



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

Legislation Text

File #: 21-1588, Version: 1

To: Board of Supervisors

From: County Administrative Office

Agenda Section: Consent

SUBJECT:

Direction for Memorandum of Understanding with Westhaven Volunteer Fire Department (VFD) for Fire Protection Services in County Service Area (CSA) #4 and Supplemental Budget (4/5 Vote Required)

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Approve a supplemental budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021-22 Forester and Warden (budget unit 1100281) (4/5 vote required);
2. Direct staff to proceed with development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Westhaven Volunteer Fire Department for fire protection services in County Service Area (CSA) #4; and
3. Authorize the County Administrative Officer to sign the MOU after review by County Counsel and Risk Management.

SOURCE OF FUNDING:

CSA #4 Property Assessment Fund (3970)

DISCUSSION:

The Humboldt County Fire Services Ad Hoc has been evaluating how fire and rescue services are currently being provided to CSA #4 and identifying where there may be room for improvement. CSA #4 is responsible for providing fire protection services to the community of Westhaven, the unincorporated area surrounding the City of Trinidad, and the unincorporated area adjacent to U.S. Highway 101 stretching approximately ten miles north of Trinidad. The service area is 23.5 square miles and parcels in the service area pay an annual special assessment. Currently CSA #4 pays for services provided by CAL FIRE through a reimbursement agreement with Humboldt County. Fire protection services within the CSA #4 boundary are also provided by Westhaven Volunteer Fire Department (VFD).

The cooperative agreement CSA #4 has with CAL FIRE continues services from their Trinidad fire station during the non-fire season. Without the agreement, the station would close during this time.

This arrangement is referred to as an “Amador” agreement. These non-fire season services maintain an engine company consisting of at least two firefighters for 24 hours per day. The longer fire season lasts, the shorter the period during which CAL FIRE bills CSA #4. The billing period generally ranges from 6 to 7 months.

Since its formation in 1986, the revenue used to support services within CSA #4 has been collected through a special assessment on property, where the cost of services is allocated according to “units of benefit” to owners of property within the district. The assessment applies a unit of benefit value to each parcel based on the current land use, which ranges from 1 unit for a vacant parcel, 4 units for a single-family residence, 12 units for most commercial properties, and 16 units for light industrial uses. Due to variations in the fire season the special assessment has not always been sufficient to cover the actual costs of the CAL FIRE agreement and the General Fund has made up the difference.

Founded in 1950, the Westhaven VFD is a non-district fire company and 501(c)3 non-profit organization supported solely by donations, grants, and fund raising. Westhaven VFD does not have an official jurisdictional boundary but maintains a fire station and is regularly called to respond to incidents within the boundaries of CSA 4. Their unofficial primary response area is located entirely within the boundaries of CSA #4 and is made up of approximately 13 square miles from the U.S. 101 Seawood Drive Exit to the southern boundary of CSA #4. Approximately 78% of the revenue generated by the CSA #4 special assessment comes from within this area which includes over 800 homes. The Westhaven VFD is dispatched to calls within this primary response area, throughout the whole of CSA #4, and beyond (sometimes countywide, particularly when the water tender is needed to assist on fires). Services from Westhaven VFD are requested as party to a countywide mutual aid agreement, automatically dispatched to calls as a signatory to the North Humboldt Bay Region Automatic Mutual Aid Agreement, and/or as the closest resource to an incident. The Westhaven VFD does not have access to traditional revenue sources for fire protection services including property tax, special tax, or special assessment revenue because it is not a special district. It is unique to have a volunteer fire department that operates within a district’s boundary that is not funded by the district to provide services.

When the Board last considered the request to support the Westhaven VFD the Board asked for support from the Fire Services Ad Hoc and the Fire Chief Association for the concept of using some of the unused CSA #4 assessment collected. The Fire Services Ad Hoc supports this request as does the Fire Chiefs Association (Attachment 2 and 3).

Based on invoices processed for FY 2020-21 the actual cost of CAL FIRE services billed to CSA #4 was lower than the assessment amount collected by \$85,072. It is recommended that \$85,000 be allocated in FY 2021-22 to pay Westhaven VFD for fire protection services to be provided to CSA #4. Staff would need to develop a MOU with Westhaven VFD which would typically include an annual standby fee as well as a minimum response fee for each incident response.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The recommended action would budget \$85,000 in assessment funds that were not expended in FY 2020-21 to FY 2021-22.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK:

This action supports your Board's Strategic Framework by creating opportunities for improved safety and health and providing community appropriate levels of service.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

Cal Fire
Westhaven Volunteer Fire Department

ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Board discretion.

ATTACHMENTS:

Supplemental Budget
Letters of Support

PREVIOUS ACTION/REFERRAL:

Board Order No.: n/a
Meeting of: n/a
File No.: n/a