

## **City of Sausalito Fire Services Consolidation: Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. Who provides fire protection services to the City of Sausalito?**

Since 2004, the City of Sausalito has contracted with Southern Marin Fire Protection District (SMFPD) to provide fire protection service for residents and businesses. Under a contract for service agreement, the SMFPD provides all headquarter staff, including the fire chief, and other front-line fire personnel. In addition, the City of Sausalito continues to employ 15 front-line firefighters, who are managed by the SMFPD, and maintains ownership of the new downtown fire station on Johnson Street and other fire equipment.

### **2. Why do we need to change how fire services are currently provided?**

The current agreement with the Southern Marin Fire Protection District does not cover the full cost of services that the City of Sausalito receives for fire protection services. The difference between the cost of those services and what the City of Sausalito pays is about \$395,000, a gap the SMFPD can not sustain. In addition, the current agreement makes the administration of fire services cumbersome and time consuming for both the City and the SMFPD.

### **3. What does merging with the SMFPD mean for Sausalito?**

Merging fire services with the Southern Marin Fire Protection District will ensure the fire and emergency services for the City of Sausalito are provided in the most cost-effective manner. With a formal merger, the SMFPD will take over all responsibility for providing fire services. A merger will eliminate administrative overlap between the City and the SMFPD, creating some savings for the city and providing new opportunities to improve or expand fire prevention and other fire protection services.

### **4. How does the merger get approved?**

The City of Sausalito and the Southern Marin Fire Protection District must submit an application to the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) to formally extend the boundaries of the SMFPD to include the city, a process that can take up to five months. As part of the process, LAFCO will hold a public hearing on the proposed merger. In addition, LAFCO allows for written protests from registered Sausalito voters. If 50 percent or more of registered voters submit written protests, the merger is terminated. If there are written protests from at least 25 percent but less than 50 percent of registered voters or, there are written protests from at least 25 percent of Sausalito landowners whose property represents at least 25 percent of the land within the city, the merger is subject to a public vote. The City has determined that even if sufficient protests are not received to require a vote, that LAFCO approval of the merger would be contingent on Sausalito voters approving a \$90 annual parcel tax to pay SMFPD for the cost of providing fire protection services. For more information on LAFCO, please visit <http://lafco.marin.org>.

## **5. Why is a parcel tax necessary?**

A parcel tax is necessary to compensate the Southern Marin Fire Protection District for providing fire and emergency protection services to the City of Sausalito. The \$90 parcel tax is the same amount as that currently being paid by property owners in the SMFPD. In addition to the parcel tax, the City would continue to transfer a portion of its local property tax revenue to the SMFPD. Approving the parcel tax will allow the City to transfer less of its property tax to the District, which will allow the City to continue providing the current level of services from other City operations in spite of the economic downturn. Approving the parcel tax will also provide equity within the District by having all property owners contribute equally to the cost of fire and emergency services. Before the merger could be completed, Sausalito voters would have to approve the parcel tax by a two-thirds vote. An election is tentatively scheduled for June 2012.

## **5. What other options are there for providing Sausalito with fire services?**

Over the past six years, a Joint Working Group of two Sausalito City Council members and two Southern Marin Fire Protection District board members has worked with staff, union representatives and experts in municipal finance and consolidation to study various alternatives for the most cost-effective method for providing fire services to the City of Sausalito. Among the alternatives identified by the Joint Working Group are:

### **Alternative 1: Formal merger with SMFPD (preferred)**

- SMFPD boundaries are expanded to include the City of Sausalito, with approval required by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO).
- Sausalito voters elect members to the SMFPD, with appointment of two Sausalito residents as non-voting, advisory representatives to the SMFPD Board until the first election after the merger is complete.
- City retains ownership of downtown fire station.
- SMFPD employs all fire services personnel and manages all fire services operations.
- Voter approval for an annual \$90 parcel tax required to pay SMFPD for Sausalito fire services costs, with additional funding from existing City property tax revenue.

### **Alternative 2: Full contract for service with SMFPD**

- City contracts with SMFPD to provide all fire and emergency protection services.
- City retains ownership of downtown fire station.
- SMFPD employs all fire services personnel and manages all fire services operations.
- Voter approval for a annual parcel tax of up to \$250 to cover costs of full contract with SMFPD, with the city continuing to use part of its property tax and other General Fund revenue to support fire services.

### **Alternative 3: Reinstate a Sausalito Fire Department**

- Sausalito operates its own, standalone fire department.
- Voter approval for an annual parcel tax of up to \$400 to cover additional costs of operating a standalone fire department, with the City continuing to use part of its property tax and other General Fund revenue to support fire services.

In addition to consolidation with the SMFPD, the City of Sausalito has explored consolidation/merger efforts or studies involving the City of Mill Valley, the Tiburon Fire Protection District and the Marin County Fire Department to gauge their interest in providing fire protection services for Sausalito. Each of these agencies has declined to participate in any actual merger of fire services.

#### **6. How will Sausalito keep local control of fire services?**

Once the merger is complete, Sausalito voters will be able to vote for members on the Southern Marin Fire Protection District governing board. The SMFPD Board of Directors is subject to all the same public accountability and open meeting laws that govern the Sausalito City Council. In the interim between approval of the merger and the next SMFPD board election, the City of Sausalito would be given two non-voting, advisory seats on the SMFPD board.

#### **7. What will happen to the new downtown fire station as part of any consolidation?**

The City of Sausalito will retain ownership of the downtown fire station, which was rebuilt in with bonds approved by voters in August 2006. The fire station would be leased to the Southern Marin Fire Protection District.