

**JANUARY 15, 2020  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. in the Board of Supervisors Chamber, Humboldt County Courthouse, Eureka, with Chair Fennell presiding.

**2. FLAG SALUTE**

**3. ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Stephen Avis, Estelle Fennell, Debra Lake, Robert McPherson, Troy Nicolini, Paul Pitino, and Mike Wilson\*  
Members Absent: Virginia Bass  
Alternates Present: David Couch and Skip Jorgensen  
Alternates Absent: Sue Long  
Staff: Colette Metz Santsche, Executive Officer  
Ryan Plotz, Legal Counsel  
Krystle Heaney, Clerk/Analyst

\*Alternate Member seated in the place of Regular Member

**4. PUBLIC COMMENTS - None**

**5. CONSENT CALENDAR**

**A) Approval of November 20, 2019 Regular Meeting Minutes**

**B) Approval of Meeting Calendar for 2020**

**Motion Pitino/Wilson** to approve consent calendar. Motion passed by 7-0-0 vote.

**6. BUSINESS ITEMS**

**A) Designation of Chair and Vice Chair for 2020**

At the beginning of each calendar year the Commission must designate a Chair and Vice Chair for the year. Minimal discussion was held by the Commission for keeping the status quo.

**Motion McPherson/Nicolini** to designate Estelle Fennell as Chair and Robert McPherson as Vice Chair. Motion passed by 7-0-0 voice vote.

**B) Fiscal Year 2019-20 Mid-Year Financial Report**

Executive Officer Santsche presented the staff report on the Mid-Year Financial Report. Overall, the Commission is on track to be under budget for the fiscal year. The CALAFCO Annual Conference did result in higher than expected expenditures which may result in a budget amendment for Transportation and Travel before the end of the fiscal year. Chair Fennell provided appreciation for managing the budget and presenting the finances clearly to the Commission.

**7. PUBLIC HEARING ITEMS - None**

**8. INFORMATIONAL AND CONTINUING ITEMS**

## **A) Preview of Proposed Rio Dell Fire Protection District Annexation**

Executive Officer Santsche presented the staff report and discussed the multi-year effort that took place to make this application happen. The proposal includes consolidation of several different volunteer fire department response areas including Scotia, Shively, and Redcrest. She highlighted the exclusion of commercial forest lands in State Responsibility Areas (SRAs) based on current fire protection district law and provided a description of the response areas included in the annexation proposal.

An agency referral notice was sent out requesting responses and to date only the City of Rio Dell has responded. They requested that the proposed annexation boundaries include areas most recently annexed by the City which would require detachment from the Fortuna FPD. This would require a tax negotiation process between the two districts.

Executive Officer Santsche also discussed the tax exchange agreement process between the District and County for the annexation. It is expected that the FPD will qualify under county agreement offer number one. She also discussed the terms and conditions outlined in the FPD application.

Commissioner Nicolini expressed his support for this process and clarified that the existing volunteer fire departments would retain their community identity as battalions under the Rio Dell FPD. He also inquired about the 218 process for special assessments in the annexation areas. Executive Officer Santsche stated that since the FPD already satisfied the 218 process when the special assessment was originally put in place, another 218 process for the annexation is not required.

Commissioner Wilson commented on the vast areas of land in Humboldt County that are not covered by fire protection districts. He also commented on the section of the fire code that excludes commercial timberlands from being assessed for fire protection services. He stated that the law is unconscionable and that he would like the Commission to advocate for legislative change. He also hopes that other districts in the county take this reorganization as inspiration for future reorganizations.

Commissioner McPherson asked for clarification on what the Commission would be requesting of the timber companies, as in, how would they pay their fair share for services. Executive Officer Santsche stated that the Rio Dell FPD assessment is based on a fee of \$25 per Unit of Benefit per parcel. Most developed residential parcels are assessed at four Units of Benefit. Undeveloped timber is often assessed at one Unit of Benefit which would be \$25.

Commissioner Lake noted that timber companies are assessed by other special districts including hospital districts so it is reasonable to request that they be included in FPD assessments. She added her support for advocating for legislative change.

Commissioner Nicolini asked whether timber companies are charged twice for fire protection services since they pay into state funds. It was clarified that the law was enacted before SRAs and that SRA fees are no longer being charged.

Commissioner Pitino added his support for seeking legislative change and there was additional discussion about the need for fire protection and emergency response in forested areas. Chair Fennell opened the item for public comments.

Jim Barsanti, Chairman of the Board for the Rio Dell FPD, commented on the need for long-term fire protection services in Scotia and that the FPD is not interested in large profits, they only seek the means to keep providing services to areas in need.

Commissioner Avis inquired about the effects of consolidation on recruitment numbers. Mr. Barsanti replied that they recently lowered their age requirement to 18 which encouraged more volunteers. He also commented that there are those willing to volunteer if they can receive better equipment. The annexation would generate additional revenue to support equipment purchases for the battalions. Rio Dell FPD also started a new program where volunteers are paid per call based on how many years of service they have provided. This encourages more responders and helps offset the costs of responding to calls.

Commissioner Wilson commented on the human need for identification with larger groups. He proposed a potential rebranding of the entire district as a more regional organization while still keeping in touch with individual town identity. Mr. Barsanti responded that the branding on local fire engines will likely not change. He commented that district trainings will rotate through the different response areas so that volunteers can become more familiar with the other areas. He also discussed negotiations with Town of Scotia Company LLC concerning the transfer of Scotia Volunteer Fire Department assets to the Rio Dell FPD.

Commissioner Nicolini inquired about how the Rio Dell FPD will be composed after annexation of other areas. Executive Officer Santsche commented that they looked into elections by divisions but felt that it would be difficult to get enough recruits from more rural areas to fill the board. As such, elections will still be held at large. When a seat becomes open, the district will try to recruit from the other response areas so that communities are represented on the Board.

Commissioner Pitino commented that for the Arcata Volunteer Fire Department, they often get questions as to why they are in other communities such as Bayside or McKinleyville even though those areas are within the department's jurisdiction. He encouraged the District to look into branding more to help address such issues.

Chair Fennell commented further on the diligence of those involved with the reorganization process and expressed appreciation for the District's efforts.

### **B) Status of Expiring Commissioner Terms**

Executive Office Santsche presented the staff report on expiring commissioner terms. She stated that LAFCo will be requesting a meeting of the City Mayors Selection Committee and that a call for nominations request was sent out to all independent special districts in the county. She also gave an overview of the public member selection process which typically includes an ad hoc committee for purposes of interviewing candidates and providing a recommendation to the full Commission. It was requested that an ad hoc committee be formed, which must include one city, one county, and one special district representative. Chair Fennell, Commissioner Avis, and Commissioner Lake volunteered for the committee.

### **C) Status of MSR Preparations**

Executive Officer Santsche presented the staff report for MSR Preparations. She stated that the first part of the year focused on fire services and helping districts with

sustainable practices. The second part of the year will focus on MSR preparations for cities and closely associated special districts.

#### **D) Status of Current and Future Proposals**

Executive Officer Santsche presented the staff report for Current and Future Proposals. The Garberville Sanitary District proposal is now complete and the final invoice was filed. The Rio Dell FPD annexation was discussed earlier in detail and the Peninsula CSD formation recently received a formation time extension. Future proposals include the Creekside Homes subdivision and other large subdivisions.

Commissioner Wilson commented that it would be good to have more details on some of the future projects so that the Commission can have a better understanding of the size and extent of the proposed development. Executive Officer Santsche commented that more details will be included when they are available, typically as part of the environmental review process.

#### **E) AB 1234 Ethics Training through California Special Districts Association (CSDA)**

Executive Officer Santsche presented the Ethics Training staff report. She commented that many commissioners receive this training through their respective agencies but for those who do not, this training is available for free through CSDA.

### **9. EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT**

#### **A) CALAFCO December 13, 2019 Board of Directors Meeting**

Executive Officer Santsche provide a brief introduction for the last CALAFCO Board meeting and invited Commissioner Couch to comment on his attendance. Commissioner Couch gave a brief verbal report of the meeting which included a new employee status for Executive Officer Pamela Miller. There was also discussion of the new CALAFCO membership fees and the legislative agenda. One of the more pressing legislative concerns is the distribution and sale of water outside of a district's boundary. The water district issue is based on current actions being taken in the Paradise area. Since there is no longer a customer base there the water district is seeking to sell water to other areas. Commissioner Couch inquired about a similar situation in Shasta County as a result of the Carr fire.

#### **B) CALAFCO Daily Legislative Report (January 2020)**

Executive Officer Santsche provide a brief overview of the latest legislative report available on the CALAFCO website.

#### **C) CALAFCO CKH Guide (November 2019)**

Executive Officer Santsche provided a brief overview of the new CKH Guide and let the Commission know that print copies are available upon request.

### **10. WRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE - None**

### **11. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:05 a.m. The next regular meeting of the Commission will be held on Wednesday, March 18, 2020, at 9:00 a.m. in the Board of Supervisors Chamber, Humboldt County Courthouse, Eureka.