



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 2019-1109, **Version:** 1

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**To:** Board of Supervisors

**Department or Agency Name(s):** County Administrator's Office

**Staff Name and Phone Number:** Terri Wright: 565-3775

**Vote Requirement:** Majority

**Supervisory District(s):** Countywide

**Title:**

Consultant Agreement for Public Outreach and Assistance with a Possible Fire Services Ballot Measure

**Recommended Action:**

Authorize the County Administrator to execute a professional services agreement with Muelrath Public Affairs, Inc. to develop and support implementation of a strategic public outreach and engagement plan to consider options and recommendations for increasing revenue, including the possibility of a Fire Services revenue measure in 2020, for the period July 23, 2019 to November 22, 2019 in an amount not-to-exceed \$435,000.

**Executive Summary:**

The County of Sonoma has been working with local fire services agencies to provide more efficient, effective, and sustainable fire services in Sonoma County. On January 29, 2019, the Board of Supervisors directed the Fire Services Work Group (formerly the Strategic Leadership Group) to work with the Fire Implementation Ad-Hoc to develop recommendations for the Board to consider the placement of a sales tax measure to fund fire services within the County.

To support this action, this item would authorize the County Administrator to execute a professional services agreement with Muelrath Public Affairs, Inc., to develop and support implementation of a strategic public outreach and engagement plan to consider options and recommendations for increasing revenue, including the possibility of a Fire Services revenue measure in 2020.

**Discussion:**

On August 14, 2018, the Board of Supervisors approved the recommendations of the Fire Services Work Group to establish a Comprehensive Fire Services Deployment Plan. The Plan, which came to be known as the "Silver Plan" was developed to provide a long-term framework for planning, funding, and implementing enhanced fire and emergency medical services within Sonoma County. Through the development of the Silver Plan, it became apparent that new revenue strategies to bolster the local property taxes and parcel taxes collected by local fire agencies was needed to implement the deployment options identified in the Silver Plan. As a result, on January 29, 2019, the Board directed staff to work the Fire Services Working Group to explore the placement of a ½ sales tax on the ballot.

A key first step in exploring a revenue measure is the retention of a qualified consultant to develop and support the implementation of a strategic public outreach and engagement plan to assess the need and support for the proposed revenue measure. The County Administrator's Office will be able to make use of the Request for Proposal (RFP) process the Department of Health Services (DHS) recently undertook. The Board of

Supervisors approved the selection of their consultant on May 21, 2019.

Muelrath Public Affairs, Inc. was a finalist in the RFP process undertaken by DHS and was selected by the Fire Services Work Group, with the support of the Fire Services Ad Hoc to provide the consulting services needed to develop and support a strategic public outreach effort. Muelrath Public Affairs, Inc. is a non-partisan strategy and communications consulting firm with expertise in public outreach efforts to explore and develop revenue options, including sale and parcel tax measures. The firm is based in Santa Rosa and has significant experience working with community leaders and stakeholder groups throughout Sonoma County. The Fire Services Work Group determined that Muelrath Public Affairs' local experience was a critical component that was necessary to properly educate the public regarding the complex fire protection and emergency medical system of care provided in Sonoma County.

If approved by your Board, Muelrath Public Affairs will enter into an agreement with the County of Sonoma to provide research and analysis for ballot measure and expenditure plan options and stakeholder outreach.

Muelrath Public Affairs will use the polling information gathered by EMS Research. (The County Administrator previously entered into an agreement with EMS Research under the Department Level Contract Authority) to undertake the following activities:

- 1) Feasibility Study to conduct public outreach based on the polling conducted by EMC Research, and under what conditions, the County can pass a local funding measure - and if so, what type of measure is feasible.
- 2) Build consensus with outreach, awareness building, and public input strategies that develop recommendations to consider revenue options based on the public's input.
- 3) If supported by the public outreach effort, develop a strong measure by aligning the measure's features with the community's priorities and sensitivities.

The estimated cost to provide the services described above is \$435,000 as detailed in the Cost Summary provided as Attachment 2. If it is determined through public outreach and polling that a local funding measure is not feasible, the County may terminate agreement and the cost will be limited to \$47,500 plus reasonable expenses. In addition, if add-on services such as digital/social media communications and direct mailers to County residents are not purchased, or are partially purchased, the total contract cost will be reduced by as much as \$150,000.

During the FY 2019-20 Budget Hearings the Board of Supervisor's allocated \$500,000 as a part of the FY 2019-20 Budget to assist with the costs of researching the feasibility of a revenue campaign and the costs associated with placing a revenue measure on the ballot. The Registrar of Voters estimates the cost to place a sales tax on the 2020 Ballot ranges from \$241,000 to \$419,000 depending on which election the measure would target. Given the significance of creating a system of effective and sustainable fire services within Sonoma, the County Administrator recommends the Board move forward with the agreement with Muelrath Public Affairs to determine the feasibility and options for a revenue measure. The County Administrator will return with additional recommendations to fund the costs in the event the feasibility of the measure and the cost of election come in at the higher range estimated by the Registrar of Voters.

#### **Prior Board Actions:**

On January 29, 2019, the Board directed staff to work with the Fire Services Work Group to explore possible revenue measures

### FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY 19-20 Adopted	FY20-21 Projected	FY 21-22 Projected
Budgeted Expenses	\$500,000	0	0
Additional Appropriation Requested			
<b>Total Expenditures</b>			
<b>Funding Sources</b>			
General Fund/WA GF	\$500,000	0	0
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
<b>Total Sources</b>	<b>\$500,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

### Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

The Board of Supervisors allocated \$500,000 during the FY 2019-20 Budget Hearings to support the costs of a potential sales tax measure on the 2020 ballot.

Staffing Impacts:			
Position Title (Payroll Classification)	Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)	Additions (Number)	Deletions (Number)

### Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

None

### Attachments:

Professional Services Agreement with Muelrath Public Affairs, Inc.

### Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

None