



COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
MANAGEMENT & BUDGET TEAM
COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

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INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
FROM: PHILLIP SMITH-HANES, COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO 2014-15 GRAND JURY REPORT *RURAL SAFETY*
DATE: JULY 1, 2015

The 2014-15 Grand Jury has issued report *Rural Safety* and the Board of Supervisors (BOS) is required to respond to the recommendations. I recommend that the Board respond as follows:

Recommendation R1: *The Humboldt County Grand Jury recommends that for the coming five years, Humboldt County should compensate for decades of dwindling resources by assigning a minimum of 20% of the Measure Z tax revenue to rural fire and emergency service providers, to address long-standing equipment deficiencies, as recommended by the Fire Chiefs' Association of Humboldt County.*

This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable.

As promised to voters by the ballot measure that placed the question of a countywide local sales tax to vote, the BOS established the nine-member Citizens Advisory Committee to accept and review Measure Z applications and make funding recommendations to the BOS. Pre-assigning funding allocations would negate the purpose of the Citizens Advisory Committee which is to receive input from the public on the public's priorities for the use of Measure Z funding and then make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors. In fact, the Citizens Advisory Committee recommended for FY 2015-16 more than 20 percent of Measure Z funding go to fire services and the BOS allocated funding accordingly.

Recommendation R2: *The Humboldt County Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors set a goal to have all Humboldt County residents covered by a fire and emergency services district within five years.*

This recommendation has been partially implemented and requires further analysis.

The Humboldt County Fire Chief's Association in its Measure Z allocation will receive up to \$73,760 to support planning efforts that will result in the formation of fire districts and the annexation of land by these districts.

The recommendation to create "a fire and emergency services district" requires further analysis. Currently, efforts are underway to annex lands into current districts. This is not the same as creating a singular district. The county is not interested in forcing consolidation of all fire districts. The formation of a fire and emergency services district would necessitate a permanent funding stream. This would likely be

accomplished through a property assessment, which the property owners may or may not be willing to pay. Therefore this requires further analysis to determine the feasibility of creating a fire and emergency services district and the willingness of the community to pay for such a district.

Recommendation R3: *The Humboldt County Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors go beyond the Measure Z temporary funding and move to a permanent funding model for a regional fire and emergency services district.*

This recommendation requires further analysis.

As stated in response to recommendation 2, moving to a single fire and emergency services district requires further analysis. So too does moving to a permanent funding model. This would require the formation of a special district, thereby forcing the consolidation of many local fire districts and would necessitate a property assessment to fund such a district. As was done with Measure Z, polling would need to take place to determine the willingness of property owners to pay for a district. In addition, the county frequently requests local control from the State of California and will extend the same courtesy to our local communities. The BOS believes our local communities can determine their service level needs. This may mean a countywide district or not. Therefore this recommendation requires further analysis to determine the communities' openness to the concept and identification of a permanent funding model.

Recommendation R4: *The Humboldt County Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors establish a Humboldt County Director of Fire and Emergency Services position.*

This recommendation may or may not be implemented based on further analysis.

The BOS will consider implementing this recommendation when funding becomes available. Since General Fund dollars have not been spent on this position before it would be necessary to identify a permanent source of funding. One funding option is the fire share of Proposition 172 revenues. Fire districts will receive an estimated \$207,582 in Proposition 172 funding in fiscal year 2015-16. This funding could possibly be used to pay for a Director of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES). If the local fire districts agree that a county DFES would be more important than continued distribution of Proposition 172 funding to individual districts, the BOS is willing to direct staff to explore creation of the position. In addition, the county may wish to further explore consolidating the Emergency Services Manager position in the Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services (OES) with the DFES. By consolidating the OES position with the DFES this may free up funding for the DFES. The General Fund contributes \$96,769 for OES. This would also beg the question whether the OES should remain with the Sheriff's Department. The BOS is interested in discussion that would create efficiencies across the county but would not support duplication of this service.

Recommendation R5: *The Humboldt County Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors lobby the Humboldt County state legislators, requesting that the Bergeson Law be amended to better reflect the funding needs of today's rural counties.*

This recommendation will be implemented.

The BOS is able to include in its annual legislative platform an amendment of the Bergeson Law (Fire Protection District Law of 1987). The Bergeson Law provides local control over fire protection services, rescue services, emergency medical services, hazardous material emergency response services, ambulance services, and other services relating to the protection of lives and property by allowing local communities to determine the types, levels and availability of these services. The county respects the intent of this law and frequently advocates for local control on a number of legislative issues. The county can include in its

legislative platform for 2016 a platform requesting an amendment to the Bergeson Law to include state funding by receiving a percentage of the revenue collected from the State Responsibility Area fee to be shared with local fire protection districts.

Recommendation R6: *The Humboldt County Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors initiate a study to see how a countywide comprehensive fire and emergency services unification, covering all county residents, has been accomplished in other California counties. The study should begin as soon as possible and be completed before the five year sunset of Measure Z.*

This recommendation may or may not be implemented depending on agreement with the Fire Chiefs Association.

The BOS is interested in contracting for a study on the feasibility of comprehensive fire and emergency services unification only if the Fire Chiefs Association is in agreement. A comprehensive fire and emergency services district would mean the consolidation of many small districts into one district. This may be more palatable to some fire districts than others. The county would only be interested in pursuing this option if all of the districts were in agreement that consolidation improves efficiency countywide and is the direction the county and the fire districts should go in.