



DIANNE JACOB

**CHAIRWOMAN
SUPERVISOR, SECOND DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: May 18, 2004

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: THE FUTURE OF FIRE PROTECTION AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY (DISTRICT: ALL)

SUMMARY:

Overview

It took decades and countless decisions at the local, state and federal level to shape the structure of how fire protection and emergency medical services are currently provided throughout San Diego County. This region's fire protection system is a jigsaw puzzle of 64 fire agencies that differ in size, structure, standards, service and funding. Although enhancing the level of service must take place, it will not be an easy task to improve and restructure the region's fire protection system. While it is unclear what shape the region's fire system will take in the future, one thing is for certain – there needs to be a change for the better.

As we learned from the various committees, commissions and reports that followed the October 2003 wildfires, there is an overwhelming desire and need to reduce jurisdictional lines in order to enhance the delivery of fire protection and emergency medical services in San Diego County.

To successfully accomplish this goal, fire officials must come together to determine the best model that fits our region and identify the resources needed to provide an appropriate level of service. In addition, a long-term stable funding plan must be developed to eliminate the numerous financial inequities between agencies and to build upon the resources that are already in existence.

Today's action will take monumental steps towards significant and lasting changes to San Diego County's fire protection and emergency services system and will put the County of San Diego on record in support of this critical undertaking.

Recommendation(s)

CHAIRWOMAN JACOB:

1. Support in principal the regionalization of fire protection and emergency medical services, and authorize the Chief Administrative Officer to assist the Local Area Formation Commission (LAFCO), the County Fire Chiefs' Association and the Task Force on Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services in developing a model fire protection and emergency medical service system in San Diego County.
2. Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer to assist the Executive Director of the Task Force on Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services in forming a small coalition of fire officials to determine the needs of the region and develop a proposal for long-term stable funding from existing property tax dollars for fire protection and emergency medical services in San Diego County.
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer and County Counsel to prepare the necessary documents in order for the Board of Supervisors to place an advisory measure on the November 2004 ballot regarding the regionalization of fire protection and emergency medical services in the unincorporated area.

Fiscal Impact

There is no fiscal impact associated with these actions.

Business Impact Statement

N/A

Advisory Board Statement

N/A

BACKGROUND:

It took decades and countless decisions at the local, state and federal level to shape the structure of how fire protection and emergency medical services are currently provided throughout San Diego County. This region's fire protection system is a jigsaw puzzle of 64 fire agencies that differ in size, structure, standards, service and funding. Although enhancing the level of service must take place, it will not be an easy task to improve and restructure the region's fire protection system. While it is unclear what shape the region's fire system will take in the future, one thing is for certain – there needs to be a change for the better.

This region can no longer afford to have a system that is filled with gaps and inequities. The October wildfires made it clear that the entire region is affected by a fractured fire protection system. We owe it to firefighters, law enforcement, disaster officials, the many volunteers, residents and especially the fire victims to make improvements to the fire protection and emergency medical services in this region.

San Diego County is alone as the only large County in the State that doesn't have a countywide firefighting entity. The regionalization of fire protection can mean several things, such as a

single agency for the entire County, a Joint Powers Authority, or a functional consolidation of services like dispatch, training, purchasing and administration. The first step in this process may be to take the most splintered part of the region, the unincorporated area, and bring together the 35 fire agencies that currently provide service.

On April 30, 2004, the Local Agency Formation Commission and the Task Force on Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services hosted a symposium to discuss the regionalization of fire protection and emergency medical services in San Diego County. In addition to local presenters, the symposium featured guest speakers from the Orange County Fire Authority and the San Bernardino County Fire Department. The purpose of the symposium was to not only learn about fire protection in other jurisdictions, but also to use the information that was gathered to launch historic change in San Diego County's fire protection and emergency medical service system.

As we discovered during the symposium and have learned from the Blue Ribbon Commission, the Fire Chiefs' Association, the Grand Jury, the Task Force on Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services, and the 2003 Fire Siege Review, there seems to be a consistent and more vocal call for reducing jurisdictional lines and enhancing the delivery of fire service. One agency or jurisdiction cannot solve this puzzle on its own. Fire officials must first come together to determine the best model that fits our region and identify the resources that are needed to be able to provide an appropriate level of service.

Adequate funding always seems to be the first issue raised during discussions on fire agency regionalization. If regionalization is going to be a success, additional funding would be needed to enhance the levels of service. As a result, a long-term stable funding proposal must be developed so that we can eliminate the numerous financial inequities between agencies and secure adequate stable funding for one of the most critical of public safety services.

Today's action authorizes the Chief Administrative Officer to assist a coalition of fire officials who will be charged with determining the needs of the region and developing a long-term stable funding plan that would adequately fund the region's fire protection and emergency services system. The individuals selected to participate in the coalition will be leaders in the fire community that can quickly put together a funding proposal.

Existing property taxes are the optimum solution for the region's fire funding needs. According to a report by the State Board of Equalization for property tax dollars in 2002-2003, San Diego County contributes a disproportionate amount of property tax dollars to school districts in comparison to the state average. For example, in San Diego County 63 cents of every property tax dollar goes to schools, while the statewide average is 52 cents of every property tax dollar. If the difference of 11 cents went to boost fire and emergency medical services, over \$250 million could be generated to improve the safety of the region. Any reduction in existing property tax funding to schools would be offset by an increase in revenue from the State as the State is required to maintain a certain level of funding for each student.

Also, during the 2004 State of the County Address, I announced that I would be bringing forward an action to the Board to place an advisory measure on the November 2004 ballot to gauge if

residents of the unincorporated area of San Diego County would be supportive of consolidating the number of fractured fire agencies in their community. This board action will initiate the development of that ballot measure.

Today's action will take monumental steps towards significant and lasting changes to San Diego County's fire protection and emergency medical service system. I urge your support.

Respectfully Submitted,

DIANNE JACOB
Chairwoman

SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT: All

COUNTY COUNSEL APPROVAL: Form and Legality Yes N/A
 Resolution Standard Ordinance

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER/AUDITOR REVIEW: Yes N/A
4 VOTES: Yes No

CONTRACT REVIEW PANEL: Approved N/A

CONTRACT NUMBER(S):

PREVIOUS RELEVANT APPLICABLE:

BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:

CITIZEN COMMITTEE STATEMENT:

CONCURRENCE(S):

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT: Board of Supervisors, District Two

CONTACT PERSON: Jeff Collins (619) 531-5522