



2011-2012 SANTA CLARA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY REPORT

CONTINUITY IN FIRE SERVICE DELIVERY

Summary

The 2011-2012 Grand Jury (Grand Jury) has reviewed all responses to the findings and recommendations issued by the 2010-2011 Grand Jury. This report results from reviewing the responses to the 2010-2011 report, “Fighting Fire or Fighting Change? Rethinking Fire Department Response Protocol and Consolidation Opportunities.”¹

Background

Agencies to which a grand jury addresses its reports are required by law to submit a written response. The grand jury is responsible for reviewing these agency responses. When an agency agrees with the grand jury’s findings and/or recommendations and commits to taking action, the grand jury follows its progress in implementing change. When an agency disagrees with the findings and/or recommendations, the grand jury scrutinizes the agency’s response for rationale and reasonableness. These follow-up functions by the grand jury broadly seek to ensure that the work of prior grand juries is taken seriously and treated with rigor by the responding agencies.

As required in California Penal Code Section 933.05 agencies are required to respond to report recommendations with one of four actions:

- Implemented
- Will implement
- Further Analysis
- Not implemented

The Grand Jury reviewed all responses to last year’s reports and focused its attention on the responses to the report titled “Fighting Fire or Fighting Change? Rethinking Fire Department Response Protocol and Consolidation Opportunities” (Report). The Report noted that 96% of current firefighting emergency responses are not fire related and 70% are medical in nature. The low number of fire-related emergencies was attributed in large part due to new building codes that now call for the use of fire-retardant building materials and the installation of sprinkler systems in most buildings. The Report recommendations focused on three areas:

¹ See the Grand Jury report and responses at http://www.scscourt.org/court_divisions/civil/cgj/grand_jury.shtml

- Reconsidering the fire response protocol in favor of an emergency response protocol tailored to the appropriate emergency need.
- Allowing management the ability to staff in appropriate numbers with the appropriate skill mixes consistent with daily, weekly or seasonal needs.
- Identifying consolidation opportunities to improve service and reduce cost.

Methodology

Findings, recommendations and agency responses to the Report were thoroughly reviewed by the Grand Jury. The Grand Jury participated in fire station visits and “ride-alongs,” which provided insight into the daily activities of fire stations. While the station visits did not inform this report, the Grand Jury wishes to thank and compliment the crews who hosted them. The Grand Jury has a greater appreciation for firefighting and emergency activities in the County.

Discussion

The Grand Jury sought to understand what actions the Cities and County had undertaken beyond their written responses required. What it found was action being taken at all levels of fire service delivery.

All agency responses to the Report were timely and proactive regarding Grand Jury Recommendations. Sixteen agencies provided responses. The Grand Jury feels that the following three responses demonstrated a commitment to seriously look for solutions to the problems raised in the Report.

The Santa Clara County’s September 1, 2011 Response², issued by the Board of Supervisors (BOS) to the Grand Jury tasked the Central Fire Protection District³ Chief as follows:

Central Fire Protection District is currently working with the Santa Clara County Executive's Office, the Santa Clara County Fire Chiefs Association, the Santa Clara County City Managers Association and the labor organizations representing firefighters from throughout Santa Clara County to complete a cost/benefit analysis for consolidation of all fire service delivery in Santa Clara County.

² http://www.sccscourt.org/court_divisions/civil/cgj/2011/responses/Fire/CountyBoardofSup.pdf

³ Central Fire Protection District is an independent special district that serves as the County’s fire protection agency.

The study will explore a range of opportunities to improve operational efficiency and cost effectiveness of fire service delivery throughout Santa Clara County. The study will look at consolidation of services, contracts for service with other agencies, impacts of employee costs (health, pension, etc.), placement of stations and apparatus, automatic aid, boundary drops, regional communications, fire-based advance life support, fire prevention, apparatus purchasing and maintenance, equipment purchasing and maintenance, public education and emergency preparedness.

The study will take place in several phases:

- 1. Identify opportunities to improve operational efficiency and cost effectiveness of fire service delivery throughout Santa Clara County.*
- 2. Evaluate and prioritize identified opportunities.*
- 3. Perform a cost/benefit analysis on those opportunities identified as having the greatest potential impact and possibility for success*

A report is due to the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors in November 2011.

Central Fire Protection District Chief Kenneth Kehmna presented a response to the BOS in December 2011 with the report entitled "Consolidation of Fire Service Delivery in Santa Clara County Status Report." The report provides:

In an effort to inspire cooperation and increase collaboration, the fire chiefs have also met with Santa Clara County Council of Professional Fire Fighters. I think it is fair to say that everyone recognizes the enormous problems we face financially and this provides us with an unparalleled opportunity to look at how we provide fire and emergency medical services across our county. We are all collectively excited about exploring the opportunities to improve how we do business going forward.⁴

The report included a timeline for upcoming meetings on February 12, April 12, and June 12, 2012. It took the FY12/13 budget cycle into consideration as a guide toward "identifying vision, priorities and deliverables" regarding consolidation. The report was accepted by the BOS. A consortium of city and county firefighting agencies has been formed to address the issue of consolidation under Chief Kehmna's leadership. The consortium is of particular interest to the Grand Jury as it demonstrates the countywide collaboration recommended in the Report. One example of the consortium's efforts is that "boundary drops" are being implemented. Boundary drops allow coordination by individual fire agencies to function countywide without being constrained by municipal boundaries.

⁴ Report attached to the minutes of the BOS meeting, December 13, 2011, Item 16.

In addition to the work of the consortium, the Grand Jury noted actions that demonstrate individual fire departments are exploring ways to improve fire service delivery. For example, San Jose Fire Department is in the process of developing a “squad concept” wherein smaller vehicles and smaller crews might be more strategically and economically located. If successful, this squad concept has the potential to eliminate a truck from existing stations and also stage vehicles closer to the demand. Palo Alto’s response to the Report cited multiple studies stemming from the Grand Jury recommendations. They reported visiting fire departments in San Mateo and West Jordan, Utah⁵ to observe best practices and to establish benchmarks for the future.

Conclusion

The Grand Jury found that actions reported by responding agencies demonstrate a strong start to rethinking how fire and emergency services can be delivered to the county. Under the leadership of the Central Fire Protection District Chief, fire departments in the county have formed a consortium. The consortium will continue to explore and implement ways to cost effectively improve the operational efficiency and effectiveness of delivering of fire and emergency services in the county. The Grand Jury views the work of this consortium to be a prudent first step toward the County implementing Recommendations that will lead to constructive change.

The Grand Jury considers the above actions, endorsed by town and city councils and the BOS through the participation of their fire departments in the consortium, to be good examples of the political will necessary to effect change.

⁵ West Jordan was identified in the Report as an example of regional consolidation that offers a benchmark for other fire departments considering consolidation.

This report was **PASSED** and **ADOPTED** with a concurrence of at least 12 grand jurors on this 10th day of May, 2012.

Kathryn G. Janoff
Foreperson

Alfred P. Bicho
Foreperson pro tem

James T. Messano
Secretary