

Public Comments, MX Community Advisory Board

April 28, 2021

Bryan Scott, Chair, East County Voters for Equal Protection

Good afternoon, Members of the Measure X Community Advisory Board. Right now, as you read this, there are 20,000 seniors in East County who do not have adequate emergency medical response and fire services.

Seniors are one of the most vulnerable segments of our community. If we are lucky, we have Mothers and Fathers, Aunts and Uncles, maybe even Grand Parents, who are getting up-there in age, who are becoming increasingly likely to need to call 9-1-1 in an emergency.

As I mentioned previously, the regional fire district serving East County is unable to respond to emergency calls, AT ALL, for significant periods of time each month. Response times are two-to-three times stated goals, and the fire district has declared an emergency, and limits its firefighting activities to defensive practices only.

Included in this Public Comment submission is a fire district press release, describing the dangerous impact of government funding priorities gone awry.

This agency, the government entity responsible for responding to these county residents, has only three fire engines and nine on-duty firefighters to serve the needs of nearly 130,000 residents, spread over 249 square miles. East Contra Costa Fire Protection District operates just three fire stations in the region.

In Brentwood, the largest (65,000 pop.) city in East County, federal census estimates (2019) put the 65-and-older population group at 15%. In Oakley, the second largest (43,000 pop.) city, the estimate is 9.3%, while in Discover Bay, the third largest (13,000 pop.) residential concentration, it is 15.9%.

These figures estimate the number of elderly East County residents without a responsive emergency service at nearly 16,000 (15,816). This does not include seniors in other unincorporated areas, like Bethel Island, Byron, Knightsen or Marsh Creek.

Other at-risk demographic groups, such as people of color, the homeless or housing-insecure, infants/youths, and young parents, all call or use 9-1-1 services, when a life-threatening situation occurs.

When an emergency occurs the EMS first response connects victims with agencies and services, so that injuries are addressed with compassion in a timely manner. These include county healthcare, crisis support, and temporary food and shelter.

Our Mothers and Fathers, our Aunts and Uncles, our Grand Parents, all deserve adequate emergency services in their community.

This is why the Measure X Community Advisory Board must recommend that the Board of Supervisors dedicate 15% of the Measure X sales tax revenue to fund emergency services in East County.

Thank you.

Appendix: ECCFPD Reduction in Service Press Release, June 10, 2020.



East Contra Costa Fire Protection District News Release

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Release Date: June 10, 2020
For Immediate Release

As Fire Season Arrives, Reduction of Services Ahead for East Contra Costa Fire Protection District

Brentwood, CA — East Contra Costa Fire Protection District (ECCFPD), the local fire agency serving Brentwood and Oakley Discovery Bay, Bethel Island, Knightsen, Byron, Marsh Creek, and Morgan Territory announced today, that due to severe under-funding, it has been forced to take new, urgent measures to maintain its extremely limited operations and keep firefighters safe.

Starting July 1, the Fire District will only send firefighters inside a burning building **if human life is at risk**. Due to the extreme conditions resulting from a 3-station deficit, ECCFPD firefighters are being forced to spread themselves across 3 stations not 6, covering 250 square miles. This is pushing our firefighters to their limits as they respond to twice as many calls for help. Furthermore, the added strain of unbalanced “automatic aid” agreements with other county fire departments are becoming unsustainable. ECCFPD must now focus on containing the fire to the structure involved. Unfortunately, this defensive first operation strategy raises the safety risk factors for families, businesses, and for property within our communities just as the 2020 fire season is getting underway. Also announced by ECCFPD today: all public outreach events and station visits will be eliminated indefinitely.

The safety risk of being under-funded and short 3 fire stations is real and growing, according to ECCFPD Fire Chief Brian Helmick. “In fire emergencies, every second counts. When a fire or emergency strikes, you need help fast. Response times matter. Delayed response times can allow a fire to **double in size** every 30 seconds. But our reality is that East Contra Costa

communities, your homes, businesses, and your families will, on average, face slower responses than national standards recommend, when you call 911.”

“Due to severe under-funding, our firefighters are continually overrun responding to calls, maintaining required training and trying to be active in public education. We must take necessary steps to save lives and provide the safest environment for our workforce, so firefighters are ready and able to answer the call when it comes,” Chief Helmick added.

“These are not steps we want to take – and candidly, they may not be the last. We may have to consider other, even more drastic measures” said Chief Helmick, adding, “The reality is, we have to live within our means and keep our firefighters safe. We are working tirelessly to address our severe funding shortfall, including correcting past oversights and renegotiating developer fees and other fees that should have been put into place decades ago. **We are also practicing full transparency, asking our community for input, and continuously LISTENING in every direction.** Our goal is to find common ground that helps shape a local ballot measure that *our community can support*, authorizing a new, stable and reliable (i.e. guaranteed, sustainable and sufficient) local funding source that secures adequate ECCFPD fire protection in the future and that doesn't take resources away from our public service partners.”

Learn more at www.eccfpd.org.

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ABOUT THE EAST CONTRA COSTA FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT:

The East Contra Costa Fire Protection District (ECCFPD) is a rural-funded fire district that currently operates 3 fire stations and has a 3-station deficit. The District protects a population of more than 128,000 across its 249 square-mile service area. ECCFPD provides firefighting personnel, emergency medical services (basic life support) and fire prevention to the residents and businesses of the cities of Brentwood and Oakley, and unincorporated communities of Discovery Bay, Bethel Island, Knightsen, Byron, Marsh Creek, and Morgan Territory. **Learn more** at www.eccfpd.org or social media via Facebook (East Contra Costa Fire Protection District), Instagram(@east_contra_costa_fire), Twitter (@ECCFPD) or our YouTube channel (East Contra Costa Fire Protection District). ###