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ATTEST: January 25, 2022
SHERYL BRATTON, Clerk/Secretary
BY Noelle Francis

County of Sonoma Resolution No. 22-0031

Gold Ridge Fire Protection District Resolution No. 21/22-02

A Concurrent Resolution Of The Board Of Supervisors Of The County Of Sonoma, State Of California, and The Board of Directors of the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District, Constituting The Parties Resolution Of Intent To Apply To the Sonoma Local Agency Formation Commission For Reorganization of the Subject Territory into the District

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Whereas, the Board of Directors of the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District (District) and the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, (collectively referred to as "the Parties"), desire to initiate proceedings pursuant to the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000, commencing with section 56000 of the California Government Code, with Sonoma Local Agency Formation Commission ("Sonoma LAFCO") for the reorganization of the Parties as specified herein; and

Whereas, the Parties have agreed to notify Sonoma LAFCO by adoption of this Concurrent Resolution of the intent to apply for the reorganization of Incident Response Plan (IRP) area 81 and the areas serviced by the Volunteer Fire Companies of Ft. Ross, Camp Meeker, Bloomfield, Bodega, Valley Ford, Two Rock, San Antonio, Wilmar, and Lakeville ("the VFC areas") (collectively referred to as the "Subject Territory") which are all located within County Service Area No. 40 (CSA-40), in portions of the unincorporated area of the County, consisting of detachment of the Subject Territory from CSA-40 and annexation of the Subject Territory into District ("the Proposed Reorganization"), resulting in an reorganized Gold Ridge Fire Protection District ("the Reorganized District"); and

Whereas, the boundaries of the territory included in the proposed Reorganized District will be the combined territories of the Subject Territory and the District, as shown in Exhibit "A", attached hereto and incorporated herein by reference; and

Whereas, the Parties have executed a tax exchange and supplementary revenue sharing agreement that provides sufficient funding to enable the District to annex the Subject Territory, resulting in the proposed Reorganized District, and includes the transference of special taxes levied by the Wilmar Community Facilities District within the Subject Territory to the Reorganized District; and

Whereas, the Proposed Reorganization requires a Municipal Services Review (MSR) be conducted, in addition to an amendment to District's sphere of influence to include the boundaries of the Subject Territory into in the Reorganized District, and the Parties agree this Resolution represents a formal request to Sonoma LAFCO to begin the proceedings necessary to complete a MSR and amend the District's Sphere of Influence; and

Now, Therefore, Be It Resolved, the Board of Directors of the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District and the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors hereby declare their intent to apply for the Proposed Reorganization and their support for the Reorganized District, and request Sonoma LAFCO begin the necessary proceedings to conduct a MSR and amend the District's Sphere of Influence.

County of Sonoma Resolution No. 22-0031

Gold Ridge Fire Protection District Resolution No. 21/22-02

This Concurrent Resolution can be executed in counterpart and is effective from the latest date of execution shown below.

Supervisors:

Passed, approved and adopted at a regular meeting of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Sonoma, State of California, by the following votes. Passed and adopted this January 25th, 2022.

Gorin: Aye Rabbitt: Aye Coursey: Aye Hopkins: Aye Gore: Aye

Ayes: 5 Noes: 0 Absent: 0 Abstain: 0

SO ORDERED.

Attest: Sheryl Bratton
Deputy Clerk

Chair, Board of Supervisors,
of the
County of Sonoma

ATTEST:

Chair
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

Gold Ridge Fire Protection District:

Passed, approved and adopted at a special meeting of the Board of Directors of the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District, by the following votes. Passed and adopted this January 12, 2022.

SO ORDERED.

Robert E. Glaeckner
President, Board of Directors

Ayes: 7
Noes: 0
Absent: 0

ATTEST:

Dominic Carvalli
Clerk of the Board of Directors

SONOMA LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION

ADOPTED MEETING MINUTES

Board of Supervisors Chambers
575 Administration Drive, Santa Rosa 102A
Wednesday, April 5th, 2023

Commissioners	Alternate Commissioners	Staff
Jean Kapolchok	Ed Hodges	Mark Bramfitt, Executive Officer
Rich Holmer	Chris Coursey	Verne Ball, Legal Counsel
James Gore	Bill Norton	Cynthia Olson, Administrative Analyst
Mark Hemmendinger	Jeff Okrepkie	Kasandra Bowen, Commission Clerk
Susan Gorin		
Sandra Lowe		
Susan Harvey		

1. Call to Order by the Chair @ 2.02 pm. The following voting members were present: Commissioners Harvey, Lowe, Gorin, Gore, Hemmendinger, Holmer and Chair Kapolchok.

2. Public Comment: None

3. Consent Calendar:

   3.1 Meeting Minutes: March 1st, 2023

   3.2 Outside Service Area Authorizations and Accessory Dwelling Units – Resolution of Consent

   3.3 Independent Financial Audit Report for Fiscal Years 2018-19 and 2019-2020

Approved as recommended
Ayes: 7 Harvey, Lowe, Gorin, Gore, Hemmendinger, Holmer and Kapolchok
Noes: 0
Abstain: 0

4. Public Hearings:

   4.1 File No. 2023-05: Municipal Service Review for South County Territory of County Service Area 40 (Fire Services) - Amendment
   Environmental Review: Not a project under CEQA

Staff summarized the need to amend the Municipal Service Review for South County Territory of County Service Area 40 (Fire Services) to include IRP Area 81. The Chair opened the public hearing. Chief Schroth-Cary & Terry Wright thanked staff and commission for their time on this matter. The Chair closed the public hearing and returned the item to the Commission.

Upon motion (Commissioner Harvey), second (Commissioner Holmer), approved as recommended
Ayes: 7 Kapolchok, Harvey, Lowe, Gorin, Gore, Hemmendinger, Holmer

Noes: 0
Abstain: 0

4.2 File No. 2023-09 Sphere of Influence Study and Amendment for Portions of County Service Area 40 – Fire Services
Environmental Review: Exempt from CEQA pursuant to Sections 15306, 15262, and 15061 (b)(3) of the State CEQA Guidelines

Staff stated that the item before the Commission is the first of two items that are closely interrelated and involves a sphere of influence study for the majority of the remaining territory within County Service Area 40, a dependent district of the County. He gave a brief history of CSA 40 and the County's actions to find willing partners to take over fire and emergency services in the territory within CSA 40. Much of that territory had been annexed to neighboring districts through a series of reorganizations. In anticipation of the next agenda item, the County entered into an agreement with North Bay Fire to provide the support activities to several volunteer fire companies that County Fire used to provide. North Bay Fire then contracted with Gold Ridge Fire Protection District (GRFPD) for administrative leadership and training services. These contracts have been operating for about two years. Both the County and GRFPD are seeking an amendment to the sphere of influence of CSA 40 and GRFPD which if enacted, would enable GRFPD to seek reorganization of the territories that are currently served by the Lakeville, San Antonio, Wilmar, Two Rock, Bloomfield, Valley Ford, and Bodega Volunteer Fire Companies (VFCs) and IRP 81.

Staff explained that LAFCo is enjoined by state law to do two things. First is a municipal service review of the agencies that are affected by the proposed SOI amendment. The Commission adopted a municipal service review of some of the affected territory in 2019 and a subsequent review for the southern territory in CSA 40 adopted earlier this year. The second item for the Commission to consider is a study for the proposed SOI amendment. The Study states the determinations to be made in each of the areas required by law provides and possible amendment options for the Commission to consider.

Staff recommended that the Commission conduct a public hearing, which was noticed as required by law, and receive public testimony on the item.

Commissioner Gorin stated that it would be helpful to her and the public attending the meeting to receive more information on the options presented in the staff report. Staff discussed the options using illustrative maps of the VFC boundaries. Staff pointed out that the Camp Meeker VFC territory is surrounded on three sides by the Occidental Community Services District, which provides fire protection services in that area and that the Camp Meeker VFC station is one mile from Occidental Community Services District station. Staff further stated that the Fort Ross VFC territory has been part of discussions of a regional solution involving the Timber Cove Fire Protection District which is immediately adjacent to Fort Ross.

Staff stated that in order to hear the next item, the Commission must change the sphere of influence of GRFPD to include all of the parcels proposed for annexation.

Commissioner Gore stated that he appreciated the fact that this item was before the Commission after what he termed as a long, crazy messy process. He acknowledged meeting with Dan George and the Fire Ad Hoc as early as February of 2015. He stated that this is the last of the regional hubs to be reorganized and that it has been difficult to address the establishment of logical boundaries while honoring the history of the VFCs. He stated that he

would like to hear from the applicant about the context for the non-contiguous parts and the overall vision for the District. He questioned the time at which the Commission could address questions to the applicant. The Chair responded that the Applicant may respond to questions during public comment.

Commissioner Gorin stated that the fire reorganization process has been messy and will probably continue to be messy going forward. She asked staff that if the proposed configuration does not become operationally efficient or able to be managed, would there be a process in the future to change the GRFPD boundary and try out a new arrangement. From a LAFCo perspective, how firm are the decisions today and can the boundaries be modified.

Staff stated that while the Commission can change spheres at any time based on current studies and analysis, there is clearly a fair amount of work that goes into the process. Staff stated that a sphere of influence established by the Commission is really meant to lay out what the Commission believes should happen to an agency's boundary in the next 5 to 10 years. Therefore, if the Commission assigns these areas to GRFPD, it is a strong message that that is the solution the Commission wants to see. Staff also expressed the concern that should one of the VFCs be unable to recruit volunteers or need equipment that GRFPD does not have the financial resources to cover, the matter will be back before the County to resolve. These are issues that important to the county as a whole and if these situations arise, this will be brought to the County to solve.

Staff further stated that despite opinions to the contrary, staff believes that the county needs strong volunteer companies to provide services to the communities they serve. As there is not adequate resources in the county to support fully professional fire department, to the extent that whichever option the Commission moves forward maintains the strong volunteer fire companies is good for the entire county.

Commissioner Gore stated that Option 1 includes the territories currently put forth in the contract with North Bay Fire to be annexed to GRFPD. He stated that GRFPD was the agency to step and take ownership of pulling all this together under their administration and the County put funding in place to support their efforts. He requested that a County representative provide context and history on the current agreement regarding the tax transfer and the funds allocated for support to District.

Commissioner Harvey stated that while it is everyone's desire to have a fully professionalized fire service, the reality is that it is not feasible. As the Commission tries to work though this process, while there is detailed information for Option 1, in order to compare the other options with Option 1, the Commission would need details from the relevant entities on how they would address the operational fit, the financials, the plans for staff, equipment and buildings, as well as ambulance services. While those options are possible, there is nothing that showing that they are probable. And if and when those are flushed out, the Commission's decision made today is not set in stone and can be revisited if someone were to bring something with those details to us.

Commissioner Holmer questioned as to why the Monte Rio Fire Protection District was not included in the proposed reorganization when it will be surrounded by the proposed GRFPD territory.

The Chair opened the Public Hearing.

Chief Schroth-Cary, GRFPD, stated from his perspective, Option 1 is the only option, He stated that during the nine-year process to get to this point, many options have been explored. He stated that the letter from Occidental CSD is one of the options that was vetted. There were many meetings, opportunities, and negotiations with the County that didn't become fruitful with the sphere of influence criteria always considered through this process. While he respects that there are other options, that fact is that over the past four years that GRFPD has been managing the VFCs, providing service and fostering volunteers in the territories. The people present today in the audience are representative of the support for this option. He stated that GRFPD believes the volunteer staffing model is the only realistic way to serve rural communities and that they will continue to manage and respond to emergency needs in the manner that they have been over the past four years. Therefore, any of the many options that are out there, they're not realistic. There's only one option.

He stated that GRFPD's long term plan includes Monte Rio FPD and that they have been in discussions with both Monte Rio and the County on ways to fund consolidation. He stated that it is important that the Commission keep this in mind when considering the noncontiguous portions of the proposed reorganization.

Christina Rivera, County Administrator, thanked LAFCO staff for its work to fully inform the Commission of the options available for consideration. She stated that it has been a key priority since 2015, not only for the fire community, but also for the County to find a way to move forward with consolidations that create standards of coverage that are consistent throughout the communities served by these agencies. She stated that this is the culmination of years of effort and requested that on behalf of herself and all the County administrative team, the Commission approve Option 1 and the subsequent reorganization to be considered under the next item.

Lynda Hopkins, County Supervisor, stated that she was there representing herself and her colleague, Supervisor Rabbit, who have served on the Fire Services Ad Hoc for several years as well as those attending the meeting with whom she has had the opportunity to work over the past six years. She stated that those in attendance are in support of this action and are excited about the resources that have been brought to bear to their agencies as the consolation moves forward. She noted that the other options were rejected by the VFCs. She stated she has had meetings with some of the North Coast agencies and that while it is possible that in five years the map of fire agencies may look different, today there is a lack of financial resources on the North Coast that preclude moving forward with other options at this point in time. She stated received confirmation from both Fort Ross and Camp Meeker VFCs that they support the consolidation with GRFPD. She acknowledged and thanked Chiefs Schroth-Cary and George for their leadership through this process.

Paul Martin, North Bay Fire, stated that the Board of North Bay Fire and the members of the VFCs are in support of consolidating with GRFPD. He stated that the main purpose of these agencies is to provide emergency services to the communities in which they live and operate; that the VFC services have been enhanced by the contract with GRFPD and that the model is financially sustainable.

Steve Genisi, North Bay Fire Station 43, Fort Ross, stated that the VFCs explored multiple possibilities and determined the best option was consolidation with GRFPD. While under contract with North Bay Fire and GRFPD they experienced excellent support training and management opportunities and that being noncontiguous to the other CSA 40 departments has not caused a problem with management or support from GRFPD.

Lou Stoerringer, North Bay Fire Station 96 Two Rock, resident of the Two Rock Valley and 17-year member of the Two Rock Fire Department stated he has participated in many committees tasked with helping guide the process of improving service delivery for the respective communities of VFCs. He witnessed various plans from studies that resulted in no additional funding, service or support for the VFCs. With the fire service reorganizations beginning in 2019 and the closure of Sonoma County Emergency Services Department, the VFCs were directed by the County to find collaborative partners willing to consolidate. The VFCs created the governing body of North Bay Fire and together with Chief Shepley, his command staff, the Board of Directors, the VFC and district members have worked to build an integrated, collaborative, and focused group where the members are heard, valued and respected. They ensured that the VFCs began receiving the funding that they needed to operate appropriately, capital investments in station improvements, apparatus purchases, equipment upgrades, the purchasing of new PPE and SCBAs and updated extrication equipment. The focus has shifted to ensure that the VFCs have the tools, training and support to be highly successful and valuable assets of the fire service community while honoring their commitment to service and GRFPD has welcomed the VFCs and actively listens to our concerns and problems, works collaboratively with us as a team to bring about efficiencies, reduce redundant positions, identify funding for improved services, honor the very important role we play in community identity and lay the foundation for a new fire service family. I am confident that we have the right partner at the right time with the best interest of the VFCs and the communities they serve at the forefront of their future vision.

Mike Stornetta, Director of the Sonoma County Professional Fire Fighters and Scott Garrett, Director of Gold Ridge Professional Firefighters stated they represented approximately 300 men and women across Sonoma County covering 800 square miles and about 35 fire stations that are in full support of the consolidation. They believe that this consolidation will shore up fire protection in Sonoma County through staffing fire stations with some full-time firefighters, providing additional equipment, increasing the volunteer participation and providing better supervision for a large area of Sonoma County. On behalf of all union firefighters, volunteer firefighters, fire chiefs, fire management, and office here today, they urged the commissioners to approve Option 1 as the best option for the county and the safety of our citizens.

Mark Heine, representing the Fire Chiefs Association, stated that the Fire Chiefs Association and the fire service working group of fire chiefs have been focused on assisting with the GRFPD reorganization application. The chiefs are in full support of the proposed sphere of influence changes as well as the reorganization. All those in attendance today been working hard to reach consensus on this issue. The Sonoma County Fire Chiefs Association believes this consolidation ensures that all of our volunteer fire companies receive the proper administration and management, the proper tools, staffing, and facilities to make sure that they can provide more effective service than they already do on a daily basis. It enhances service levels throughout all of our communities in Sonoma County by bringing them under one successful umbrella of a fire district.

John Little, former volunteer and President of the Bloomfield VFC and former North Bay Fire Board member. He stated that Bloomfield VFC merged with Two Rock VFC and since they have been working with GRFPD, the community has never had a stronger presence with volunteers and staff. He said the community supports the consolidation are excited to move forward.

Terri Wright, Principal Analyst, County of Sonoma, stated that the Board of Supervisors listened to the fire services community and dissolved the County's Emergency Services Department that was not properly supporting the fire community. In response to Commissioner Gore's question

regarding the agreements, on January 25th, 2022, the County passed a series of agreements that provided financial provisions for the Bodega Bay FPD and Sonoma County Fire reorganization, the North Sonoma County Fire Protection District reorganization and the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District reorganization. Based on the recommendations from the fire services community and out of respect for desire of the VFCs to join with GRFPD, the County believed that while they are in transition, it is an important issue here in Sonoma County. So, they move forward with the agreements.

Dan Fine, Chairman of the Board of the Monte Rio FPD, handed out documents to the Commission. He stated that that the District supports the consolidation of the VFCs with GRFPD and that the District board has been having discussions for the last eighteen months about a possible consolidation. Monte Rio FPD is a hybrid organization relying on both professional and volunteer staff. The model is working now but they recognize that it's not a sustainable mode and are looking to eventually consolidate with GRFPD. He distributed a letter sent to LAFCO last July asking to be included in the sphere of influence in preparation for an ultimate consolidation and also a map showing that the inclusion of Monte Rio FPD ties in Fort Ross VFC to the rest of the annexation as part of the whole West County alignment of volunteer and professional fire districts. He encouraged the Commission to approve the consolidation now, but he also offered an Option 4, which was Option 1 plus Monte Rio FPD.

Chair Kapolchok invited Chief Schroth-Cary back to the podium to answer questions from the Commission.

Commissioner Gore asked the Chief to review the funding efforts by the County and the District as well as operation and management of the VFCs by GRFPD over the past four years and the results of those activities.

Chief Schroth-Cary stated that the District currently operates North Bay Fire with a budget of 2.7 million, 2.2 million of which is the base funding that the County gives to North Bay Fire and an additional $550,000 that is called enhanced services funding that is used for stipends as well as the contract with Cal Fire to staff the Amador engine in Petaluma. With that 2.7 million, the District has decreased response times by strategically utilizing stipend firefighters at the stations that are the busiest, as well as utilizing stipend firefighters during planned public events, upcoming weather events and red flag warnings. The District has purchased all new SCBAs, two fire apparatus, two type three fire engines, as well as three utility trucks. It's been somewhat difficult, in the past configuration, to make purchases of fire apparatus as well as do facility improvements because of some of the restrictions and processes involved in dealing with the County. Under the current conditions, we've had made some remarkable improvements. We have reduced response times, added more cohesive training, shored up our boat program, expanding our technical rescue program in the southern portion of the district. So, on the ground, what you have is an excited volunteer core. We have 163 volunteers currently and are adding new members regularly.

He stated there is no doubt that managing volunteer fire companies and volunteers in general is difficult. But GRFPD have the expertise and the enthusiasm to do it. As the District had the opportunity to do this over these last three years, tracking the cost of everything as we go, we have a firm grasp of the cost of operating each one of these stations. They have started to right size our fleet so that don't have old fire engines. They are reducing the fleet to what's practical and what's needed. In the past, volunteer fire companies held on to anything they could for fear of not having a plan to replace it. They have a plan now. They have revenue to address those issues and not have 30-year-old fire engines.

Commissioner Gore asked the Chief to address the questions regarding VFC facilities.

Chief Schroth-Cary stated that the County has operated and managed the VFCs under the current arrangement where the facilities and properties are owned or leased by the VFCs. In the case of the leases, GRFPD will be the successor lessor and those agreements exist already. In the case when a facility is owned by the volunteer fire companies, they are at a point where they have agreement on a no cost lease in the case of Bodega VFC. He was confident that the remaining facilities will not be a problem as occurred in Knights Valley. He realizes that his confidence is not adequate to answer the question, but that should the VFC and GRFPD come to an impasse, they have options to still serve adequately and provide service to those areas, either from a different facility or lease a different piece of property. It would not be ideal, but he has a plan in place if it does.

Commissioner Gore asked the Chief to address the question regarding the current funding versus the needed funding as to whether the proposed tax initiative would include funding for the operational needs for the VFC districts.

Chief Schroth-Cary stated that he, along with VFC board representatives and VFC battalion chiefs, have had the opportunity, just like any other fire district, to participate in discussions of the initiative to make sure that, should the tax initiative pass, their future needs would be met. He stated though that a tax measure really only addresses infrastructure issues and there is a tremendous infrastructure need throughout the county for fire stations that will not be addressed unless a tax measure is passed.

With regards to the financial picture, GRFPD have been managing these volunteer fire companies and know the cost of doing it at this current level of service which has been an increase from where they were prior to their arrangement. Moving forward, they can be very cautious and incremental about how we spend their money and be very focused about how they ramp up the expenditures. The difference between another fire district annexing the VFCs is that district is obligated to pay staff. GRFPD is not obligated to do things in at a rate that pushes the board or pushes their financial comfort because they are not obligated to the staff. They are obligated to support the volunteers and they are obligated to serve the community, but they don't have this tremendous demand for their revenue immediately. And so, as they grow, they can do it in a very cautious and secure manner.

Commissioner Gorin asked for the status of ambulance service in the VFC territories, whether they have paramedics on their trucks and how does the District responds to emergency medical calls.

Chief Schroth-Cary stated that they are only at the level of EMT's on their trucks and that emergency medical services are provided by a number of different agencies throughout the territory. Coast Life Support covers the northern half of Fort Ross. Sonoma County Fire District covers the remaining portions of Fort Ross as well as Bodega, Valley Ford, Bloomfield and Two rock. The Southern VFCs primarily served by the Petaluma Fire Department.

Commissioner Gorin stated that the County is ready to go out with an RFP for Emergency Medical Services, and she continues to have questions about how the folks in the West County are going to be served.

Commissioner Kapolchok thanked the Chief for his comments. She stated that in the draft resolution there are a number of recitals that give the impression that volunteer fire companies

are not really a sustainable model, yet she heard from speakers today that the VFCs are very much alive and well, and they've also grown and expanded in both their enthusiasm and their contribution under GRFPD's leadership. It is her understanding with the annexation, the proposal is not simply volunteers, but also stipend volunteers and some paid staff. With the annexation, the District's finances have increased significantly from 2.5 million to 5 million. With those changes, what do you predict in terms of the health of the model, volunteers, stipend volunteers and paid staff. She stated that it is important for the Commission to take a look at this resolution and be sure that it's reflective of what the District is in fact are proposing.

Chief Schroth-Cary stated there are currently 163 members and of those, 12 are trainees, meaning new members. To be honest, managing volunteer fire companies is difficult and there is a trend in the county that available volunteers are decreasing. The District was formed 30 years ago by the consolidation of Twin Hills and Hessel fire departments. The District over these years, from being volunteer and recognizing the need to increase staffing because of demographics and changes in people's lifestyles, they needed staffing during the day initially so that's what they did. Then over this 30-year span, they have come to where they are now, where they have a two-person engine company at two of their stations with a spot for volunteers to work. The reason he shared this is that volunteers are there, they have to cultivate them, and they have, and they continue to, but they have to be intentional about it. So as far as a model, GRFPD has for 30 years successfully integrated, retained and recruited volunteers and will continue to recruit volunteers regardless of what happens in the demographic of their community. They have different ways people can participate. They are applying that same model to the communities that they have be and will continue to manage. The model health is good, 163 members is good. They have ideas about how they can continue to entice, recruit, and retain these members and create enthusiasm to participate, but it's intentional and they have that expertise.

They currently have a part-time volunteer coordinator through the contract but as part of their staffing model they would include a focused chief officer for just that purpose. The other major investment that they want to make is training, putting a large emphasis on training that's meaningful, making sure the volunteers are safe, but keeping people engaged and excited about what they're doing.

Commissioner Kapolchok thanked the Chief, and seeing no one else rise to speak, closed the public hearing and asked for comments from the commissioners.

Commission Lowe stated she is a supporter of process and that one done over a series of years with everybody's input should be respected. She stated that it would have taken a room full of people opposed to this action to even compel her to change her initial thoughts. She thanked everyone in the room for all the information they provided that illuminated her even greater and increased her confidence in the success of the plan going forward. She stated that she would support the change in the sphere.

Commissioner Holmer stated that the Commission heard from an entire room full of firefighting professionals who put their lives on the line to protect our lives and our property. He stated that he had the utmost respect for all of them and the good work they do. He stated that in Sonoma County fire is a huge issue and that it's not something that might happen but something that will happen. As Chief Stornetta said, having all these people come to a mutual agreement is pretty amazing. As such, he stated he would support Option 1. He offered support for the suggestion that Monte Rio FPD be included but that was a topic for another meeting.

Commissioner Harvey thanked all of the speakers for their efforts and the information they provided and stated that after reviewing the reports, documentation and comments from the public, she has not read or heard of any issues with the current management of these areas by GRFPD. She heard in fact that response times have gotten better, recruitments of volunteers have gotten better and that there have been commitments for district-wide standards of cover study to be added for facilities and equipment. She feels that additional funding will only make more improvements. She feels that in this instance, there is the advantage of having had a trial period of three years and that it appears from what she was hearing from everyone involved, it is working. She reviewed the LAFCO policy manual which states that agreements to kind of try this stuff out is encouraged and in instances where the implementation of such a functional agreement has provided satisfactory results for all affected agencies, the commission encourages agencies to pursue changes of organizations such as consolidations and mergers. She stated her support for Option 1.

Commission Gorin stated that it is impressive when the chamber is filled with uniforms of blue and thanked everyone for their service and willingness to come together to put forward the effort to unite this area and provide even better services. She thanked the Executive Officer and LAFCO staff for their efforts and stated she would support Option 1.

Commissioner Gore state his support of Option 1 and requested that the Commission revisit the language in the resolution regarding the volunteer model.

Dan Fein asked for and received clarification that Monte Rio FPD cannot be included in the action today.

Commissioner Kapolchok stated her support of Option 1 and that she believes the language in Section 3.4 of the draft resolution gives the impression that volunteer fire companies are on their way out and may not be sustainable in the future. She stated that the testimony given today refutes these statements and that she would like to change the language of the resolution to reflect that the SOI amendment, if approved, is based on a model the includes other forms of staffing than just volunteers and that the model is sustainable. She asked staff for assistance on the language.

Counsel Ball stated that Clause 3.7 also needs to be addressed. The Commission could either take a recess and allow staff to draft the language or they could continue this to the next meeting. Staff offered alternative language for 3.7 for the Commission to review and approve.

He also stated that with regards to Clause 3.4, it sounds like the direction of the Commission may be to add more findings about the viability of the volunteer model as described by the District. He stated that the Commission could remove the clause as written and add language that states there is a robust plan for stipend volunteers but deferred to staff for drafting of the language.

Staff reminded the Commission that the District had not provided a staffing plan with the application materials. Commissioner Kapolchok stated that although a written plan for staffing was not submitted, the staff of the VFCs that have been under the management of GRFPD provided verbal testimony that the existing plan is robust and the Chief stated that the District has a solid working plan.

Executive Officer Bramfitt stated that the three statements in the draft resolution as written are valid and suggested adding an additional point that addresses the Commission's concern

regarding viability. After discussion, the Commission directed staff to add the following to Clause 3.4: Improvements to stipend programs for volunteers enable the volunteer companies to address staffing challenges.

Upon motion and second, approved Option 1 with Exhibit A and changes to Clause 3.4 as directed

Ayes: 7 Kapolchok, Harvey, Lowe, Gorin, Gore, Hemmendinger, Holmer
Noes: 0
Abstain: 0

4.3 File No. 2023-02: Gold Ridge Fire Protection District Reorganization (CSA 40– Fire Services) Involving Detachment of areas from County Service Area 40 and Annexation of those Territories to the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District Environmental Review: Exempt pursuant to Sections 15320 and 15061 (b)(3) of the State CEQA Guidelines

The Executive Officer summarized the staff report and stated that now that the amendment to the sphere of influence of CSA 40 is adopted, GRFPD is eligible to seek annexation of the CSA 40 territory now in its SOI. He stated that concerns expressed by the commission at the October study session included the disposition of vehicles and equipment owned by volunteer fire companies, more detailed projections of revenues and expenditures and a plan for staffing.

Staff explained that in cases when a public agency takes over another public agency, the Commission has the authority to tell the agency to hand over the agency's assets and liabilities. In this case, the Commission does not have that authority because the volunteer fire companies are not public agencies. Staff was not able to inform the Commission of the status of disposition of vehicles and facilities in the District's plan for service as the District had not provided that information to staff. He stated that the District did provide updated projections of revenues, expenditures and financial sustainability although staff was not able to evaluate the projected costs due to lack of details. Although the District stated in conversations with staff that they will have to move to increased stipend payments and potentially daytime staffing in some of these areas. As they did not provide a written staffing plan, staff was not able to perform analysis or comment on proposed staffing.

Staff stated that the District has not, after repeated requests, provided information on the actual parcels to be annexed and the names and addresses of the owners of those parcels, both of which are needed to send a legal notice of hearing and to conduct a protest proceeding. Staff stated that the information can be obtained, at the direction of the Commission and at cost to the applicant, by staff. However, due to the time involved to prepare and verify the list of parcels and process the mailing to the landowners, should the Commission approve the reorganization today, the length of the protest hearing will be shortened by the delay. The Commission has expressed the desire for protest hearing to be as long as possible to allow maximum time for the property owners and registered voters to understand the proceeding and lodge protest if desired. As the District and County are adamant that the reorganization must be completed by June 30, 2023, to uphold the terms of the contract between North Bay Fire and the County, the protest hearing must be held no later than the Commission on June 7 meeting.

Chair Kapolchok asked staff to estimate the time required to obtain the list of landowners and process the mailing. She stated her concern with a shorter protest period as she knows that in the in the past when there were new taxes imposed, LAFCO was criticized significantly for lack of notification and shortness of the protest period.

Staff responded that they would use an outside company to process the mailing. Once they receive the list and are able to verify the names and addresses of the landowners, weed out any duplicates and make sure that everyone that is entitled to a notice is on the list, it should be about two weeks. Staff is aware that, upon request from LAFCO staff, the County Assessor's Department has been working with the County GIS Department to develop a list of parcels affected by this reorganization to report to the State Board of Equalization. However, staff has been told that there is a section of the territory that must be mapped and that they will need a licensed surveyor to notify them of the affected parcels in that area. The Assessor's Department staff do not know when that list will be completed. Staff is concerned that all parcels that are to be included in the reorganization be properly noticed to avoid challenge to the Commission's actions.

Commissioner Gore stated that as the departments preparing this information are under the jurisdiction of the County, he, the Board of Supervisors' Fire Ad Hoc Committee Chair or the County Administrator can make sure that the work is made a priority.

Commission Hemmendinger stated that at the study session last fall, he discussed a number of points with Commission staff as well as with the Chief of GRFPD that he felt were missing from the submitted documents. He stated that many of those issues have been addressed by subsequent submissions from the District. However, he was disappointed that the District has provided only vague language, not commitments, as to the transfer of ownership or long-term lease arrangements of the VFC facilities and equipment, which he believed was more significant than has been commented on because of the result if the transfers do not occur. He also stated that another area of concern was the plan for staffing. While through personal conversations with the Chief and discussion at this meeting, there seemed to be more thought put into this than was evidenced by any staffing plan submitted to the Commission, it makes judgements on viability of this reorganization more difficult because the Commission must rely on verbal assurances from the District which may or may not actually be implemented.

He stated that with regards to the comments made about the financial sustainability of this model, he believed it may be sustainable in the short term, but he is concerned it would not be so for the long term. The County funding together with the property and parcel tax monies result in a cost per call for about $5,000, probably the highest in the county and if you look at a new organization with the paid staff and volunteers, it is a cost of about $3,700 per call, which is still on the very high side. He stated that with regard to the expense projections and this high cost per call, the projection of a flat 2.8% per year seems low based on other agency budgets including the Commission's budget. He believed that the District had gone a long way to address many of the issues raised in that study session, there are still some significant questions regarding the operating plan as it has been presented thus far.

Chair Kapolchok stated that as it has been pointed out that there's no list, there's no detailed projection costs, there's no developed plan about the leases and staffing, is the June 7th date an absolute date. Staff responded that the June 7th date is based on a June 30th deadline set by the County and District under terms of the property tax exchange agreement and suggested the Commission direct this question to the County for clarification.

The Chair opened the Public Hearing.

Bill Adams, District Counsel, asked that the protest hearing be held on June 7th. He stated that the protest mailing can be completed in less than a month. He stated he was not sure how the mailing process has become broken with LAFCO staff but without casting any aspersions, there

appeared to have been things left out by staff in other reports. He stated that he believed with the assistance of the County, the mailing will be done at the County cost.

He further stated that he did not agree with the comments regarding the five-year fiscal funding plan in that it shows expenses and revenue, or $2 million more revenue; he was not sure what level of minutia Commission Hemmendinger was looking for in the staffing plan but he has appeared before the Commission six separate times on other reorganizations and never has the Commission required such detail; facilities are going to be available as explained by Mr. Martin of North Bay Fire. He stated he wanted the Commission as a whole to know that the bar had been uniquely raised in this particular situation with a different standard being applied in questioning and requirements.

Chief Schroth-Cary stated that he believed the questions from the Ad Hoc Committee had been addressed but that he would go through the facilities listed in Exhibit 2 to provide the current status of the facility as to ownership or lease agreements if desired. He stated that he did not take lightly the importance of having the use of these facilities and has no doubt in his ability to do so. He offered to provide lease agreements under the District's name but reminded the Commission that the District can serve the areas without use of some of these stations. The District wants to do a standard of cover to really identify what is needed to serve each area, but he feels he adequately addressed the current status of each facility in Exhibit 2.

He also noted that the supplemental letter reflected a change based on the Ad Hoc Committee's concern for allowing for appropriate inflation or showing appropriate changes to labor costs and things of that nature. He stated he formulated the table showing fire years of projected revenues and expenditures in the same fashion as was used in previous applications submitted to the Commission. Based on the combination nature of the fire model, they assumed 75% of the budget would go towards staffing which is lower than the 100% for paid fire departments and 80% for other fire districts. Looking at salaries and employee benefits, it starts at $6.7 million for the first year increasing the $7.5 million five years later. The District projected $500,000 per year to go towards assets and $350,000 towards lease or debt services. The fund balance is estimated at $1 million for the first increasing over subsequent years.

With regards to sustainability and cost, he states that Commission Hemmendinger only shared one metric, cost per call, but there are other metrics and other ways to, to evaluate the cost for service. Finally, it is not accurate to say the bulk of the District's fleet is owned by the VFCs but in fact is owned by the County.

Paul Martin, North Bay Fire, stated that the Directors of North Bay Fire have agreed that the facilities currently in place will be made available to GRFPD, the exact manner in which will depend on the particular local circumstances. He assured the Commission that those facilities are going to be available.

Doug Hamilton, Vice President of Wilmar Volunteer Fire Company, stated that under the current model, respond times have been shortened, services enhanced and new equipment purchased including radios, turnouts and SCBAs with a limited budget and a positive account balance. Going forward, speaking on behalf of Wilmar, the District has met with the school district that owns the property on which they built the station. A contract has been roughed out and the dollar amount has been agreed to of less than $200 a year. Specific to Bodega Volunteer Fire Company, the contract has not been resolved yet, but the agreement has been stated and voted by the Board of Directors. They will be less at or less than $200 a year.

Commissioner Gore pointed out that although Sonoma County Fire Department was ultimately able to enter into an agreement regarding use of the Knight Valley VFC station, it did not actually store any equipment at the station as it was not strategically close enough to areas where fires actually occur. He asked if there was any context of that type in the VFC areas.

Doug Hamilton stated that it gets to the core of a combined service model. The facilities go from essentially a barn to fully operational stations with ADA compliant facilities. North Bay Fire and GRFPD have been managing these areas for the last four years and the County of Sonoma for decades before that with the exact same lack of contracts or lease agreements that are being suggested right now. He stated that Wilmar VFC station responds to over half of all the calls in North Bay Fire territory. Willmar's Board of Directors has voted unanimously that every single fire apparatus owned by the VFC goes to GRFPD with the exception of a $600,000 medium rescue which has to stay in the area but can be used as a regional resource.

Lynda Hopkins, Supervisor 5th District, stated that for decades the West County has on operated on a word and a handshake that many time allows for things to be done better than through bureaucratic processes. While she was impressed with the thoroughness of the plan and its planning foresight, she believes the words and the handshakes that underlie the plan are even more important. She stated that the unified force of the attendees shows a commitment to move forward together and that based on their combined experience, the Commission should not let process stop the reorganization. She stated that in her experience with protest proceeding that they follow electoral boundaries and that working directly with the Assessor and GIS, the job could be done. She offered, with the agreement of Supervisor Rabbitt, to involve County staff to see how it can be done at the County's expense.

Terri Wright stated that this all needs to all happen by June 30th. It makes it easier for transferring the tax, particularly the parcel tax and ultimately dissolving the community facility district. She stated that didn't recognize that there was such a problem to get the listings and that had she known sooner she would have gotten with GIS and the Assessor's office in advance to facilitate getting the information. With that said, if it cannot happen by June 30th, there are options for the County to extend the existing agreement with North Bay Fire.

She stated that the County, based on the funds available for the CSA 40 dissolution process, looked at a holistic approach in terms of dispersing the dollars based off of a three-part metric including calls for service, the territory involved and the population to be served. This applied not only to this reorganization but the Bodega Bay, North County Fire Protection District and Kenwood Fire Protection District reorganizations. It was a negotiating process that took months to complete with all partners involved and coming to agreement.

Commissioner Hemmendinger stated that with regards to the term holistic, he assumes that the term is to be applied to those specific funding agreements because when looking at all the fire districts in the county, it is very clear that only those districts with County money are thriving. Every other district is not thriving because they are underfunded and in fact, the County withdrawing even more money each year because of the funding agreements that have been made. He did not want the term holistic to be misinterpreted by the audience.

Territ Wright stated that it was holistic related to the agreements but that the County is the supporting the DFCS as well.

Seeing no one else rise, the Chair Kapolchok closed the Public hearing and returned the item to the Commission.

She stated that what the Commission heard is a commitment from the County that staff will receive the mailing list post-haste, hopefully in time to have an adequate protest hearing and retain the June 7th hearing date; from staff and commissioners that the specificity of the cost projections, leasing plan, staff plan are less than desirable; and from the public, particularly Chief Schroth-Cary, that the submitted application and supplemental material submitted contained the level of specificity that was comparable to previous reorganization applications. She asked the Commission if they are satisfied with the material before them today or if they would like to discuss requiring additional information and set this item for a later date.

Commissioner Gore stated that he supported forwarding a motion to approve of Item 4.3 and do whatever is necessary to initiate a protest hearing. He stated that while there are obviously many different areas of concern, there is the proof of concept that's gone out for three to four years from a willing partner that has executed above and beyond what the numbers show on piece of paper and delivered higher capacity and service. With respect to the acknowledgement about the complexity of the future and the unknowns involved, he believes it is time to move forward.

Commissioner Lowe stated that she concurred with Commissioner Gore and that she is convinced that the timeline will be met, honored, and delivered. She supported moving forward.

Commissioner Holmer stated his support of the reorganization, and that the County has offered assistance with getting the necessary information to conduct the protest hearing. He stated that he believed the District did a reasonable job with regards to budgeting and anticipating future costs and that the can-do attitude in the room will carry forward.

Commissioner Harvey stated she supported the reorganization, that the applicants have worked hard to move things forward and shown a commitment to work collaboratively on future challenges to arrive at a solution and move forward and that there was enough information provided.

Commissioner Gorin thanked the Commissioners, LAFCO staff, County staff and the fire personnel for all the hard work. She stated her support for the reorganization on a leap of faith because the Commission was not provided with detailed and comprehensive budget as would normally come before a board. She expressed confidence that the fire group will come together to find solutions as needed but reminded them there was not money in the County budget going forward. She stated there are other fire agencies in need of County support including Kenwood FPD and Sonoma Valley FPD and that the Commission now needed to turn to the consolidation of the Sonoma Valley fire agencies. She stated that there are still a lot of fire districts that are underfunded and trying to figure out how to work together to provide the best services that they can. She thanked the Ad Hoc Committee for trying to get the information needed by the Commission to consider this item and hoped that what was provided is enough to make that leap of faith and vote to support this.

Commissioner Hemmendinger stated that he had said earlier that many of those issues brought up in the Study Session had been addressed in the supplemental documentation. He also stated that while there was more information provided anecdotally in the meeting, he was disappointed and would have preferred to see more. This did not however necessarily preclude him from supporting the reorganization from moving forward.

Chair Kapolchok stated that while the material presented in the supplemental documents was an improvement over the original application and contained a significant amount of detail, she

had expected more and was disappointed that it was not provided. She pointed to the comment from Supervisor Hopkins relative to old-fashioned way of doing business on a handshake and believed the testimony given and the camaraderie and trust exhibited in the meeting room supported moving forward with a decision on the reorganization.

Staff reminded the Commission that there were items in the draft resolution that needed to be addressed before moving forward. Staff presented Exhibit A on the overhead for the Commission to review that defined the territory to be included in the reorganization and he asked that the Commission amend the language regarding the start date of the protest hearing as staff will not be able to meet the April 12 date as stated. The Commission approved Exhibit A and directed staff to remove the start date for the initiation of the protest period leaving the date of the hearing as June 7, 2023.

Upon motion and second, approved as amended by the Commission

Ayes: 7 Kapolchok, Holmer, Gore, Hemmendinger, Gorin, Lowe, Harvey
Noes: 0
Abstain: 0

4.4 Fiscal Year 2023-34 Proposed Budget

Staff summarized the staff report and the budget recommended by the Budget Committee providing additional procedural information for the new commission members.

Commissioner Gore stated the Budget Committee thoroughly reviewed and discussed the proposed budget and commended staff on the great job they are doing. He stated that in the discussions of staffing, staff indicated that the workload is such that it is hard to find the time to train the new staff. The Committee challenged staff to, when time allows, determine what staffing is needed to build capacity back in so that staff is not overworked. He stated that there are resources available such as retired annuitants with the County who can work as extra time employees or other temporary employees as opposed to going through a year-long process to hire a parttime employee. He stated the Committee reviewed the fee structure and fund balance to ensure the reserves were set up appropriately. He commented that while there will be a cost associated with the Santa Rosa MSR, there's this understanding with the funding agencies, whether it's the cities or others, that if they are paying the LAFCO dues and the Commission wants to be able to provide services in return.

Commissioner Lowe asked for and received clarification that staff uses outside consultants on those occasions where assistance is needed on a particular project such as municipal service review work.

Commissioner Holmer asked for and received clarification from staff that the 0.7 FTE position resulted from employees wanting to work reduced hours and that attempting to fill a 0.7 FTE position may not be attractive for those seeking for a fulltime position, it may be to those seeking a more flexible schedule.

Commissioner Lowe suggested that in the future the Commission look into budgeting for support of a hybrid style meeting as allowed under the Brown Act. Commissioners Gore and Gorin shared the challenges of conducting meetings in person as so many of the community want to participate virtually.

Upon motion and second, approved as recommended.

Ayes: 7 Kapolchok, Holmer, Gore, Hemmendinger, Gorin, Lowe, Harvey
Noes: 0
Abstain: 0

5. Regular Calendar

5.1 Election of Officers and Appointments to Standing Committees

Staff summarized the staff report stating that the Commission needed to elect both a chair and a vice and appoint members to the standing Budget and Policy Committees. Staff also requested that the Budget Committee be renamed the Fiscal Committee to better reflect the actual work of the Committee.
Commissioner Gore nominated Commissioner Kapolchok as Chair and Commissioner Hemmendinger as Vice Chair. On motion and second, the nominations were unanimously approved.

Chair Kapolchok asked for and received members interested in serving on the two standing committee as follows:

Policy Committee: Kapolchok, Holmer and Gorin
Fiscal Committee: Hemmendinger, Harvey and Lowe

Commissioner Gore left the dais at 4:50 p.m.

5.2 Requested Changes to Commission Budget – Position Allocations

Staff briefly summarized the request from the County for a change to the Commission's allocation within the County financial system.

Upon motion and second, approved as amended recommended.
Ayes: 7 Kapolchok, Holmer, Gore, Hemmendinger, Gorin, Lowe, Harvey
Noes: 0
Abstain: 0

6. Information/Report Items

6.1. Executive Officer's Report and Legislative Report

Staff stated that as Commissioner Gore mentioned before he left, staff has been in continued conversations with a group of landowners in the Alexander Valley seeking to form a water district. Staff had planned to bring a study session before the Commission at its next meeting, but the leadership of the group has changed, and staff will meet with the new group in the near future.

Staff has not received an application from the Graton Community Services District for an MSR but anticipates one in the near future.

Staff stated that the CALAFCO Legislative Committee asked for a letter of support for the omnibus bill and as the Commission had traditionally given staff the authority write these letters

of support, staff forwarded a letter on behalf of the Commission. Most of the other items before the Legislative Committee deal with changes to the Brown Act regarding virtual meetings. This was addressed further in Item 6.2.

6.2 Brown Act and Hybrid Meetings

Counsel Ball stated that the Brown Act hybrid meeting materials that forwarded to the Commission lay out the process that the Commission would go through if it chose to hold a hybrid meeting which leads to a policy and logistics discussion about whether or not the Commission wants to resource hybrid meetings. After a brief discussion, the Commission will continue to watch the legislation and revisit the matter in the future.

7. General Announcements: Staff will be attending the CALAFCO staff workshop in Murphys, CA.

8. Confirm Meetings the following meeting was confirmed - May 3, 2023, at 2:00 p.m.

9. Adjournment: the meeting was adjourned at 5:07 p.m.

Minutes adopted at 06/07/2023 Commission meeting.

Attested by Commission Clerk:

K Bowen

Kasandra Bowen