



SOLANO COUNTY GRAND JURY

2015 - 2016

CORDELIA FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

FIRE DEPARTMENT

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REPORT

I. SUMMARY

The 2015-2016 Solano County Grand Jury elected to look into the Cordelia Fire Protection District (Fire District) because of questions asked by residents regarding the closing of the community center, its conversion into sleeping quarters for the firefighters and the loss of revenue the center had generated. Also questioned was the process to become members of the Board of Directors of the Fire District. The Grand Jury looked into the issues of staffing, budgeting, equipment, station maintenance and Measure I-Special Tax.

The Grand Jury found the Fire District communicates minimally with its citizens, has significant deferred maintenance issues, has equipment that needs replacement and is facing difficult decisions in order to remain in existence.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Fire District currently has two fire stations. The Main Station, Station #31, is located at 2155 Cordelia Road, Fairfield. The Secondary is Station #29, located in Green Valley at 1624 Rockville Road, Fairfield. The Fire District covers 56 square miles of varied topography ranging from the Suisun Marsh, the Suisun Valley and the mountain range separating Napa and Solano Counties. These areas present unique fire protection opportunities and one of the most challenging areas is the Green Valley and Rockville Hills regions.

III. METHODOLOGY

Reviewed:

- Cordelia Fire Protection District Mission Statement
- Cordelia Fire Protection District General Board Policies
- Cordelia Fire Protection District Board Member Qualifications
- Cordelia Fire Protection District Ordinance No. 2002-01 Special Tax Procedures
- Agendas and minutes of Board Meetings of August 11, 2015, September 8, 2015, October 13, 2015, November 17, 2015
- Comprehensive Budget Report for 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15

Toured and Photographed:

- Station #31
- Station #29

Interviewed:

- Members of the Board of Directors
- Fire Protection District Management and Staff
- A representative of Solano County Registrar of Voters

IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS

The Cordelia Fire Protection District (Fire District) five-member Board of Directors is the governing body responsible for setting all department policies and procedures and overseeing the budget. Since the Cordelia Fire Protection District is mainly a volunteer organization, the Board of Directors serves without remuneration.

They currently serve a term of four years and may also be appointed to the Board if no one has applied to run for the position in a general election. Members of the Fire District Board of Directors stated “there has not been a lot of interest in becoming a Director in the district”. Four of the five current Board members have been appointed in recent years. Board vacancy information appears to be minimally disseminated e.g. local grocery store, local café and community bulletin boards. Three of the board positions are expected to be on the November 2016 ballot.

During the course of the Grand Jury's interviews with members of the Board of Directors, it was apparent the directors did not have a clear understanding or working knowledge of budget line items they are tasked to manage.

Personnel:

The current paid staff for the Fire District includes the following: Fire Chief, Battalion Chief and two Driver-Operators. There are currently 45 volunteers who receive a \$20.00 stipend per shift. The staffing for the Fire District varies from day to day, with a range of three to eight members on duty at any one time. The Fire District responds to approximately 750 calls per year and approximately 60% of those calls are for medical aid. At the time of this report, there were five Paramedics working in the Fire District. Paramedics are advanced providers and highly educated in topics such as anatomy, physiology, cardiology, medications and medical procedures. The other members of the department are qualified Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT). Normally, first responders are EMTs, because the Fire District may not have a Paramedic on duty.

Personnel vary daily. A minimum of three full-time staff members are needed to staff at least one station. The second station is staffed if more personnel are available.

The paid staff is EMT certified and required to live within a 25 minute response time. Approximately 45 volunteers, five of which are paramedics, supplement the staffing at the stations. It was reported they are fortunate to have a total of eight individuals to split between both stations. Realistically, it is more likely to have three to five personnel to divide between both stations.

Volunteers are assigned one 24 hour shift per week. They travel from as far away as Sacramento for the experience in firefighting in the hopes of gaining a full-time, paid position outside of the district. Volunteers are not required to live within the Fire District but come here for training and make up the bulk of the staffing needs. The Fire District would be unable to function without these volunteers.

The district relies upon the mutual aid program in the county for assistance for their medical and fire calls due to short staffing.

Equipment:

The Fire District's current equipment consists of:

- Two type-1 fire engines, generally used for structure fires but can be used for any type of emergency
- One type-3 brush truck, generally used for vegetation-type fires but can also be used for any type of emergency
- Two type-5 brush trucks, generally used for vegetation-type fires but can also be used for any type of emergency
- One water tender (carries 4,000 gallons of water)
- One utility vehicle with safety trailer
- Four SUVs used as Command vehicles and other administrative duties

The two type-1 fire engines are 1994 and 2009 model vehicles. The Grand Jury was informed the 1994 fire engine is in need of replacement due to escalating maintenance costs.

The type-3 fire engine and the water tender are 1990 model vehicles.

The fiscal year 2014-15 maintenance equipment costs were \$72,842.71 which comprises 8% of the annual budget.

Facilities:

Station #31, the main station, is located at 2155 Cordelia Road Fairfield

The station was built in the early 1900's without sleeping quarters. As the district transitioned into full-time positions, trailers were acquired to serve as sleeping quarters. They are Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailers from the Loma Prieta Earthquake in 1989. These trailers are now condemned due to black mold and can no longer be used.

A portion of Station #31 has been used as a community center and rented out for social events. This practice has been discontinued to allow the district to utilize the space as sleeping quarters. This has resulted in a loss of revenue to the district. Partitions have been installed in the hall as well as a shower in the men's restroom. Restrooms have been upgraded to provide handicap access. The reception office and Chief's office have been modified for American Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance.

The apparatus bay was added 20-30 years ago. All of the vehicles as well as other equipment, (i.e., hoses, saws, rakes, tools, etc.) are housed in the apparatus bay. Firefighters open the bay doors for ventilation. The area is too small to allow firefighters to tilt the engine cab forward to work on the engines necessitating moving the engines outside for maintenance.

The weight room is a converted engine bay. It is also used as the turnout and gear areas and contains the medical locker closet that has a combination lock on the door. The medical supply closet contains all of the medical equipment and supplies. For security reasons, only the full-time Paramedics have the combination to the lock. The Chief even had to call to get the combination so Grand Jury could inspect the locker. Supplies did not appear to be in any particular order nor were they labeled.

All of their office equipment, shelves, room dividers and personal lockers are received from Solano County surplus warehouse. The Grand Jury observed what appears to be a lack of accountability for hand tools as they are not marked with county stickers or etched with department number.

The training area in the front office has been moved so they now have an education /training room with computers and training manuals for a study area.

Miscellaneous deficiencies observed were:

- Numerous metal milk crates used for equipment storage.
- Only one of the two air conditioners is in working order.
- Rear and side access doors to the hall have at least 1½ inch gap under doors. (see photo 1,3,6 and 8).

The Grand Jury has received copies of the maintenance logs for equipment, apparatus, tools and medical logs.

The Fire District Board has deferred for many years necessary maintenance on the facility resulting in the station being minimally habitable. The station itself is in need of a new roof. The outer walls, as well as the foundation, are in need of repair, (See Photographs 4,5,7 and 9 through 14)

The district has enough land to build a new facility on site to eliminate these major problems.

Station # 29, located in Green Valley, at 1624 Rockville Road, Fairfield.

The Station # 29 building is leased from the Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District (FFSUSD) which is currently evaluating future uses for the property. The facility has suffered from deferred maintenance and is in need of replacement. Until the FFSUSD resolves the issue of the land use, the Fire District is in a holding pattern and is unable to plan maintenance or replacement issues.

Deficiencies noted were:

- The roof is in need of replacement
- There is major dry rot throughout the structure.
- The bay doors do not close properly and are not large enough to accommodate modern fire equipment
- Sleeping quarters are insufficient; they are a single room with no dividers and accommodate only two people.
- The kitchen facilities are barely adequate; the sink is leaking and the cabinets are in disrepair
- There is no ADA Compliant entry into the building

A trailer used for housing firefighters was being replaced at the time of the Grand Jury's re-inspection.

Meal preparation, training room, exercise room and fitness equipment are located at Station #31.

See pictures 15 through 22 for noted deficiencies.

Budget:

The Grand Jury reviewed the budget for the District and interviewed the directors regarding their understanding of the budget. None of the directors appeared to have a comprehensive understanding of the budget or the components within the budget. They were unable to explain what is included in the categories of:

- Medical/dental supplies- \$10,149
- Special department expenses-\$43,919
- Reimbursable expenses -\$41,582
- Capital facilities fees - \$70,992

The directors also could not explain the rationale for the increases in costs for these and other items in the comprehensive budget reports.

Several directors indicated a lot of institutional knowledge concerning the budget was lost with the retirement of the former fire chief.

Income and Expenses Fiscal Years 2010-2015

Year	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15
Expenses	\$659,070	\$689,600	\$841,386	\$778,639	\$889,254
Revenue	\$650,840	\$692,994	\$877,230	\$763,863	\$920,587
Loss/gain	(\$8,230)	\$3,394	\$35,844	(\$14,776)	\$31,333

When Cal-Fire, the state firefighting agency, requires assistance to deal with fire emergencies within the state, volunteers are assigned to what are referred to as “strike teams” and are paid by the state through the district.

In 2012-2013 and 2014-2015 the district benefitted from significant income from other governmental agencies from the volunteers working on “strike teams”. Without this outside reimbursement the district would have been operating at a deficit in both of those years.

The Grand Jury was told most fire departments participating in “strike teams” are full time paid staff. When a firefighter from a full time paid department is out on a strike team, it is either a scheduled duty day or an off day for that firefighter. If it is an off day, overtime would apply .For the highest paid fire department Cal-Fire reimbursement probably still does not fully cover their actual costs. Lower paid departments or those using volunteers (such as Cordelia FD) generate positive revenue for these activities.

Salary and Retirement Expenses Fiscal Years 2010-2015

Year	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	Uncompounded % increase
Salaries	136,479	170,896	187,713	197,751	200,860	47.17
Retirement costs	66,685	89,237	83,883	88,621	96,812	45.18

The above chart shows that salaries and retirement costs are a significant portion of the district's costs and can only be expected to consume a greater part of the budget in the years to come.

While salaries may be controlled in the future, the increasing retirement cost has the potential to add to deficits in the future which may not be able to be controlled.

Measure I Special Parcel Tax:

Measure I, a special parcel tax passed in 2002, provides approximately 40% of the revenue for the Fire District. Income from fiscal year 2014-2015 was \$368,299.29. Measure I limits the tax that can be levied based on the description of property and its rate may only be adjusted annually using the consumer price index for the preceding year not to exceed 2% per year.

Due to the recession, the inflation factor was adjusted to only 1% for 2009, 0% for 2010, 1.5% for 2011, 2%, for 2012, 2% for 2013, 1.5% for 2014 and 2% for 2015. This results in an un-compounded increase of 9 % over the last five years, significantly less than the increased costs experienced by the District.

Maintenance and Deferred Maintenance:

Building Maintenance

Building maintenance has averaged 3.2% of the budget over the five-year period. Due to budgetary restrictions and the lease concerns at Station #29, they have performed a minimal amount of maintenance in both fire stations which reflects the current condition of the stations.

Equipment Maintenance

Equipment maintenance has increased from 5.19% of the budget in 2010-2011 to 8.19% in 2014-2015.

Year	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15
Equipment Maintenance cost	\$34,250	\$51,110	\$68,628	\$44,203	\$72,843

Maintenance costs continue to rise due to the advancing age of the equipment. The Grand Jury was informed replacement costs for a used type-1 fire engine is estimated at \$450,000; \$600,000 for a new type-1.

V. Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1

It appeared that members of the board did not have a full-working knowledge of the budget and, in particular, what was contained within each line item.

Recommendation 1

The members of the board of directors meet with the Fire District's accountants and gain a comprehensive understanding of the budget and all of its components.

Finding 2

The District does not have adequate income to sustain itself as a viable entity.

Recommendation 2

- 2A. The Fire District considers merging with another fire agency (e.g. City of Fairfield, Montezuma Fire District, or City of Suisun City) to effectively service the citizens of the Cordelia Fire District.

2B. The Fire District consider developing a plan seeking approval of a bond measure to address the increasing costs to operate the district, including replacement of both stations (#29 and #31) and to provide for replacement equipment.

Finding 3

Community outreach is minimal at present.

Recommendation 3

The Board of Directors need to develop a robust plan to inform and involve the community regarding the current state of the Fire District, the need for additional funding, opportunities to serve on the Board of Directors, and the options open for the Fire District to remain a viable entity.

Required responses:

Board of Directors, Cordelia Fire Protection District

Courtesy copy:

Clerk, Solano County Board of Supervisors



#1 Gap under the door Station #31



#2 Old sleeping quarters at Station# 31



#3 Exterior of Station #31



#4 sleeping quarters Station #31



5 Cracks in foundation at Station 31



6 Station #31 exit door



#7 Dry rot window sills station #31



#8 Chained exit door #31



#9 Community meeting room Station 31



#10 same



#11 Ceiling panels above restrooms 31



#12 same



#13 Structural damage Station #31



#14 Electrical problems Station # 31



#15 Station # 29 damaged door far right



#16 Roofing overhang 29



#17 Dry rot station 29



#18 same



#19 Station # 29 damaged door



#20 Roof Station #29



#21 Aparatus room utility equipment Station #29



22 Roof Station # 29