square miles, - its high population count (largest in the county, at 122,067 residents, according to the 2010 Census) and officer's having to prioritize calls.

Officers per capita

Though there are no required standards to be met, the study also found that the City of Concord employs 1.2 sworn officers per 1,000 residents, while the county range is from .7 in Danville to 2 officers per 1,000 residents in Kensington.

LAFCO documents say that state legislation requires the review to be published every five years to provide a means for assessing local government

agencies' ability to provide services to residents, both efficiently and effectively.

Here are some service demand **numbers of interest**:

Concord's population (2010): 122,067
 Total service calls (2009): 122,300
 Calls per 1,000 population: 1,001
 Arrests made (2009) 2,358

Department resources:

Total staff: 285
 Sworn staff: 152 (1.2 per 1,000 population)
 Support staff: 48
 Volunteers: 98

Service Adequacy (2009):

Average response time: 12minutes, 15 seconds
 Clearance rate of violent crimes: 39 percent
 Clearance rate of property crimes: 16 percent
 Per capita cost: \$341

Related Topics: [Concord police](#)

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
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Pre-Cutbacks Report: Hercules Police Response Time Better Than Average

A recent report compared all Contra Costa County police departments.

By [Laila Kearney](#) | [Email the author](#) | July 19, 2011 [Print](#)

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The Hercules Police Department showed rising expenditures, quick response times and subsequent low crime rates for the city, according to a recent report comparing all Contra Costa County police departments.

The report was prepared by a consultant for the [Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission](#), a government group that reviews and approves all changes in local government boundaries. Some 2011 data was used to prepare the report, but most of the information used to compare Hercules and its police department with other cities in the county was from 2007, 2008 and 2009.

Hercules has made major cuts to its Police Department, and its union as agreed to salary and benefit [concessions](#) for 2011-12.

In earlier timeframe on which the report focused, violent crimes decreased slightly, while property crimes decreased by 10 percent. The report says during that time, there were about 15 reported violent and property crimes per 1,000 residents. The countywide average was 21 crimes per 1,000 residents.

On average, Hercules police responded to high priority incidents within five minutes, while departments countywide averaged five minutes and 44 seconds.

The report said service levels, determined by categories like response time, had a direct correlation with staffing levels, particularly with the number of patrol officers. The more patrol officers, the quicker police respond in general.

Over the past three years, Hercules eliminated two sergeants, one detective, five police officers, one traffic control officer, one records specialist, and five office support staff, the report said.

Expenditures from the city's general fund for the police department over the last three fiscal years increased by 33.4 percent, which was the highest percentage jump in the county. About 79 percent of the department's \$7 million in total expenditures went to salaries and benefits, while 16 percent went to services and supplies and five percent went to other expenses. Patrol made up 66 percent of the total police costs.

The report did not factor in Hercules police expenditure cuts in fiscal year 2011-2012, which trim roughly \$1.5 million off its budget.

Hercules police had a clearance rate of 35 percent for violent crimes in the 2007 to 2009 period. "By comparison, providers countywide on average cleared 38.3 percent of violent crimes and 10.6 percent of property crimes, meaning Hercules PD solves slightly less violent crimes and property crimes within its jurisdiction than the average of other providers in the County," the report said.

The report also said that based on an [Association of Bay Area Governments](#) projection, Hercules is expected to grow by 38 percent over the next 25 years, which is more than double the anticipated growth countywide.

"The Department reported that the police facility is at capacity, and in order to accommodate additional growth in the future, new or expanded facilities may be warranted to allow for enhanced staffing to serve the public accordingly," the report said.

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Police strained, study finds

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen
Contra Costa Times
Posted: 07/19/2011 04:27:04 PM PDT

Updated: 07/19/2011 05:43:49 PM PDT

The first Contra Costa-wide analysis of its kind reveals strained policing agencies struggling to keep officers on the street at a time of dwindling dollars and rising retirement and benefit costs.

To preserve patrol divisions, agencies are cutting specialized crime-fighting units, closing substations, driving their cars longer and postponing facility upgrades.

"We're seeing quite a few trade-offs as agencies work to maintain their basic patrol beats," said study co-author and consultant Bruce Baracco. "But it's coming at the expense of other important community services."

The exception is the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office, where budget cuts have forced reductions in both its patrol divisions and other services.

The sheriff's loss of 50 sworn officers in the past three years means it can no longer meet the county standard of responding to the vast majority of top priority calls within five minutes. The consultant found that the average Sheriff's Office response time for such calls was 8 minutes, 39 seconds.

"As funding levels for county law enforcement continue to decline, meeting these standards will no longer be possible," Baracco wrote.

Interestingly, at the same time police have fewer dollars, crime rates have declined in Contra Costa.

"Whether there is a direct correlation between crime rates and how much is spent on policing is really hard to say," Baracco said.

The study was ordered by the Local

Agency Formation Commission, a county-based group charged with overseeing public agency

boundaries, and ensuring efficient governance and adequate provision of public services.

Baracco & Associates of Sutter Hill, Policy Consulting Associates of Malibu and retired Lodi police Chief Roger Neuman wrote the report.

Among their key recommendations:

- Jointly purchasing equipment and hiring dispatchers could save money as the new Contra Costa-Alameda counties' interoperable public communications system goes online in 2013.
- Saving threatened specialized teams such as gang suppression through the formation of cost-sharing collaborations in all areas of the county.
- Reclassifying as civilian jobs the positions occupied by more costly sworn officers such as those in detention.
- Deploying volunteers.
- The six cities that contain a dozen unincorporated islands within their boundaries -- San Pablo, Pleasant Hill, Antioch, Brentwood, Concord and Walnut Creek -- should consider annexation and avoid service duplication. Such a move is more politically controversial than it appears, though. Many residents in unincorporated regions resist shifts into city boundaries, where the taxes may be higher and the local regulations tighter. The consultant also recommends that the county repair its police assessment district mishmash, where



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property owners in an astonishing 111 distinct unincorporated zones pay a direct fee for law enforcement. The zones have evolved over decades of land-use approvals and boundary adjustments, which produced a complex and, in some cases, unfair series of overlapping tax districts. Some zones consist of a single, small subdivision and don't raise sufficient cash for even a single deputy. Other residents pay into multiple zones but do not receive the services they pay for. "Some Alamo residents are paying six times over for 'enhanced services' they aren't getting," said Local Agency Formation Commission Executive Director Lou Ann Texeira. "The (Contra Costa) auditor-controller and the sheriff are going to have to work together to fix it." Adequate policing is among the public services the Local Agency Formation Commission must assess under state law. Others include fire protection, sewer, public health, water and parks. It is a big task. Contra Costa law enforcement agencies, on average, in the each of the past three years took 1.5 million calls, investigated 4,500 violent crimes and processed 20,500 claims of property crimes. But it is not inexpensive. Law enforcement costs, on average, \$296 a year for every man, woman and child in Contra Costa, although that figure varies widely by community, according to the consultant. In Richmond, the number soars to \$606 per capita, while it drops to \$125 in Moraga. The dollar gap matches the disparate crime rates in each town. Richmond has a crime rate of 46.4 crimes per 1,000 people, compared with Moraga at 7.7 per 1,000 people. The Local Agency Formation Commission is scheduled Aug. 10 to hear the consultants' presentation, take public comment and hear from its seven board members. The commission consists of two county supervisors, two elected city council members, two elected special district trustees and one member of the public. Contact Lisa Vorderbrueggen at 925-945-4773 or IBAbuzz.com/politics. online

To read the full Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission's draft "Municipal Service Review: Law Enforcement Services,"

visit www.contracostalafco.org, click on "municipal service reviews" and scroll down to the first listing.



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Mt. Diablo health board considers public outreach campaign

By Sandy Kleffman
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 07/21/2011 05:57:36 PM PDT

Updated: 07/22/2011 05:29:01 PM PDT

A health district challenged to justify its existence will consider holding a community forum in September, placing informational health ads on buses and expanding a CPR training program to Martinez schools.

These were among the ideas that surfaced when a committee of the Mt. Diablo Health Care District met Thursday to discuss programs and outreach.

The district has been swept up in controversy in recent weeks as a grand jury and the Contra Costa Taxpayers Association called for its elimination.

Last month's grand jury report marked the fourth time that the Contra Costa County panel has concluded the district no longer has a purpose and should be disbanded.

The Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission has been debating the issue and will take it up again Aug. 10.

The district was formed in 1948 to oversee construction and operation of Mt. Diablo Medical Center in Concord.

But in 1997, the board merged the hospital with the private John Muir Health system, giving up control of the facility and much of its power.

It collects about \$230,000 in property taxes annually, and encompasses about 200,000 residents in Concord, Martinez, Clyde, Pacheco and portions of Lafayette and Pleasant Hill.

The grand jury noted that from 2000 to 2009, the district received more than \$2.45 million in property taxes and contributions from John Muir Health, but used less than 10 percent of that money for community grants.

Board

Chairwoman Grace Ellis noted the district has provided CPR training to 6,000 high school freshmen and placed defibrillators in all high schools and middle schools in the Mt. Diablo Unified School District.

It should now consider expanding the program to the Martinez Unified School



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District, Ellis said.

The district has about \$700,000 to \$800,000 available for community grants, said board member Roy Larkin.

People can submit applications any time, he added.

The district has posted its grant program guidelines at www.mtdiablohealthcaredistrict.ca.gov.

Board members discussed putting advertisements on local buses with health tips. Few details were available, but Larkin estimated such advertisements might cost \$300 per year per bus.

Wendy Lack, a member of the Contra Costa Taxpayers Association, questioned the expenditure.

She noted the board has about a \$700,000 unfunded liability to pay for lifetime health benefits for Ellis and former board member Ron Leone, now a Concord councilman.

"They're talking about a PR campaign, basically," she said. "What a colossal waste of money. "... I see this as a way to justify their existence."



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LAFCO Report Finds Lamorinda Police Doing Well With Less

Monday, July 25, 2011

By Anna Pickrell | Email the author | July 25, 2011

A report on the efficacies of police services in Lamorinda has found that despite understaffing, budget woes and a recent, region-wide uptick in property crimes Lamorinda's police departments are doing a good job providing basic police services in their respective communities.

The Municipal Service Review (MSR), was compiled by [Barraco & Associates](#), a policy consulting firm, and submitted to the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission ([LAFCO](#)) last week.

It determined that the community's police departments remain understaffed but receive fewer service calls than the county average, and clear a low percentage of property crimes while maintaining a high rate of clearances for crimes against persons, according to data supplied by officers from each of Lamorinda's three jurisdictions.

The two cities and a town also fall victim to fewer crimes per capita than the county average, according to the report, and their police officers record faster emergency response times and higher violent crime clearance rates than their counterparts in other parts of the county.

Among other findings published in the report:

- Overall, Lamorinda is below the countywide average in the ratio of sworn officers to residents. Moraga and Lafayette employ 0.7 sworn officers per 1,000 residents while Orinda comes in only slightly better at 0.8 officers. The county average is 1.2 officers per 1,000 residents.
- In terms of response time, Lafayette responds to a Priority 1 (emergency call which requires immediate response and [in which] there is reason to believe that an immediate threat to life exists) in four minutes and 50 seconds, Moraga just ahead at approximately four minutes even, and Orinda behind at five minutes and 33 seconds. Though none of the three cities meet adopted standard Priority 1 response times, the average county time was five minutes and 44 seconds.
- Clearance rates, defined as "offenses for which at least one person was arrested, charged with the offense, and turned over to the District Attorney for prosecution...[or in which] the offender dies, the victim refuses to cooperate, or extradition is denied" were also included in the review. Lafayette had a clearance rate of 23 percent for violent crimes committed in 2007, 2008 and 2009, clearing five percent of their property crimes. Those same years, Moraga cleared 40 percent of its violent crimes and six percent for property crimes. Orinda showed a clearance rate of 39 percent for violent crimes and five percent for property crimes. Countywide clearance rates averaged 38.3 percent for violent crimes and 10.6 percent for property crimes.

All of this, keeping officers in the field and responding to calls for assistance, was accomplished under varying, yet tightening financial constraints. Lafayette's police expenses rose from \$3.6 million to \$4.1 million in the past three fiscal years, while Moraga's expenditures declined by 20 percent and Orinda's costs declined in 2008-09, then rebounded the following year, according to the report.

As for crime rates, Lafayette showed an uptick in the annual number of crimes and the number of crimes per capita in the past three years. Though the number of violent crimes remained stagnant, the number of property crimes increased by almost 14 percent, or approximately 14 reported crimes per 1,000 residents, according to the report.

In Moraga, the number of violent crimes waxed and waned, while property crimes declined by 18 percent and overall the town reported approximately eight reported crimes per 1,000 residents.

Orinda showed a decline in its annual overall crime stats and number of crimes reported per capita. The number of violent crimes decreased and then rebounded, while the number of property crimes declined by 11 percent. The city had approximately 11 reported crimes per 1,000 residents, according to the report.

It was not known if a recent surge in residential burglaries - 44 in recent weeks - was included with those statistics. By comparison, police in other jurisdictions of Contra Costa County handled an average of 21

crimes per 1,000 residents.

For reporting purposes violent crimes were defined as homicide, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault. Property crimes were defined as burglary, motor vehicle theft, and thefts of greater than \$400 values.

Monday, July 25 2011

Assemblyman Rich Gordon's bill supporting local control and consolidation of special districts signed by Governor Brown Featured

(SACRAMENTO) Today, Governor Brown signed into law a bill authored by Assemblyman Rich Gordon (Menlo Park) that will increase local control over special districts and allow government resources to be used more efficiently. While AB 912 only makes a minor procedural change to the Government Code, the law will ultimately help facilitate the dissolution of certain extraneous special districts allowing local governments to deliver services more effectively.

Most often, special district reorganization is initiated by a commission or district analysis calling for improved service delivery, cost savings, or efficiencies of scale. This process is overseen by a Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo). AB 912 will allow LAFCos to bypass expensive special elections when commission reports recommend dissolution, and a majority of the voters or landowners of a district do not protest the action.

"I believe AB 912 follows through on the original intent of LAFCos," said Assemblyman Gordon, who also serves on the Assembly Local Government Committee. "This law will allow local governments to save hundreds of thousands of dollars on special elections while not compromising government accountability or transparency."

Contra Costa LAFCo sent a letter to Governor Brown urging him to sign AB 912 calling the legislation a "valuable tool."

Supported by the California Local Agency Formation Commissions (CALAFCos) and California Special Districts Association (CSDA), AB 912 passed through the State Assembly and Senate unanimously.

###

Assemblyman Rich Gordon represents the 21st Assembly District, which includes much of Silicon Valley, including the communities of San Carlos, Redwood City, Atherton, Menlo Park, Portola Valley, Woodside, East Palo Alto, Palo Alto, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Monte Sereno, Los Gatos and the Almaden Valley.

CONTACT: Margot Grant, (650) 691-2121

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AB-912 enables LAFCO to target Mt Diablo Health Care District

by Edi Birsan on **July 26, 2011**



Around The Capitol reports that [Assembly Bill 912](#) has been approved by the Governor. This new regulation would allow Local Area Formation Commissions (LAFCO) to dissolve a Special District upon receiving a notice from the District requesting it. Further, AB-912 allows for ordering of a dissolution without a general population vote, after a call for dissolution by an “affected agency” or petition, after having a public hearing and receiving no majority protest.

The local target in all this is the Mount Diablo Health Care District (MDHCD). The exact details of what is to be done with the current funds in the District, its role in the John Muir charity fund board assignments, and its lifetime medical policy has not been worked out.

AB-912 follows a ground swell of interest in possible dissolution of MDHCD, including: four Grand Jury Reports, complaints to the Board of Supervisors, and LAFCO as well as newspaper articles and articles here on Halfway to Concord. Meanwhile, the MDHCD elected and appointed board of directors ponders how best to justify its existence to forestall dissolution or to take up the matter of dissolution themselves as was talked about last summer. There has been an uptake in grant requests recently due to the publicity of the process for the first time in a decade, following the recent hubbub.

One interesting question concerns having a District made up of elected officials terminated by a non-election process. Further there is an interesting internal conflict of interest when you consider that the funds directed to the district are most likely to be redirected to the remaining Special Districts thus giving LAFCO in effect a financial gain to terminate.

When LAFCO last reviewed the matter it specifically said it wanted to see if AB-912 would be signed.

Well, now AB-912 has been signed, clearing the way for LAFCO and/or possible action by the Contra Costa County Supervisors.

Contra Costa Times Readers' Forum: Times wrong about dissolving Mt. Diablo Health Care District

By Grace Ellis
Guest Commentary

Posted: 07/29/2011 04:00:00 PM PDT

Updated: 07/29/2011 04:23:06 PM PDT

WOW, WHY not just jump on the bandwagon without doing your due diligence. Words like "greedy hands," "unconscionable deal," "be ashamed," "outlived its usefulness" and "misguided" seem to be personal attacks and have no place in an editorial that should have been full of facts that the taxpayer can rely on to make an informed decision.

Before I was elected to the Mt. Diablo Health Care District board, state law provided health benefits for district board members, as it did for all elected officials. It is still the law, but this district stopped the practice in 1997, unlike most other government organizations. Even the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission has this liability, but they hide their cost under the county umbrella. There is no need to make a personal attack for something that is rife throughout the county.

The "misguided lawsuit" against John Muir Medical Center was supported by the cities of Concord, Pleasant Hill and Martinez by an

amicus brief to the court, and was supported by the Times as well. We brought the suit to protect the health and well-being of the women in our community, which is exactly why this district is here.

In regard to outliving our usefulness, ask the Hospice Foundation of the East Bay, La Clinica de La Raza, Rehabilitation Services of Northern California, Senior Helpline, Jewish Family and Children Services, Monument Circle Center, Contra Costa Jewish Community Center and the Regional

Health Foundation for their opinion. The district board has half of the votes on the distribution over \$1 million per year provided to organizations through the John Muir/Mt. Diablo Community Health Fund, established as a result of the merger under the community-benefit agreement. In addition, there are automatic electronic defibrillators in our schools and local community centers, 6,000 freshman students trained in CPR by professionals, and funds available for new grants with the guidelines posted on our website.

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We receive an amount equal to approximately 1/100th of 1 percent of the county budget. If the district is dissolved, the tax will still be collected and divided among the remaining 71 special districts, about \$3,000 each, throughout the entire county not all of which serve the district's taxpayers.

Everyone knows you can make numbers any way you want, but your insinuation that all of the district's funds have been spent is irresponsible. The net worth of \$91,000 is after the unfunded future liability is paid in full. This liability needs to be paid, according to the county, over 30 years and our pace is less than 20 years.

So how does the community benefit? Gone are the CPR classes at the high schools, \$80,000 per year. Gone are the defibrillators that the cities cannot afford to place in their own facilities. Gone is the influence for the district's taxpayers over the grants given by the John Muir/Mt. Diablo Community Health Fund. Gone are the smaller grants that do not qualify under the health fund guidelines. Gone is the organization that you said has outlived its usefulness and does nothing. Congrats!

Grace Ellis of Concord is chairwoman of the board of the Mt. Diablo Health Care District.



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East Contra Costa Fire District leans toward parcel tax to restore services

By Rowena Coetsee
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 08/02/2011 05:33:53 PM PDT

Updated: 08/02/2011 10:47:02 PM PDT

OAKLEY -- East Contra Costa Fire District officials this week agreed to consider asking voters to approve a parcel tax that would allow the financially troubled agency not only to reopen two stations but put paramedics on its engines for the first time.

An ad hoc committee advised directors to pursue an approximately \$187 annual tax so it can operate eight stations with 72 firefighters, 24 of them trained as paramedics.

Directors agreed to pursue the idea of putting the measure on next June's ballot, and directed district employees to come back with details on how quickly the additional revenue would enable the agency to add firefighters, as well as how long it might take to establish a paramedic program. The tax would require two-thirds voter approval.

East Contra Costa Fire is operating at a deficit and expects to exhaust its reserves before the end of 2012-13.

A near-capacity crowd turned out for the three-hour meeting at Oakley City Hall, during which the discussion bewildered some and left others frustrated.

Not the least were firefighters themselves, who fear for their jobs if the district can't drum up more money.

The board's executive committee presented a stark scenario if the final budget that directors adopt next month is based solely on the \$8.2 million they expect to receive this fiscal year.

Without dipping further into reserves, the district could afford to have only eight firefighters on duty at any

time instead of the current 16, said fire Chief Hugh Henderson. It also would necessitate cutting back from six stations to four or three, he said.

Although board President Kevin Romick said after the meeting that he doubted that his colleagues would make such drastic cuts before they are completely out of money, the

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possibility of slashing personnel and stations rattled some listeners.

Toward the end of the evening, a firefighter angrily accused directors of dragging their feet.

Until they make a clear decision on which approach they are taking, he and others can't start rallying public support for a tax, the man yelled before storming out of the room.

Directors also are toying with the possibility of using the parcel tax revenue to facilitate a merger with the Contra Costa Fire District, a much larger agency that might be able to provide services more cost effectively.

They directed Henderson to send a letter to his counterpart at ConFire asking how much money that agency would require to take over some or all of East Contra Costa's stations.

It's an option Director Jim Frazier favors in part because of the manpower -- including paramedics -- and number of engines ConFire has at its disposal if there were a disaster in far East County. What's more, when property values rise in other parts of the county, this region would benefit from the additional tax revenue, he said.

The board meets again Sept. 12, when it is scheduled to discuss ConFire's price tag as well as a timetable for restoring services if a tax succeeded.

Romick said he hopes the board will formalize its intention to pursue the \$187 tax and eight-station model, as well as

decide whether consolidation is still an option.

"My goal is to have some direction for those guys," he said of firefighters.

Contact Rowena Coetsee at 925-779-7141.



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Moraga-Orinda fire board likely to make decision on office space Wednesday

By Jonathan Morales
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 08/02/2011 10:29:43 AM PDT

Updated: 08/02/2011 05:48:28 PM PDT

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District likely will decide Wednesday whether to buy a new building for its staff or lease or buy space at Orinda City Hall.

Fire Chief Randy Bradley last month recommended that the board of directors finalize a \$1.1 million purchase of the two-story office building at 1150 Moraga Way in Moraga.

Directors held off on a final decision, asking Bradley to continue talking with the city of Orinda, which has space in its City Hall left vacant when the Contra Costa County building department moved out.

Neither side has talked yet about specific terms of a potential lease or purchase agreement. Orinda City Council members were slated to meet Tuesday in closed session to discuss the issue; Bradley will meet with city leaders Wednesday morning and the fire board will meet in closed session later that night before its regular meeting.

The fire district is looking to move

administrative staff out of fire stations in Moraga and Orinda to clear space for needed upgrades at the Moraga facility. The board must make a decision on the building soon, Bradley said.

An agreement with the fire district would mean income for the cash-strapped city, which is battling budget deficits. The county building department paid about \$90,000 annually, although City Manager Janet Keeter acknowledged that the current market rate for the space likely is lower.

The fire district typically has preferred owning property to leasing, and

Bradley told directors last month that buying the Moraga Way building is the best long-term decision. The purchase would allow the district to lay off a secretary and potentially lease the bottom floor, saving an estimated \$150,000 annually, he said.

Two fire board directors have opposed the purchase outright.

The others said the long-term benefits of

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the building were attractive, but they remained open to an agreement with the city.

Contact Jonathan Morales at 925-943-8048.
Follow him at [Twitter.com/sosaysjonathan](https://twitter.com/sosaysjonathan).

If you go

What: Moraga-Orinda Fire District board of directors meeting

When: 7 p.m. Wednesday

Where: Board room, administrative offices, 1280

Moraga Way, Moraga

Online: www.mofd.org

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