

Wednesday, March 14, 2012

April 11, 2012
Agenda Item 15c

Concord to Take Over Mt. Diablo Health District

Move is intended to reduce waste

By: Katharine Mieszkowski and Jennifer Gollan

Despite years of waste and scathing grand jury reports calling for its dissolution, the taxpayer-supported Mount Diablo Health Care District has won a reprieve.

Instead of disbanding the district, which takes in about \$240,000 in tax revenue each year, local watchdog officials voted Wednesday to put the City of Concord in charge of its management.

Last week, [The Bay Citizen reported](#) that Mt. Diablo is one of about 30 health care districts — out of 74 statewide — that continue to collect taxes even though they no longer run hospitals. The districts were originally created to provide hospital care to rural and low-income areas.

Mary Piepho, a member of the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission, told the crowd at a meeting Wednesday that dissolving the Mt. Diablo Health Care District was “fraught with risk,” while reorganizing it was a “cautious, but maybe more prudent approach.”

Until this year, state law required voter approval for the dissolution of special districts. But new legislation, which took effect in January, made it easier to disband most special districts without an election.

There is debate about whether voter approval is required to dissolve health care districts under the new law, said Kate McKenna, executive officer of the Monterey LAFCO, and a former deputy executive officer of the California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions, which represents the state’s 58 commissions.

If the Contra Costa LAFCO had voted for dissolution, the Mt. Diablo Health Care District threatened to sue to put the issue on the ballot. Members of LAFCO indicated that they feared that such a suit could be costly and take years to resolve.

After urging the commission to dissolve the district, Concord officials agreed to submit an application outlining how the district’s day-to-day operations would be overseen by the City Council. The takeover could be finalized by the end of the year, pending the commission’s approval.

The district has long been criticized for poor management and waste. Over the last decade, four grand jury reports have called for its dissolution. The small district, which includes Concord, Martinez, Pleasant Hill and parts of Lafayette, has not run a hospital since 1996, yet continues to take in about \$240,000 in property tax revenues a year.

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From 2000 through 2007, the district spent only a fraction of its budget on community health programs, financial reports show. Between 2000 and 2011, the district spent just 17 percent — \$527,686 — of its \$3.2 million in property tax and other revenue on community grants, public records show. The bulk of its budget goes to administrative and overhead expenses.

For example, in 2012, the district expects to spend about \$16,000, or about 7 percent of the tax revenue it receives, on health insurance for a current board member, a former board member and their spouses. It also owes as much as \$800,000 for lifetime retiree health benefits for a current and a former board member.

Critics of government spending seized on the district’s inefficiencies at the meeting Wednesday.

“This group has squandered hundreds of thousands of dollars,” said Kris Hunt, executive director of the Contra Costa Taxpayers Association. “Four grand juries came to the conclusion that this district should be dissolved. We agree.”

District officials pleaded for patience.

“There is no public need or benefit for the dissolution of the Mt. Diablo Health Care District,” said Jeff Kasper, chairman of the district’s board, who urged the commission to grant the district another year to address its shortcomings.

“You’ve had the one year many times,” responded Commissioner Dwight Meadows. “How many times do we give one more year?”

If the reorganization plan is approved, the Concord City Council would serve as the governing board of the district. After the meeting, Daymon Doss, the district's executive director, said it would continue to do its best to address residents' the health care needs.

"We are going to continue to do business," Doss said. "It may have a very different future, but it will have a future."

Mt. Diablo Health Care District stripped of power; Concord assumes oversight

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times
Posted:

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ContraCostaTimes.com

Contra Costa regulators voted Wednesday to strip the Mt. Diablo Health Care District and its five elected board members of their authority and turn over its small pot of property tax revenues and limited duties to Concord.

The Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission's 6-1 decision signals a likely end to years of controversy surrounding a district that lost its hospital 16 years ago but continued to spend the vast majority of its money on elections, overhead and free lifetime health benefits for several elected directors.

The only no vote came from Commissioner Martin McNair, who fought for a clean shutdown of the 64-year-old health care district that includes Concord, Pleasant Hill, Martinez and portions of Lafayette. Contra Costa would have been the first in the state to disband a public agency under a new state law that allows a special district to be dissolved without a vote of its residents.

McNair's six colleagues on the commission, a seven-member board of county, city and special district officials who have authority over public agency service boundaries, chose a less confrontational path they said carries less legal risk but disbands the existing board and preserves at least a portion of the tax dollars for unmet community health needs.

"Being cautious puts us in the leadership role and we avoid the added risks," said Contra Costa Supervisor Federal Glover of Pittsburg.

He is referring to potential post-dissolution litigation over the 1996 agreement under which the health care district transferred its Concord hospital to the nonprofit John Muir Health that includes a mandatory \$1 million annual community grant program and a provision that returns the hospital to the district in 2049. The health care district's attorney said dissolution would jeopardize the agreement.

Mt. Diablo Health Care District Chairman Jeff Kasper expressed "cautious optimism" to the commissioners about a reorganization option. But a commissioner blasted Kasper after he asked for at least a year to "reestablish (the district's) proper role in the safety net that serves the area's most vulnerable residents."

"We've been giving you one year for years," said Commissioner Dwight Meadows. "How many years do we have to give you?"

A commission consultant found that the health care district spent in the past decade 85 percent of its property tax proceeds on overhead, elections and legal bills. The findings matched what four civil grand juries said for years.

But the commission and Concord are under the gun to finish the complex paperwork soon.

Four of the five health care board seats are up for election in November. If the city has not been named the district's governing board by the time the candidate filing period opens in early August, a costly election will proceed.

The tight timing was one of the key reasons why Contra Costa Supervisor Karen Mitchoff of Pleasant Hill, the city of Concord and John Muir representatives said they favored dissolution. They also weighed the

potential election and administrative costs against the diminished property tax revenues of the smaller district.

"I'm very angry," Mitchoff said after the vote supported by Glover and Supervisor Mary Nejedly Piepho. "Concord, John Muir and the supervisor who represents this community all wanted dissolution, and my two colleagues on the commission voted against that."

Under the reorganization plan adopted Wednesday, Concord will create a new subsidiary district governed by the Concord City Council. The commission will reassign to the city governance of the district's assets and the transfer agreement. The existing elected health care board will be eliminated.

Concord will receive the property tax proceeds that currently go to the health care district, although the dollar amount will drop from \$240,000 a year to as little as \$100,000, depending on the size of the new district.

A Concord-led district will be smaller than the current one, as the city cannot govern residents outside its limits unless they represent at least 70 percent of the overall population in the subsidiary district. Concord makes up 44.5 percent of the existing district.

No tax dollars will be returned to residents. Money generated in areas of the district excluded from the new one will remain in the pool and distributed to cities, schools and other special districts.

The commission will also require the health care district to purchase an annuity that covers the costs of free lifetime benefits for board member Grace Ellis and former board member and Concord Councilman Ron Leone.

timeline

1948: Voters form the Mt. Diablo Health Care District and pass a new parcel tax to pay for the management and construction of a new hospital in Concord.

Nov. 1, 1994: California Legislature bans health care districts from offering new free lifetime medical benefits to their elected boards. Certain members who already held office were exempted: A member had to have been in office at least 12 years and elected before Jan. 1, 1995. Two Mt. Diablo Health District directors were eligible -- Grace Ellis and Ron Leone. Ellis is still on the board. Leone is a Concord councilman.

1996: The district hits rough financial waters and voters agree to turn over the hospital to John Muir Health. But the district and its elected board remain in place, where its duties include oversight of the transfer agreement, five seats on the 10-member community health fund and responsibility over roughly \$240,000 a year in property tax proceeds.

2001: Contra Costa civil grand jury recommends dissolution of the district, saying it has outlived its usefulness.

2003: Civil grand jury issues second call for the elimination of the district.

2007: Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission, which has jurisdiction over city and special district boundaries, questions the health care district's high level of spending on overhead and legal bills. It rejects dissolution demands but mandates annual progress reports.

2008: Third civil grand jury recommends disbanding the district.

2010: Three of the district's five elected board members vote to dissolve the agency, but it takes a supermajority, or four votes.

June 2011: A fourth grand jury demands the district shut its doors. Its findings show that the district had spent \$360,000 from 2000-2009 on health care benefits for the two eligible trustees, Ellis and Leone.

July 2011: Commission postpones a dissolution vote pending the outcome of Assembly Bill 912, a measure that would allow commissions to close public agencies without a vote of its residents. It was later signed into

law.

August 2011: Commission initiates dissolution study.

September 2011: Health care district hires Sacramento lawyer Ralph Ferguson to help fight dissolution.

December 2011: The commission's consultant finds evidence to support elimination of the district, finding that the agency has spent 85 percent of its money since 2000 on elections, administration and legal bills, only rarely providing community grants.

Jan. 11: Commission votes unanimously in favor of dissolution but postpones decision about whether to shut the district down or turn over its duties and dollars to Concord.

March 14: Commission votes to strip the five health care district members of their authority and reassign the agency's property tax proceeds and duties to a new subsidiary zone governed by Concord.

Contra Costa growth commission attracts large applicant field

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen *Contra Costa Times* *Contra Costa Times*

Posted:

Sunday, March 18, 2012
ContraCostaTimes.com

The competition is looking fierce for two seats on a Contra Costa commission that holds sway over where the county grows.

More than a dozen people have applied for the public member and alternate posts on the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission, including a former Concord mayor, three former city managers, an attorney, a businesswoman, an accountant, a contractor and a stay-at-home mom.

Every California county has a local agency formation commission. The panels vote on annexations and incorporations and conduct regular reviews of public service levels in areas such as fire, water, parks and law enforcement.

Most recently, the Contra Costa commission voted to strip the Mt. Diablo Health Care District and its elected board of its authority and reassign its small pot of property tax proceeds and limited duties to Concord.

The applicants are:

- Helen Allen, of Clayton; former commissioner and Concord councilwoman.
- Don Blubaugh, of Brentwood; retired executive director of the Contra Costa Mayors Conference and former Walnut Creek city manager.
- Sharon Burke, of Alamo, current alternate public member.
- Paul Carman, of Richmond; apparel manager.
- Jess Centeno, of Pittsburg; former Contra Costa civil grand jury member.
- David Dolter, of Alamo; consultant and former city manager and redevelopment manager of Redondo Beach.
- Tashia Flucas, of Pinole; self-employed accountant.
- Kathy Hopkins, of Lafayette; retired general manager of the Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District.
- Winchee Lin, of Pleasant Hill; stay-at-home mom with a master's degree in public policy from UC Berkeley.

- Judy Lloyd, of Danville; president of Altamont Strategies and former presidential appointee to the U.S. Department of Labor.
- Herb Moniz, of San Ramon; retired city manager of San Ramon.
- Ivor Samson, of Lafayette; attorney.
- Dale Smith, of Oakley; contractor.
- Mark Thomson, of Martinez; technology manager at Shell Oil.

Despite the lengthy list, the interest level pales in comparison to the 1980s, when dozens of people applied for a seat on the commission. The county was growing, and the commission made key decisions about where cities and special districts were allowed to expand and provide new services.

But the seats remain highly desirable in a county in which voters were among the first in the state to adopt urban limit lines intended to stem suburban sprawl.

It took the commission eight months to fill the post in 2005 after pro- and anti-urban growth boundary factions couldn't reach an accord.

They finally chose someone palatable to both sides -- Martin McNair, a Point Richmond resident with a background in development and environmental activism. Public members are subject to term limits, and McNair is termed out.

The commission consists of seven voting members: two county supervisors, two elected city councilmembers or mayors, two special district representatives; and one member of the public. There are also four alternates.

To win appointment, it takes four yes votes, including one affirmative vote each from a supervisor, mayor/councilmember and special district representative.

An ad hoc committee of the commission will narrow the field. Those who make the short list will be interviewed at the commission's April 11 public meeting.

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Monday, March 19, 2012

LAFCO appointment brings strong applicant pool

Four from Tri-Valley are among the more than dozen seeking appointment for two slots

There's a fierce competition for two seats on Contra Costa's Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) that includes officials from across the county and some from here.

LAFCO has some control over what development goes where and that could mean decisions on hot-button areas, such as the Tassajara Valley, where a developer has proposed using 771 acres of land along Camino Tassajara east of San Ramon to develop 187 residential units and cultivate olive trees.

More than a dozen have applied for the public member and alternate posts on LAFCO, including Herb Moniz, San Ramon's retired city manager, Judy Lloyd of Danville; who is president of Altamont Strategies was a presidential appointee to the U.S. Department of Labor.

Two Alamo residents have applied as well, including Sharon Burke who is the current alternate public member, and David Dolter, a consultant, who was once city manager and redevelopment manager of Redondo Beach.

The other applicants are:

- * Helen Allen, of Clayton, a former commissioner and Concord councilwoman.
- * Don Blubaugh, of Brentwood, who is a retired executive director of the Contra Costa Mayors Conference and former city manager of Walnut Creek.
- * Paul Carman, of Richmond, an apparel manager.
- * Jess Centeno, of Pittsburg, who was a Contra Costa civil grand jury member.
- * Tashia Flucas, of Pinole, who is a self-employed accountant.
- * Kathy Hopkins, of Lafayette, a retired general manager of the Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District.
- * Winchee Lin, of Pleasant Hill, who is a stay-at-home mom with a master's degree in public policy from UC Berkeley.
- * Ivor Samson, of Lafayette, an attorney.
- * Dale Smith, of Oakley, who is a contractor.
- * Mark Thomson, of Martinez a technology manager at Shell Oil.

The commission is made up of seven voting members: two are county supervisors, two are elected city councilmembers or mayors, two are special district representatives and one is a member of the public. There are also four alternates.

It takes four yes votes to win appointment, and that includes getting the nod from a supervisor, a mayor or councilmember and a special district representative.

Interviews for those who make the first cut will be held at the commission's April 11 public meeting.

Breaking: SRVUSD Board Rescinds Child Care Decision; No Provider Changes For a Year »



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Locals Apply for the Contra Costa County Growth Commission

Two seats are open for the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission and more than a dozen applicants want the seats.

March 20, 2012

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Guiding the expansion within the county seems to be a popular topic, if the number of candidates for two open seats on the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission is any indication.

The [LAFCO](#) looks at issues of incorporation, annexation, and other forms of boundary change inside Contra Costa County.

More than a dozen applicants are going after the two available seats on the growth commission, the [Mercury News reported Sunday](#).

Local applicants include:

- **Judy Lloyd**, of **Danville**; president of Altamont Strategies and former presidential appointee to the U.S. Department of Labor.
- **David Dolter**, of **Alamo**; consultant and former city manager and redevelopment manager of Redondo Beach.
- **Sharon Burke**, of **Alamo**, current alternate public member.
- **Herb Moniz**, of **San Ramon**; retired city manager of San Ramon.

Read the entire list of applicants [here](#).

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Mt. Diablo Health Care District considers \$770,000 in community grant requests

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times
Posted:

Wednesday, March 21, 2012
ContraCostaTimes.com

The Mt. Diablo Health Care District board is poised to hand out tens of thousands of dollars in grants on its way out the door.

In what is perhaps the health care district's last hurrah before the city of Concord assumes its duties, the district board will filter through grant requests from 17 nonprofits worth nearly a combined \$770,000.

The nonprofits propose to use the money on mobile clinics for the poor, healthy-eating campaigns, transportation for seniors and at-risk youth mentoring.

Among the applicants seeking the largest grant is NorCal Transitions, a Concord-based nonprofit that wants an additional \$150,000 to help the homeless.

The district gave NorCal \$50,000 last October but never knew -- and didn't ask -- about its founder, Rudy Jaime, a 60-year-old Concord native whose troubled history of the past three decades includes felony grand theft, jail time, accusations of domestic abuse, unpaid taxes, workplace altercations, a revoked contractor's license and civil lawsuits.

Also competing for an identical grant is NorCal's former fiscal sponsor, Dr. Harmesh Kumar of Concord, who said he severed the partnership after learning about its leader's past and vowed to pursue a grant on his own.

The district budgeted \$162,000 for its 2012 grant program but may spend more or less depending on the merits of the applications, said interim Executive Director Daymon Doss. As of February, the district estimated it will have \$668,000 in the bank at the end of year.

Local regulators voted earlier this month to disband the elected board as unneeded and costly, and initiated a transfer of the district's small pot of money and governance duties to the city of Concord.

The district hasn't run a medical facility since Central Contra Costa voters turned over the operation of its financially troubled hospital to John Muir in 1996. With no hospital to run, its five-member elected board has spent the vast majority of its property tax proceeds on overhead, elections and legal bills.

Critics say the district should stop spending money, particularly since it must cover the costs of free lifetime health and dental benefits owed to one current and one former elected director before the transfer to the city of Concord takes place.

But while the process unfolds, board Chairman Jeff Kasper has said the district will proceed with the grant cycle it revived last year.

The agency has tightened its rules, however, and the less formal process that led to NorCal's initial grant has been replaced with a competitive application cycle.

The district has also appointed a grant review committee of board members and residents, who will use a standard checklist to score each of the initial applicants. High-scorers will be asked to submit detailed applications and the review panel will vet them and make final recommendations to the board in April or May.

The district's grant targets are broadly defined. The money can be spent on programs that improve "physical, social, personal, spiritual and economic well-being," according to the district.

Programs could include better health care access for children, seniors, minorities, the homeless and immigrants. The district also emphasizes the provision of unmet needs.

But proposals must represent a "realistic potential to meet established goals in the projected timeline."

How NorCal will fare under the more stringent rules is an open question.

Its latest grant proposal states that its two paid staff and volunteers will help 600 homeless individuals per year access social services and find housing and jobs. The number is unrealistically high, say several experts in other nonprofit organizations that help the homeless.

The question may be moot. The district requires applicants to provide a letter from the Internal Revenue Service verifying their federal tax-exempt status, often called 501(c)(3) after the code section.

Jaime has told the district that NorCal's IRS application was filed but the nonprofit is not yet listed as 501(c)(3) on the federal agency's online qualified charities list.

NorCal's grant of \$50,000 last October came through the South Asian Behavioral Health and Training Foundation, the 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded by Dr. Kumar for the purposes of producing his downtown Concord cultural music festival.

Contact Lisa Vorderbrueggen at 925-945-4773, lvorderbrueggen@bayareanewsgroup.com, www.ibabuzz.com/politics or at [Twitter.com/lvorderbrueggen](https://twitter.com/lvorderbrueggen).

rush for cash

Mt. Diablo Health Care District will evaluate nearly \$770,000 in grant requests from 17 organizations.

- American Cancer Society, \$15,000: Transportation to and from cancer treatments.
- Cambridge Community Center, Concord youth center, \$22,000: Cooking classes for low-income families on ways to provide healthy meals on a budget and training preschool staff on appropriate levels of physical activities for children.
- Center for Human Development, wellness and youth program in Pleasant Hill, \$7,500: Expansion of anti-smoking campaign into Martinez schools and Boys and Girls Club of the Diablo Valley that serve primarily low-income youth.
- Concord Senior Citizens Club, \$16,000: Transportation for seniors to doctor's appointments and services at the senior center.
- Concord Historical Society, \$5,000: Expand its history program for Concord third- and fourth-graders.
- Contra Costa Child Care Council, \$67,000: Nutrition and physical education training at licensed child care centers.
- Contra Costa Kops for Kids, \$2,500: Mentoring of at-risk youth, positive mental attitude seminars and sports clinics.
- Contra Costa Regional Health Foundation, \$6,000: Education for health care providers on culturally appropriate services for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals.
- Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, \$50,000: Provide free fresh produce and nutrition education for the poor in Concord and Martinez.
- John F. Kennedy University, \$52,500: Funding for its Family Resiliency Project, which provides therapy for students and their families who attend low-income schools.

- Martinez Community Emergency Response Team, \$5,950: Purchase CPR mannequins and other medical training equipment and supplies.
- Michael Chavez Center, Concord nonprofit created to help minorities, \$10,000: Expand efforts to boost access to health services for immigrant and minority residents.
- NorCal Transitions, \$150,000: Help homeless individuals access social services, housing and jobs.
- RotaCare Bay Area, \$100,000: Free mobile health clinics for the poor.
- Senior Helpline Services, \$30,000: Transportation, home visits and aid to seniors who wish to remain in their homes.
- South Asian Behavioral Health and Training Foundation, \$150,000: Help homeless individuals access social services, housing and jobs.
- Wellness City Challenge, \$80,000: Mt. Diablo High School students learn to cook healthy meals, which are served to teachers and students.

Source: Mt. Diablo Health Care District, Times research

Moraga Orinda Fire District to continue with three trustees for now

By Jennifer Modenessi Contra Costa Times San Jose Mercury News

Posted:

Friday, March 23, 2012

ContraCostaTimes.com

In a move spurred by public input and a desire for financial restraint, the remaining directors of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District have decided against special elections and appointments to fill two empty board seats.

Trustees Frank Sperling and John Wyro and President Fred Weil agreed Wednesday to continue operating as a three-member governing body. They will hold elections in November so voters can fill vacancies left by the recent departures of directors Dick Olsen and Brook Mancinelli.

Olsen and Mancinelli announced their resignations in February after the approval -- and subsequent withdrawal -- of a contentious building purchase that fractured the board. Mancinelli offered no comment on his exit, but Olsen said frustration and board dysfunction factored in his decision. Both opposed the building purchase.

Directors previously discussed several ideas for filling the posts for Districts 3 and 5, including appointments and special elections. But those options had their drawbacks. Appointments would last only until general elections in November. If special elections were held, Mancinelli's replacement would have to run again in November as that term ends in December.

If they decided to take no action, the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors could fill the vacancies through elections or appointments.

"I think time is of the essence," Chief Randy Bradley told trustees Wednesday. "You need to make a decision. You have your options."

As they did at their March 14 meeting, directors turned to the public for input, emphasizing again their desire for transparency.

"There is a perception in certain parts of this community that we're an old-boys club, and we need to keep it closed," Sperling said. Appointing new directors would be wrong, he said, and would disenfranchise voters.

Weil told the board he would support having voters fill Olsen's District 3 seat in November in the general election and that he wasn't too concerned about operating as a three-member board. Important decisions on the budget or other issues could be delayed, he said, until replacements were found. Spending almost \$40,000 on a special election for a new director whose tenure would last only a couple of months also gave him pause, Weil said.

Orinda resident Terry Murphy, one of two people who has publicly expressed interest in a board seat, said he thought it would be financially irresponsible for the board to pay for a special election. And he acknowledged how cumbersome -- but doable -- it would be to operate with just three directors.

Under the Health and Safety Code, a minimum of three affirmative votes are required to enact policies, ordinances and resolutions when a five-member board is operating with two vacancies. Under the Brown Act, a quorum is two members of a five-member board operating with two vacancies. Directors cannot currently discuss matters among themselves without calling a public meeting.

Other speakers also encouraged the board to refrain from spending money on an election. Art Haigh asked trustees whether they expect to make any decisions on matters that would require more input from

underrepresented districts.

Weil said if there were plans for a new fire station in those districts, they would want community input. Earlier, he said the district could function if the board delayed some decisions because of its current status.

Before the vote, directors told attendees they appreciated their input.

"I hope you feel you're listened to and we're working together for the same purpose," director Wyro said.

Nevada Co. LAFCo orders 75 percent increase in contributions from cities, county

MARCH, 23 2012
BY CHRISTOPHER ROSACKER
THE UNION

NEVADA COUNTY, Calif. — Following a lawsuit settlement over a contested sphere of influence determination, the Nevada County Local Agency Formation Commission is mandating local government agencies increase contributions to cover litigation and ensuing expenses.

Specifically, LAFCo has ordered Nevada County, Grass Valley, Nevada City and other municipalities or special districts to increase their contributions to LAFCo by 75 percent — a directive approved as part of the interim budget update at the LAFCo commissioner's meeting Thursday.

The increased contributions total an additional \$74,000 among Grass Valley, Nevada City and Nevada County.

The budget update, which will circulate to the various agencies in the next week, is scheduled to be finalized in June, said Nevada County LAFCo Executive Director S.R. Jones.

In the 2011-12 fiscal year, Nevada County contributed more than \$71,000; Grass Valley contributed almost \$20,000; and Nevada City contributed nearly \$8,000, according to the finance departments each agency.

A 75 percent increase would raise contributions by \$53,000 from the county, nearly \$15,000 from Grass Valley and almost \$6,000 from Nevada City.

“I don't know where they are going to get it,” said Maryanne Hoffler, an accounting supervisor for Grass Valley. “We're already squeezing blood out of turnips over here.”

The increase is manageable for the county, given its approximate \$170 million annual budget, said Joe Christoffel, Nevada County assistant executive officer, adding the county had set funds aside in anticipation of the LAFCo contribution increase.

All 58 California counties have a LAFCo, independent regulatory commissions created by the California Legislature to act as watchdogs over the boundaries of cities and most special districts.

“Because LAFCos control local boundaries, they indirectly influence the state's political and the physical landscape,” notes a 2003 State Legislature report on LAFCos. “Yet, very few Californians actually know who governs LAFCos.”

Primarily, LAFCos review and act on proposals to change boundaries. The local LAFCo is involved with sphere of influence and annexation considerations, currently with regard to Loma Rica and HEW developments outside Grass Valley and Nevada City, respectively.

LAFCos control nine types of boundary changes: annexations, detachments, disincorporations, dissolutions, formations, incorporations, mergers, consolidations, subsidiary districts and reorganizations.

One such determination landed Nevada County's LAFCo in hot water in 2011.

Truckee Donner Public Utility District sued Nevada County's LAFCo in September 2011 for its decision to minimize the sphere of influence of the Truckee Sanitary District, according to previous reports.

The suit challenged both the adequacy under the California Environmental Quality Act of LAFCo's Supplemental Environmental Impact Report and the process of its adoption.

As part of the December 2011 settlement, LAFCo reviewed its document and concluded there were administrative procedural errors and agreed to prepare an enhanced analysis of greenhouse gas emissions.

Also, LAFCo must prepare a new EIR, which is estimated to cost \$55,000.

Nevada County loaned LAFCo \$50,000 for litigation expenses. In the course of litigation and regular expenses, LAFCo depleted \$75,000 from its funds — leaving a \$58,000 shortfall in anticipated expenditures for 2011-12 budget, according to a LAFCo report prepared for Thursday's meeting.

At the same time, it must repay the loan to Nevada County, which LAFCo has mandated to increase its contribution to \$53,000.

LAFCOs are funded by contributions from the agencies for which it makes determinations, both through annual contributions based on their budgets and from fees for projects, Jones told The Union.

With the increases, Nevada County's LAFCo total budget will be nearly \$400,000, of which the largest expense — more than \$182,000 (46 percent) — is allocated to the salaries of Jones, a part-time clerk and a part-time office assistant.

<http://www.sierrasun.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?>

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Pinole council to consider options for fire department budget

By Tom Lochner Contra Costa Times San Jose Mercury News

Posted:

Saturday, March 24, 2012
ContraCostaTimes.com

Pinole over the past several years has struggled to make fire protection more efficient and cost-effective. A special City Council workshop Tuesday will examine alternatives, including contracting for service with neighboring agencies.

Pinole is one of three cities in Contra Costa County that has its own municipal fire department; the others are in Richmond and El Cerrito.

Pinole's fire budget is almost \$3.2 million this year, with a current staff of 15 firefighters. But funds are insufficient for administration, fire prevention and training above the minimum requirements, officials say.

So Pinole invited two neighboring fire agencies -- the Contra Costa County and Rodeo-Hercules fire districts -- to submit contract proposals.

The three agencies already collaborate in what essentially is a single fire department from an operational standpoint known as Battalion 7.

It includes Rodeo-Hercules' two stations; Contra Costa's El Sobrante and San Pablo stations; and Pinole's downtown station.

A second Pinole station, in the Pinole Valley, has been shuttered since July. The three agencies share a rotating chief officer, usually a battalion chief or acting battalion chief. And Pinole and Rodeo-Hercules share a fire chief in Charles Hanley.

At a Jan. 31 workshop, the two adjacent fire districts offered contracts that would maintain Pinole firefighter staffing at current levels and provide some of the elements that Pinole cannot now afford -- for roughly the same amount as Pinole's current fire budget.

Since then, Contra Costa Fire has had to update its proposal to include previously unaccounted-for retiree medical benefit costs. The upward revision may negate any cost saving from a contract with Contra Costa over a stand-alone, municipal fire department, according to a Pinole staff report for Tuesday's meeting.

The report estimates costs for the three service models in the coming fiscal year at \$3.28 million for the Pinole Fire Department; \$3.09 million for a contract with Rodeo-Hercules; and \$3.46 million for a contract with Contra Costa Fire. Figuring in escalation formulas, the costs in the fifth year would be \$3.7 million, \$3.63 million and \$3.84 million, respectively.

The figures assume operation of one Pinole fire station with constant staffing of three firefighters within a greater Battalion 7. If Pinole contracts out fire service, its firefighters would become employees of the contracting district, according to the proposals.

Rodeo-Hercules proposes a 10-year contract; Contra Costa, five years.

The union representing all three agencies' firefighters, Local 1230, has not taken a formal vote on which arrangement it prefers, but a majority of the members likely would prefer contracting with Contra Costa, with Rodeo-Hercules the second choice, said union President Vince Wells.

Contra Costa Fire, which currently has 28 stations, would provide more coverage flexibility, more specialized training and career opportunities, and the benefit of a diversity of firefighting experiences ranging from wildland urban interface fires to urban structure fires, Wells said.

All three agencies have Advanced Life Support capability, Wells added, with each engine equipped with the same medical equipment and drugs as an ambulance and carrying a licensed paramedic.

Contact Tom Lochner at 510-262-2760.

IF YOU GO

What: Pinole City Council workshop on fire service options

Where: Pinole City Hall,
2131 Pear St.

When: 5:30 p.m. Tuesday

State parks to fix ailing Mount Diablo road before pro bike race

By Denis Cuff *Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times*

Posted:

Thursday, March 29, 2012
ContraCostaTimes.com

DANVILLE -- The state parks system has pledged to spend up to \$100,000 to fix a privately owned road to Mt. Diablo State Park to make it safe for a pro bike race featuring some of the world's best riders, two state lawmakers announced Wednesday.

Just six weeks before the Amgen Tour of California is scheduled to stage its first leg on part of the mountain, the State Parks and Recreation Department announced its commitment to repair Mount Diablo Scenic Drive leading to the southern entrance of the park above Danville.

The work is not expected to be a permanent fix for the long troubled road, but enough to make it safe for the racers and race fans during the May 15 leg.

State Sen. Mark DeSaulnier, D-Concord, and Assemblywoman Joan Buchanan, D-Alamo, jointly announced the road relief. The old narrow road with deep potholes and cracks belongs to some property owners in and near the community of Diablo, but most road users are state park visitors.

Contact Denis Cuff at 925-943-8267. Follow him at [Twitter.com/deniscuff](https://twitter.com/deniscuff)



Monday, April 2, 2012

East Bay Water Agency Muscles Up on Green Power

Here's some possible balm for your conscience in case it's prone to distress when you throw away food.

The agency that delivers water to 1.3 million customers in Contra Costa and Alameda counties, the East Bay Municipal Utility District, also performs other services, such as treating wastewater and generating electricity from waste.

The agency collects discarded food and other waste – some of it too gross to describe for a family online newspaper – at its main wastewater treatment plant near the eastern end of the Bay Bridge. The muck is tossed into a digester and spews a tremendous volume of methane, which in turn can power electricity-generating machines.

Up to now, the district has been using three conventional engines – each about the size of a car – that run on the methane to make electricity and lower its greenhouse-gas footprint, but there's been a big surplus, necessitating flaring of the excess methane, according to Alice Towey, an associate engineer with the agency.

On Tuesday, the district is holding a unveiling of what a news release calls "a state-of-the-art turbine" that will nearly double the plant's generating capacity.

"It's basically a jet engine," Towey said. "It's just a lot more efficient." The turbine is more compact, able to fit in the bed of a truck, and has a 5.6-megawatt capacity, compared with the existing three engines whose combined capacity is 6.3 megawatts, she said.

The news release calls the power-generating facility "EBMUD's green factory."

"The nature of the wastewater treatment plant as we know it has evolved," said agency spokesman Charles Hardy. "That's why we call it the 'green factory.' Instead of a place where we get rid of something, it's a place where we produce something."

The Tuesday event begins at 9 a.m. at the treatment plant at 2020 Wake Ave. in Oakland. (Directions to the facility are attached to this article.) The main speaker will be Alexis Strauss, water division director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for Region IX. Other participants in the program are EBMUD board President John Coleman and Matt Bond, president of the Water Environment Federation.

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