

# CITY OF MOUNTAIN VIEW

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September 14, 2011

Ms. Helene Popenhager, Foreperson  
Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury  
Superior Court Building  
191 North First Street  
San Jose, CA 95113

**FILED**

SEP 19 2011

DAVID H. YAMASAKI  
Chief Executive Officer/Clerk  
Superior Court of CA County of Santa Clara  
BY D. ALDYCKI

**RE: City of Mountain View Response to "Fighting Fire or Fighting Change?"  
Rethinking Fire Department Response Protocol and Consolidation Opportunities**

Dear Ms. Popenhager:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Grand Jury's report on firefighting, and resulting recommendations and findings.

**Finding 1**

It is extremely costly to equip a fire department for only the occasional fire response. The County and 15 towns/cities have not been proactive in challenging fire departments to adopt changes that are more cost-effective and that better serve their communities. Further, unions are more interested in job preservation than in providing the right mix of capabilities at a reasonable cost, using tactics to influence the public and fostering firefighter unwillingness to collaborate with EMS.

*The City partially disagrees with this finding. The City of Mountain View agrees that appropriate staffing levels and equipment require a significant investment. The City takes seriously its responsibilities of ensuring expeditious response to emergencies with thoroughly trained personnel. We also take seriously our responsibility for ensuring fiscally accountable services.*

*To achieve success in both areas, the City has trained its Fire Department employees as "multi-disciplined/all-risk" emergency responders.*

*This means that our Firefighters and response units are not only prepared to fight fires, but because they are on duty 24/7, they also are trained and equipped to effectively*

*mitigate medical emergencies requiring both Advanced Life Support (ALS) and Basic Life Support (BLS) services.*

*Additionally, our personnel are trained to respond to emergencies which require specialized education and skill sets. These include hazardous materials response, technical rescue response, homeland security and natural disasters. Each fire station has been strategically located to ensure rapid response times with individuals who are trained at all of the aforementioned response capabilities.*

*Finally, the City will continue to work with the emergency responders who belong to Local 1965 to be partners as we ensure high-quality and seamless service, while remaining cognizant of the need to manage City resources responsibly.*

### **Recommendation 1A**

All cities that manage their own fire department—Gilroy, Milpitas, Mountain View, Palo Alto, San Jose, Santa Clara, Sunnyvale—and the County (for CCFD and SCFD) should benchmark and observe best practices from communities that have demonstrated successful changes in response protocol and consolidation efforts, such as in San Mateo County, California; West Jordan, Utah; or Scottsdale, Arizona.

*This recommendation is currently being implemented. Fire departments within Santa Clara County have entered into automatic aid agreements which prescribe closest appropriate unit response without regard to jurisdictional boundaries. In addition, management staffs from multiple Santa Clara County fire and police departments have visited West Jordan and San Mateo County to observe and incorporate their best practices in both response protocol and consolidation.*

*Also, joint training at all levels is being incorporated throughout the County. This includes joint recruit fire academies, joint fire officer development academies and a new initiative to train incident commanders from all jurisdictions through a County-wide Command Training Center (CTC).*

*In addition, joint purchasing of specialized and expensive equipment (HazMat and technical rescue) now creates a greater "economy of scale" when purchasing and utilizing these tools.*

*Finally, the Cities of Mountain View, Palo Alto and Los Altos have entered into an agreement to create a virtually consolidated dispatch system. Implementation of this resource is scheduled for July 2012.*

### **Recommendation 1B**

All 15 towns/cities—Campbell, Cupertino, Gilroy, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Los Gatos, Monte Sereno, Morgan Hill, Milpitas, Mountain View, Palo Alto, San Jose, Santa Clara, Saratoga, Sunnyvale—and the County (for CCFD and SCFD) should determine the

emergency response service they want to achieve, particularly as to the result, then determine how best to achieve that.

*This recommendation is currently being implemented, as described in the response to Recommendation 1A.*

### **Recommendation 1C**

All cities that manage their own fire department—Gilroy, Milpitas, Mountain View, Palo Alto, San Jose, Santa Clara, Sunnyvale—and the County (for CCFD and SCFD) should collaborate with their fire department, union and political leadership to drive fire department change and develop consistent, joint communication messages for the public.

*This recommendation will be implemented in the future as the City continues to implement cost-effective approaches to providing emergency services.*

### **Finding 2**

Based on Santa Clara County's fluctuating demand for emergency services, contractually based minimum staffing requirements are not warranted and hinder fire chiefs in effectively managing firefighter staffing to meet time-of-day, day-of-week and season-of-year demand. This wastes money and may drive station closure as budgets continue to erode.

*The City partially disagrees with this finding. It is true that calls for emergency services do fluctuate, but it is difficult to predict where and when an emergency response will occur. Because of this, we constantly review our calls for service and how effectively our deployment model is addressing them.*

*There are three factors that influence the outcome of an emergency call for service:*

- 1. Properly trained responders.*
- 2. Properly equipped responders.*
- 3. Response time—of Nos. 1 and 2.*

*The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) prescribes best practice benchmarks regarding staffing standards. They are based on minimum levels necessary for "safe, effective and efficient emergency operations."*

*Instead of staffing to the NFPA standard of four on-duty personnel per engine and five on-duty personnel per ladder truck, the City of Mountain View staffs each unit with three personnel and then augments our response with a two-person rescue squad. The City believes the end result is greater efficiency without degrading our effectiveness.*

*In January 2011, the Fire Department conducted a comprehensive review of dispatching procedures along with the type and number of units sent per call. At the conclusion of this review, a change in the way we process and dispatch EMS calls was incorporated into our procedures.*

*Instead of overwhelming the response with personnel and equipment, we now triage the call differently. This adjustment provides us the capability to send the closest appropriate units, instead of everything, at the beginning of the dispatch. The result of this change has been greater efficiency by scaling our response to meet the specific needs of the emergency.*

## **Recommendation 2**

All cities that manage their own fire department—Gilroy, Milpitas, Mountain View, Palo Alto, San Jose, Santa Clara, Sunnyvale—and the County (for CCFD and SCFD) that also have contractual minimum staffing requirements should reopen negotiations with the unions to eliminate this term and any other term that limits a fire chief's ability to "right-size" staffing given the time of day or time of year.

*This recommendation requires further analysis. The Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Mountain View and its Firefighters (Local 1965) states that a "minimum staffing level of 21 shall be maintained daily." This level of staffing is lower than NFPA standards and management believes the current deployment model is operationally sound and appropriate to meet the needs of our community. The City will continue to work with labor to assess our effectiveness and ability to provide optimal service levels.*

## **Finding 3**

Whether the emergency responder is a firefighter-paramedic or an EMT-paramedic matters little to the person with the medical emergency. Using firefighter-paramedics in firefighting equipment as first responders to all non-police emergencies is unnecessarily costly when less expensive paramedics on ambulances possess the skills needed to address the 90 percent of calls that are not fire-related.

*This finding requires further analysis. This finding lacks sufficient detail to fully address the issue to which it refers. We are unaware of any supporting data or examples of currently operating emergency service delivery systems where only ambulance-based personnel respond to 90 percent of non-police emergencies. Significant review and study of the implications of this kind of system would need to be undertaken.*

## **Recommendation 3A**

All 15 towns/cities—Campbell, Cupertino, Gilroy, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Los Gatos, Monte Sereno, Morgan Hill, Milpitas, Mountain View, Palo Alto, San Jose, Santa Clara,

Saratoga, Sunnyvale—and the County (for CCFD and SCFD) should adopt an emergency services department mentality and staff or contract accordingly to meet demand.

*This recommendation has been implemented. The City of Mountain View requires its Fire personnel to be trained and proficient in multiple disciplines of emergency response. All Fire companies and each crew member are trained and equipped to provide life-saving EMS. This is vital to successful mitigation of the full spectrum of emergencies that fire departments respond to.*

*For example, a Fire company may be confronted with a vehicle rescue situation where the work environment simultaneously requires firefighting personal protective equipment (PPE), rescue equipment and EMS for the vehicle occupants. This type of circumstance can be present at structure fires, technical rescues, hazardous materials releases, etc. For this reason, an appropriately equipped, multi-disciplined Fire company is the ideal first response unit.*

### **Recommendation 3B**

The County should modify its approach to mandating (through direct contract or through the EMS provider contract) that fire departments serve as first responders, reserve the use of firefighting vehicles for fire events and enable the EMS contractor to be the first responder.

*This recommendation requires further analysis. The cost-effectiveness, operational efficiency and community support for an emergency medical system which relies solely upon paramedics assigned to ambulances serving all of Santa Clara County would require a significant amount of study. There would obviously need to be substantially more ambulances in the County EMS system in order to respond to medical emergencies as quickly as fire units currently do.*

*In addition, private ambulance providers would not be able to handle the full spectrum of calls that firefighters are capable of (hazardous materials, fires, vehicle extrication and other rescue situations). Therefore, losses from those situations would be higher if fewer firefighters are available to respond.*

### **Recommendation 3C**

In consideration of non-fire emergencies, all cities that manage their own fire departments—Gilroy, Milpitas, Mountain View, Palo Alto, San Jose, Santa Clara, Sunnyvale—and the County (for CCFD and SCFD) should modify fire department protocols to authorize, incorporate and use less expensive non-firefighter paramedics and non-firefighter equipment.

*The recommendation requires further analysis. The City of Mountain View has strategically located its fire stations and personnel to ensure timely and appropriate*

*response to all emergencies. Additionally, a triage-based dispatch system is utilized to send only those resources that are needed.*

### **Recommendation 3D**

All cities that manage their own fire department—Gilroy, Milpitas, Mountain View, Palo Alto, San Jose, Santa Clara, Sunnyvale—and the County (for CCFD and SCFD) should consider ways to extend the service life of expensive vehicles by augmenting ambulances with the County EMS provider.

*The recommendation requires further analysis. Further study is necessary to determine if the deployment of an additional vehicle to selected Fire companies would be cost beneficial. The delivery of County-wide Emergency Medical Services (EMS) has evolved into a system that is fully integrated with local fire services.*

*The existing deployment strategies employed by County fire agencies for fire protection also match the response-time demands for effective EMS delivery. The network of strategically placed Fire stations ensures rapid first-response, complementing the County's patient transport ambulances.*

*First-response ambulances may be appropriate for specific types of calls to reduce wear and tear on Fire apparatus. The cost to purchase, maintain and replace these vehicles, coupled with the additional expense incurred to increase the number of available ambulances necessary to satisfy the existing response requirements, must be weighed against the costs avoided by extending the service life of a particular piece of Fire apparatus by a specific number of years.*

### **Finding 4**

Emergency callers care less about seeing their city/town name on the equipment door than receiving timely assistance when needed, and a wide variety of consolidation opportunities offer cities ways to deliver emergency response service at a reduced cost and without compromising service response times.

*The City of Mountain View agrees with this finding.*

### **Recommendation 4A**

All cities that manage their own fire department—Gilroy, Milpitas, Mountain View, Palo Alto, San Jose, Santa Clara, Sunnyvale—and the County (for CCFD and SCFD) should evaluate and implement cost-saving consolidations, including administration consolidation, boundary drop, department or regional consolidation, purchasing personnel training and equipment maintenance.

*The City has both implemented and is proactively pursuing various consolidation opportunities to increase efficiency and effectiveness. These include boundary drops,*

*joint training, emergency management and dispatching services. Fire chiefs throughout Santa Clara County will continue to discuss opportunities for consolidation and other ideas to increase efficiency and decrease costs. In Mountain View, Fire and Police administrative positions were consolidated in the Fiscal Year 2010-11 budget year to reduce expenses and achieve greater efficiency.*

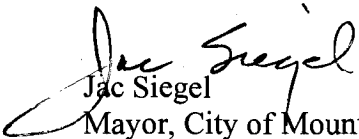
**Recommendation 4B**

All cities that manage their own fire department—Gilroy, Milpitas, Mountain View, Palo Alto, San Jose, Santa Clara, Sunnyvale—and the County (for CCFD and SCFD) should consider adopting a vehicle fleet management approach by establishing a County-wide standard for vehicles and equipment, consolidating purchases to take advantage of lowered costs and consolidating maintenance or revisiting guaranteed maintenance contracts on new vehicle purchases.

*This recommendation will be implemented in the future.*

Thank you for your consideration of this response.

Sincerely,

  
Jac Siegel  
Mayor, City of Mountain View

cc: City Manager  
City Attorney  
City Clerk