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**Santa Cruz Local Agency Formation Commission**

Date: August 3, 2022  
To: LAFCO Commissioners  
From: Joe Serrano, Executive Officer  
Subject: **Consulting Firm Selection for the Upcoming Feasibility Study**

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**SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION**

The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act delegates LAFCOs with regulatory and planning duties to coordinate the logical formation and development of local governmental agencies through various actions, including but not limited to, processing boundary changes and developing service and sphere reviews. In some cases, LAFCO staff requires additional assistance from outside consultants for specific projects or studies. This report will summarize the proposed agreement with a consulting firm to produce a feasibility study stemming from LAFCO's 2021 Countywide Fire Protection Service & Sphere Review.

It is recommended that the Commission approve the draft contractual agreement to hire AP Triton as LAFCO's consulting firm to produce a feasibility study regarding the sphere boundaries for the fire agencies in Santa Cruz County.

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**EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT:**

In October 2021, as part of the Countywide Fire Protection Service & Sphere Review, the Commission reviewed the 13 fire agencies' spheres of influence. A sphere indicates the potential growth of an agency, or in other words, a sphere identifies the most logical service provider to an area. The Commission took three key actions regarding the sphere boundaries: (1) it reduced County Service Area 48's sphere to remove any overlapping with other sphere boundaries, (2) it gave County Service Area 4 a zero sphere, and (3) it reaffirmed the remaining 11 sphere boundaries with the condition that an annexation plan be developed by August 31, 2022.

Existing Sphere Boundaries

The majority of the spheres for each fire agency were originally adopted in the late-1980s and early-1990s, with most of them remaining the same with no annexations or actions. As a result, residents who are within an agency's sphere but outside their jurisdiction do not have proper representation or a voice in the agency's decisions even though they may be receiving services due to their proximity of the fire agency. Reaffirming the spheres with the condition that the affected agency coordinate with LAFCO to develop a plan to address the areas within their spheres allows the affected agencies an opportunity to plan for the future. These plans may lead to potential annexations or, at minimum, sphere amendments that better reflect the agency's future growth.

## Financial Impact

Following the Countywide Fire Report, several fire agencies expressed interest in exploring the possible annexations of territory within their sphere boundaries. However, the number one question that all affected agencies have when considering annexation is: “*What is the financial impact?*” This question led LAFCO to distribute a Request for Proposal in March to address this fiscal obstacle by developing a more technical analysis that would provide the necessary facts to the affected agencies. This feasibility study will examine how future annexations within existing sphere boundaries directly affect the subject agencies, specifically CSA 48’s funding and operations. For any annexation to occur, those subject areas need to be detached from CSA 48, which currently serves all unincorporated areas not within a fire district. This feasibility study would benefit the entire County because it would answer two fundamental questions:

- 1) Is it feasible for an agency to take over fire responsibility in areas within its sphere boundary through annexation?
- 2) How does the proposed reorganizations impact the current and future operations of CSA 48?

In March 2022, over 60 consulting firms received a copy of the RFP. The original deadline to submit proposals was April 15 but received a time extension until May 18 to ensure enough bids were submitted. In total, LAFCO received three proposals before the deadline. This staff report provides an overview of two key components: (1) summary of each firm’s proposal, and (2) staff’s recommendation on which firm is the most qualified to produce the feasibility study.

## **RANKING OF CONSULTING FIRMS (BASED ON WEIGHTED CRITERIA)**

A total of three consulting firms submitted a proposal expressing interest completing the feasibility study. The three firms are listed in **Table A** on page 3. In accordance with the RFP, all proposals were evaluated based on the following criteria and weighting: (1) Qualifications – 35%, (2) Costs/Rates – 35%, (3) Conflicts of Interest – 15%, (4) Local and State Client References – 10%, and (5) Additional Information – 5%. **Attachment 1** provides a more detailed evaluation of each firm based on the weighted criteria. In order to calculate the weighted criteria, LAFCO staff first used a 1-10 scale with 10 points being the best, and then factored in the weighted criteria to rank each firm.

### Most Suitable Legal Firm

It is staff’s position that the most important areas are the qualifications of the firm and the costs for services. LAFCO’s goal is to ratify a contract with a firm that is qualified and cost effective. Based on the firms’ responses, and in conjunction with the weighted criteria, LAFCO staff and its fire consultant identified AP Triton as the most suitable firm to complete the feasibility study. **Table A** shows the ranking of each firm. An explanation of each firm’s ranking can be found in the following page of this report.

**Table A: Consulting Firm Rankings (In Order of Weighted Points)**

| <b>Legal Firm</b>   | <b>Total Points</b> | <b>Weighted Points</b> |
|---------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| AP Triton           | 49                  | <b>9.85</b>            |
| PlanWest Partners   | 46                  | <b>9.60</b>            |
| Management Partners | 45                  | <b>9.00</b>            |

### **Ranked #1: AP Triton**

AP Triton earned 49 out of 50 points based on their proposal, resulting in a weighted total of 9.85 out of 10 possible points. AP Triton's identified team has both fire and LAFCO experience including former fire chiefs, former Cal FIRE chiefs, and LAFCO employees. AP Triton has completed several LAFCO-related fire studies, including but not limited to an annexation study in Contra Costa County which led to several reorganizations. One of AP Triton's team members was also the project manager for the feasibility study involving Aptos/La Selva and Central Fire Protection Districts, which led to the successful consolidation in 2021. Their proposal, as shown in **Attachment 2**, includes several references from various fire districts, LAFCOs, and local agencies (ex. Central Fire District). Additionally, AP Triton was the only firm that submitted their bid before the original deadline of April 15. If selected, AP Triton would complete the entire study for \$49,776.

### **Ranked #2: PlanWest Partners**

PlanWest Partners earned 46 out of 50 points based on their proposal, resulting in a weighted total of 9.60 out of 10 possible points. This firm also has fire and LAFCO experience with examples of several fire-related service reviews and reorganizations. However, unlike AP Triton, the firm does not have direct experience in Santa Cruz County and has a conflict of interest in their team that may affect their findings and recommendations, as shown in **Attachment 3**. If selected, PlanWest Partners would complete the entire study for \$50,000.

### **Ranked #3: Management Partners**

Management Partners earned 45 out of 50 points based on their proposal, resulting in a weighted total of 9.00 out of 10 possible points. This firm has experience in this area with examples of several fire-related reorganizations. However, staff identified several issues: (1) it does not have direct experience in Santa Cruz County, (2) it did not identify any LAFCO examples/references, (3) it has a conflict of interest in their team that may affect their findings and recommendations, and (4) their estimated cost is beyond the maximum amount identified in the RFP, as shown in **Attachment 4**. If selected, Management Partners would complete the entire study for \$86,000.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

The Countywide Fire Protection Service & Sphere Review has sparked interest from various fire agencies, has led to multiple LAFCO presentations and discussions, and has reinforced the fact that the affected fire agencies, the County, and LAFCO play a critical role in the current and future delivery of fire protection in Santa Cruz County. Gathering the necessary data and facts will clearly indicate how potential annexations will impact the affected agencies, including the CSA 48. More importantly, the study will help LAFCO develop a transition plan, in coordination with the affected agencies, so that potential reorganizations are not completed in a "piecemeal" approach but rather through a holistic and transparent process. Therefore, staff is recommending that the Commission approve the draft contractual agreement with AP Triton (**Attachment 5**) to complete this significant study. It is important to note that the draft agreement contains a detailed scope of work, which includes input from County staff – specifically representatives from the Fire Department Advisory Commission and the County Administrative Office. LAFCO staff appreciates their participation in finalizing the scope of work.

Respectfully Submitted,



Joe A. Serrano  
Executive Officer

Attachments:

1. [Weighted Criteria Ranking \(Detailed Table\)](#)
2. [AP Triton's Proposal \(submittal date – April 14\)](#)
3. [PlanWest Partners' Proposal \(submittal date – May 18\)](#)
4. [Management Partners' Proposal \(submittal date – May 18\)](#)
5. [Contractual Agreement with AP Triton \(Draft Version\)](#)