

Joe Serrano

From: Don Jarvis <donjarvis9@gmail.com>
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To: LAFCO Info
Subject: Public comment Item 5a Countywide Fire Protection Service and Sphere Review, October 13, 2021
LAFCO Agenda

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Dear Mr. Serrano and Commissioners,
Following are my comments on the draft Fire Service Review:

Part 1

Clearly, the most concerning issue raised in the Service Review is the viability of the Branciforte Fire District. The recommendations found in the Service Review, surprisingly, continue to rely solely on the Scotts Valley Fire District to resolve the Branciforte conundrum, and reaffirms the combined Branciforte/Scotts Valley SOI. SVFD has, through words and actions, demonstrated that it is not in a position to be the sole successor to the Branciforte Fire District. Allow me to make the following observations:

1. The SVFD (not Branciforte) cancelled the Administrative Agreement. After six years of providing exemplary service to the Branciforte community, SVFD rightfully decided they could no longer continue to do so due to the demands the agreement placed on their system. It is unrealistic to believe that anything will change in the foreseeable future that will make the relationship more workable for Scotts Valley.
2. The SVFD Fire Chief, on two separate occasions in public meetings, stated “**Consolidation [with SVFD] means closing the Branciforte Fire Station**”. Comments made during recent BFPD Board Meetings by both the public and Directors made it clear that closing the station was unacceptable. The obvious conclusion is that SVFD, with just 22 full-time firefighters, does not have the capacity to take on full responsibility for the BFPD without reducing service to a level unacceptable to the Branciforte community.
3. The Central Fire District Administration and individual Board members have openly expressed a willingness to have discussions with BFPD and SVFD to explore options for developing a regional fire service model when the timing is right. That LAFCO would choose to ignore this opportunity is baffling.
4. A combined Scotts Valley/Branciforte/Central SOI allows for all possible combinations of reorganization of the three districts, without obligating anyone to anything.
5. The best possible outcome would be the two strong pillars (SVFD and CFD) bridging the gap in a Consolidated (Scotts Valley/Branciforte/Central) Fire District. I have no doubt that such a consolidated district, with over 130 full-time employees, nearly 40 volunteers, and revenues of approximately \$50M/yr, would have the resources necessary to avoid closing the Branciforte Fire Station.

It doesn't take much imagination to picture a small fire that, due to an understaffed (or unstaffed) Branciforte fire station, grows out of control to threaten large areas within and outside of the Branciforte Fire District boundaries. This is an example of a local problem that has regional consequences, and it demands a regional solution.

Part 2

The four San Lorenzo Valley Fire Districts (Boulder Creek, Ben Lomond, Felton, and Zayante) have a long history of working very closely together, share a strong community identity, have similar service models, and share similar challenges. The Districts together form a highly interdependent system. These uniting factors could be capitalized on to form the foundation for further cooperative efforts in developing plans to meet community needs and expectations. Oddly, the Service Review completely ignores this commonality and affinity, and recommends consolidating Ben Lomond and Zayante (part of the San Lorenzo Valley community), with Scotts Valley and Branciforte, which are not. I see nothing in the data presented in the Review that supports such a recommendation. The consolidation of SVFD, BLFD, ZFD, and BFD, frankly, makes little sense from either an operational or organizational perspective.

The Service Review further recommends that Boulder Creek and Felton both (independently) increase on-duty staffing. A recommendation with such significant financial and operational impact should be the result of comprehensive analysis as would be found in a Standard of Cover (SOC) document.

A more reasonable recommendation might be to have the four San Lorenzo Valley fire districts jointly undertake an SOC study, and from the recommendations in that study, work together to implement a deployment model (based on hard data) that best meets the needs of the entire SLV community. A cost-sharing methodology, management of the joint efforts and performance measures could be collaboratively developed by the four participating Districts. While this approach may in fact result in increasing staffing, it would be

planned in such a way that all residents reap the highest possible benefits and all of the districts would proportionally share in the cost. A collaborative effort would not require consolidation or any other formal reorganization, and could be accomplished with or without a combined SOI. If implemented and managed with care (by the Districts themselves), it could improve service throughout the valley without threatening the autonomy of the Districts, the Volunteer Departments, or the Fire Chiefs.

I appreciate the effort and time that LAFCO staff invested in drafting the Service Review. The document contains a significant amount of important data and will be a valuable tool in moving forward. It seems the fire agencies in the county remain, for the most part, siloed, but the Service Review does little to address that condition. I hope my comments will encourage LAFCO to spur meaningful discussion across district boundaries, resulting in improved service to all county residents. Specifically, LAFCO can help resolve the issues surrounding the Branciforte Fire District by adopting a combined SOI for the Scotts Valley, Branciforte, and Central fire districts and recommending that the three districts work together to develop a regional solution to the Branciforte problem. Further, LAFCO can help the four San Lorenzo Valley fire districts collaborate on planning for future service enhancements by recommending a joint Standard of Cover study and, perhaps, by adopting a combined SOI for the SLV districts.

Thank you,
Don Jarvis
Interim Fire Chief (Retired)