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Upland fire protection move makes sense

The Editorial Board, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

Posted: Dec. 6, 2016, 4:43 PM

Upland's decision to move ahead with disbanding its Fire Department and contracting with San Bernardino County for fire protection appears to be a reasonable step in trying to regain the city's fiscal footing.

The move would come as a blow to many residents of the community, which has had its own department since 1911. And it might come as a blow to property owners (and, indirectly, to renters) that the move would add a \$148 annual parcel tax to their tax bills.

Interim City Manager Martin Thouvenell says City Hall would save more than \$3.5 million a year with the move — money that could be applied to civic needs like fixing potholed streets. The county's cost to provide fire protection would be roughly \$600,000 to \$1 million cheaper than the city department does it, but the parcel tax — which would go straight to the county Fire District — would lower City Hall's expenditures by another \$3 million a year.

When the **San Bernardino County Fire District** annexes a community into its coverage area, it requires a parcel tax to be part of the deal. In June, the bankrupt city of San Bernardino joined the district, with the same \$148 parcel tax assessed on that city's property owners. (Twentynine Palms annexed into the county district the same day San Bernardino did — it's a trend.)

Upland's City Council, with two members — retiring Mayor Ray Musser and Councilman Glenn Bozar — on their way out, voted 5-0 to begin the application process, and Thouvenell turned in the city's application days later. It seems odd to make such a momentous decision one meeting before a new council is seated, but Thouvenell said the city needed to apply quickly in order to meet the August deadline for getting the parcel tax assessment on November property tax bills.

Thouvenell said he looked into contracting with Cal Fire instead of the county and with the Sheriff's Department for police protection, but neither move would save money.

He expects annexing to the county Fire District to save Upland as much as \$50 million over 10 years, in part because the district will take over the city's fire stations and equipment and maintenance of both. Plus, the city will no longer have to pay into CalPERS for fire personnel.

That makes it a good move.

<http://www.dailybulletin.com/opinion/20161206/upland-fire-protection-move-makes-sense>

Firehouse Subs comes to the rescue of first responders

Rene Ray De La Cruz

Posted: December 6, 2016 1:33 p.m.

HESPERIA - Firehouse Subs was the scene of a five-alarm donation event where the eatery presented local first responders with thousands of dollars in life-saving safety equipment.

The Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation awarded the Hesperia Sheriff's Station and **San Bernardino County Fire Protection District** items such as a large swift water rescue boat and multiple LED flares during a ribbon cutting ceremony at the new restaurant on Thursday in Hesperia.

Co-owners Dan Aparekka and Marsha Chatterjee told the group of first responders, community leaders and city officials they were honored to make the donation on behalf of Firehouse Subs and the many customers who contributed to the foundation.

"This is the first time we tried to do a fundraiser while opening a new store," said Aparekka, at the newest eatery located at the Hesperia Marketplace Shopping Center on Main Street. "We decided to move forward with the fundraiser and the community really came through."

As he stood in front of a large, yellow inflated rescue boat in the parking lot of the restaurant, Aparekka said customer support for the fundraiser pushed the Hesperia store "well past its goal."

Mayor Bill Holland told the group the Sheriff's station received LED flares worth \$2,500. The awarded devices will provide illumination in all weather conditions and are safer than traditional flares.

County Fire received a swift water rescue boat and flotation devices worth \$6,722. The awarded equipment will be used in water rescue missions during torrential rainstorms, severe flooding and flash floods, as well as in area lakes, streams and rivers, allowing the district's urban search and rescue team to reach victims easier and faster.

Aparekka, who said he was thankful for the support of the community and the Hesperia Economic Development Department, added that since the store opened in April he's witnessed first responders putting "their lives on the line" to battle the Pilot and Bluecut fires.

"Thank you for all that you do," said Aparekka as he gestured toward the groups of deputy sheriffs and firefighters gathered near a large fire engine and patrol vehicle.

During the event, Firehouse Subs area representatives Jeff Press and Jim Fick were on hand to cut a dedication cake and serve sandwiches to their guests.

The Hesperia store collects money for the local public safety agencies by selling empty 5-gallon pickle buckets. Donations are also accepted online at firehousesubs.com.

Firehouse Subs Restaurant is at 13325 Main St. in Hesperia. For more information, visit the company website or call 760-983-5512.

<http://www.hesperiastar.com/news/20161206/firehouse-subs-comes-to-rescue-of-first-responders>

San Bernardino man gets stuck in storm drain searching for phone

Doug Saunders, The Sun

Posted: December 6, 2016, 8:47 p.m.

SAN BERNARDINO >> A man was rescued after nearly two hours of being stuck in a storm drain Tuesday night.

Sometime around 6 p.m. firefighters said Ronnie Wayne, 51 of San Bernardino, removed the manhole cover to a storm drain in the parking lot of a business complex in the 600 block of E. Base Line so he could retrieve a cell phone his friend accidentally dropped.

That's when Wayne found himself in his awkward predicament.

Firefighters said he couldn't get out of the storm drain so his friend rushed into a local discount store to purchase some rope.

According to firefighters on the scene Wayne tied the rope around his waist and his friend tried to pull him to safety. But the rope broke sending Wayne further down into the drain.

Firefighters were called to the scene and began rescue operations. Forty minutes after their arrival Wayne was freed from the enclosure and paramedics were checking him for injuries.

Fire officials on scene said Wayne suffered from minor cuts and refused to be transported to the hospital.

<http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20161206/san-bernardino-man-gets-stuck-in-storm-drain-searching-for-phone>

San Bernardino Man Rescued After Getting Stuck in Storm Drain

KTLA

Posted: December 6, 2016, 11:37 p.m.



San Bernardino firefighters rescued a 51-year-old man who became stuck in a manhole after attempting to retrieve his cellphone Tuesday night.

Fire officials received a call just after 7 p.m. of a man stuck in a 6-foot deep manhole in a strip mall parking lot near Baseline Road and G Street, according to the San Bernardino County Fire Department.

The man, identified as Ronnie Wayne in The San Bernardino Sun, said his cell phone fell into the storm drain and he was trying to retrieve it when he became stuck.

Wayne's friends attempted to help him and bought some rope from a local discount store to pull him out but the rope was not strong enough, officials said.

"He was about three or four feet down. We were able to get a rope around him and pull him up out of the manhole," said Batt. Chief Gary Jager. "It was pretty quick and easy rescue."

Wayne was stuck for two hours before firefighters rescued him from the drain. He suffered minor cuts on his back but did not require medical treatment.

<http://ktla.com/2016/12/06/san-bernardino-man-rescued-after-getting-stuck-in-storm-drain/>

Pancake Breakfast Proves Successful in Victorville

Victor Valley News

Posted: December 5, 2016

On Sunday December 4th #SBCoFD hosted a pancake breakfast & public safety fair at fire station 311 in the city of #Victorville. This event was sponsored by the San Bernardino County Professional Firefighters Local 935 and the San Bernardino County Firefighters Association.

Pancake breakfast tradition originated in Canada where they were associated with the ranching industry. Pancakes were cooked in large quantities from a chuck wagon while on the trail. Pancake breakfasts have now been associated with many summer festivals and community events in which volunteers cook for members of the public often for free or for a donation as part of a fundraiser.

This mainly Canadian tradition has evolved in the neighboring United States in which various groups use pancake breakfasts as a means to raise funds for schools, churches, hospitals, charities, non-profits, volunteer fire departments, or civic organizations.

Honored guests today included 1st District Supervisor Robert Lovingood as well as #SantaClaus. A new member of the San Bernardino County Sheriff Search and Rescue Team also joined us. "Brio" a Belgium Malinois is just a few months old has begun her training as a search dog and will be serving the community very soon.

In addition to several of our your off-duty firefighters cooking we had members of our fire marshal's office, office of emergency services emergency communications volunteers & members of County Fire's Old Cajon Crew.

Events like this allow County Fire to strengthen our trust with the community away from an emergency. Events like this also allow us to show members of the community their firehouse, their fire apparatus & discuss County Fire's all risk mission. All proceeds from today's event will be donated to the Victor Valley Rescue Mission and the #SparkofLove Campaign which is currently underway all over Southern California.
<http://www.vvng.com/pancake-breakfast-proves-successful-in-victorville/>

'Prevailer' Swann-Paez, first responders focus of new documentary

Anthony Victoria, Inland Empire Community News

Posted: December 6, 2016



Photo/Loma Linda University Health: San Bernardino shooting 'prevailer' Julie Swann-Paez seen here in a screenshot from the film 'San Bernardino Strong'.

A documentary film—highlighting the story of ‘prevailer’ Julie Swann-Paez and first responder heroics during the Dec. 2 terrorist attack—debuted during a Q & A session at the Loma Linda University Church Tuesday.

The 45-minute film, produced by Loma Linda University Advancement Films, goes in depth into the experiences faced by law enforcement during the attack that killed 14 people and severely injured 22 others at the Inland Regional Center last year. Swann-Paez tells her story of overcoming physical and mental pain.

“I try not to let this define me. I don’t want to be a victim or a survivor,” Swann-Paez responded to Senior Pastor Randy Roberts’ question on how the attack has changed her life. “I’m a prevailer. You can prevail over evil or prevail over obstacles.”

Paez, who works as an environmental specialist for San Bernardino County, was shot multiple times in her pelvis—causing her to lose a lot of blood. According to Loma Linda Medical Center officials featured in the film, 35 medical professionals attended to her that day and saved Swann-Paez’s life by conducting multiple blood transfusions.

Advancement Films’ documentary team followed Swann-Paez’s recovery for several months—providing in-depth coverage of her surgeries and family support. As she explains in the film, Swann-Paez has adopted a strategy of self-care to overcome the adversity of recovering from the attack that took the lives of her colleagues. She’s launched a project that focuses on spreading positivity across the city by attaching “stars of hope” around her neighborhood. The mother of three also likes to take walks to ease her mind. “I hope when people pass by they see [the stars],” she said of the art project. “I hope it makes them think or gives them happy thoughts—things we take for granted, other people are praying for.”

The crowd in attendance also got a first look at the emotions first responders were undergoing during and after the incident. Many including San Bernardino Police Lt. Mike Madden—the first officer on scene at the Inland Regional Center—spoke about the worries and fears they confronted and overcame.

“As a Lieutenant, I primarily perform administrative functions for the police department, so I wasn’t wearing a vest [going into the the Inland Regional Center],” said Madden. “The first thing I did was apologize to my wife and kids when I got home. Apologized?? Why. Needs explaining I just apologized to them. We did a little crying, and decompressed a little bit.”

Psychologists were sent in to consult with first responders in the aftermath of the attacks to help officers and paramedics deal with any trauma or stress they were experiencing.

“It’s getting people in that mind frame that recovery is a process,” explained County Behavioral Health Director Veronica Kelley. “There is no time frame for that. It takes however long it takes. The first thing is to be patient with yourself and have peer support.”

Swann-Paez told the audience that she believes her future is bright. “I will be able to do the things I love,” she said. “It will be OK. I don’t want to ask for too much or take things for granted.”

The film will be aired on KVCR at 7 p.m. on Dec. 14.

<http://iecn.com/prevailor-swann-paez-first-responders-focus-new-documentary/>

San Bernardino bankruptcy plan gets judge’s OK, clearing way for exit

Ryan Hagen, The Sun
Posted: December 6, 2016, 4:20 p.m.

RIVERSIDE >> U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Meredith Jury confirmed San Bernardino’s bankruptcy plan Tuesday, clearing the way for the city to exit bankruptcy after more than four years.

City officials don’t expect the plan — a comprehensive blueprint for how much the city will pay creditors and when — to become effective until March, after at least one more court hearing. But they celebrated Tuesday’s hearing as historic.

The day San Bernardino first voted for bankruptcy, then-Mayor Pat Morris mourned the move as a necessary step but “a stain on our city.”

That stain is now all but gone, though other challenges remain, leaving current city officials optimistic they have the foundation to build a shining city.

“I am elated,” City Attorney Gary Saenz said after Tuesday’s hearing. “I’m so pleased and excited about where the city is now compared to where we were when we filed bankruptcy and what we were able to accomplish and that we now have a solid foundation upon which to build this city. The confirmation should certainly help the rest of the city and the world recognize that San Bernardino is back.”

Jury added her own praise, saying that during the four years she oversaw the case the city had improved not just its finances but its governance, pointing to the voter approval of a new charter and better working relationships among elected officials.

“The city came in in financial chaos, and it’s leaving in much better shape,” she said. “I have lived in this region for 40 years ... and I’ve always said the city needed help. I’m glad it got it.”

San Bernardino will pay many of its creditors far less than they would otherwise be entitled to — for many creditors, just one cent for every dollar they’re owed. But the plan also outlines changes to the structure of the city, some of which — including outsourcing of refuse and fire services, and the passage of a new city charter — have already been implemented.

Saenz estimated that while direct costs of the bankruptcy — attorneys and consultants — had cost more than \$20 million, the city and its taxpayers saved more than \$300 million in debts that were being discharged. A more exact number would be available Wednesday, Saenz said.

San Bernardino filed for bankruptcy in August 2012 with a deficit of more than \$45 million, equivalent to 40 percent of the \$112 million in revenues the city expects this year.

Finding and getting approval for a plan to handle that financial deficit and the city’s long-term deficit in services took longer than many expected — far longer than Detroit, and longer than other California cities like Vallejo and Stockton that filed in recent years.

Jury said the case, which hinged significantly on deals with major creditors, took the right amount of time.

Several of the city’s major creditors added their praise, noting that Detroit in particular had the advantage of outside assistance and an emergency manager empowered to force through decisions.

“Here the city had the challenge of being not only economically viable but politically palatable,” said attorney Vincent J. Marriott, representing bondholders who invested about \$50 million in the city. “As is appropriate, that took time. I think the result today is really a tribute to all the work and thought that went in from the city.”

From early in the case, when it reached an agreement with the California Public Employees’ Retirement System — in that instance, an agreement to pay CalPERS everything it’s owed — the city’s plan depended on a series of agreements with creditors, rather than asking Jury force concessions.

Their final major agreement came just before this hearing, when a mediator helped broker a deal with the Big Independent Cities Excess Pool. BICEP gave its support to the plan and agreed to be responsible for claims against the city in excess of \$1 million.

That left only attorneys representing clients injured by police to argue Tuesday that the case was unfair, but Jury overruled them.

Those attorneys argue that the city had not acted “reasonably” and “in good faith” — two requirements to confirm a bankruptcy plan.

“It took 21 separate phone calls to get (the city’s bankruptcy attorney) Mr. Glassman on the phone, and then when I got him on the phone I got a penny on the dollar — a penny on the dollar for a man who’s going

blind,” said Duane Folke. “... They need to do better, they should do better and they won’t do better unless this court has some kind of fulcrum on the other end.”

Jury said that’s not something the law allows her to do. As unsecured creditors, those with claims against police fall into the same class as others who voted in favor of the plan despite it giving them only 1 cent on the dollar.

Furthermore, every one of the city’s creditors was making significant sacrifices, Jury said — originally excluding CalPERS, but withdrawing the remark after CalPERS’ attorney objected.

“I’m not trying to diminish the injuries to your client,” Jury told Folke. “But I’m also saying at a human level what the police and others have given back do affect the livelihoods of their families. It’s not a dispassionate institutional creditor.”

The police union agreed in 2015 to a deal that includes concessions on leave time from before the bankruptcy filing, legal claims related to the imposition, and retiree health care.

One of the few areas where the city’s plan includes an increase in spending is for police, which Jury agreed they couldn’t afford not to do.

“Anybody that lives in this area knows that the crime problem in San Bernardino is substantial,” she said, pointing to a decrease in the number of police and the aging of equipment. “They have to get safe for people to want to live there.”

The confirmation is a huge step, Mayor Carey Davis said after the hearing, but not the final step.

“This is a monumental day,” Davis said. “The hard work has paid off. We have a lot left to do, but this clears the way for us to do much of that work.”

The city’s next court date, over the details of the confirmation order, is Jan. 27.

<http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20161206/san-bernardino-bankruptcy-plan-gets-judges-ok-clearing-way-for-exit>

Battered San Bernardino is one step closer to exiting years-long bankruptcy

Paloma Esquivel, LA Times
Posted: December 6, 2016, 6:20 p.m.

After four long, painful years, San Bernardino will soon emerge from bankruptcy.

A federal judge on Tuesday said she would approve the city’s plan to exit bankruptcy, marking a major step toward the end of the process for San Bernardino.

“This is a very important day for the city,” U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Meredith Jury said. “The city came in in financial chaos and it’s leaving in a much better place.”

Approval of the city's plan to pay its creditors and restructure its finances was touted by officials as the start of a new era for the battered Inland Empire city, even as it faces a daunting list of challenges to truly right itself.

"We want our residents to know, and we want people who would invest in the city ... to know we've cleared this burden and we're ready to do business," City Manager Mark Scott said.

The plan includes a list of agreements with employees, retirees, municipal bondholders and many others.

The confirmation order is tentative until being made official, which Jury said would be done within 30 days. "Nobody is walking away from this proceeding without having taken some kind of hit," Jury said.

The plan, the broad outlines of which have been known for some time, preserves pension benefits for employees and retirees, though employees will have to contribute more to their pension plans and benefits were modified for new employees.

Retirees will lose some health benefits they were promised.

Meanwhile, some bondholders and unsecured creditors will be paid only 1% of what they were owed.

The vast majority of the city's creditors have agreed to the plan.

But during Tuesday's hearing, a number of lawyers for clients with federal civil rights lawsuits against the city that allege police abuse argued forcefully against it.

Those clients stand to get 1 cent on the dollar for the first \$1 million in judgments if the city is found liable. Insurance would cover the remaining amount.

City representatives have argued that any savings from their compromises with creditors would go to rebuilding the city's depleted infrastructure and improving municipal services.

In issuing her ruling, Jury noted that the city must be able to offer adequate services — particularly those for public safety — if it is to improve.

"Anybody who lives in this area knows that the crime problem in San Bernardino is significant," she said. "They have to be able to get safe in order for people to want to live there."

City Atty. Gary Saenz said the city's creditors, employees and others made significant compromises for the plan to move forward.

They "realized that the city is in bankruptcy, has no money, and is in an extremely difficult situation," he said. And they "gave up much to help the city get to a place where we could have a plan that would help the city survive."

San Bernardino has been in bankruptcy since summer 2012. Over the last four years, other municipalities have entered and emerged. Stockton filed bankruptcy in 2012 and exited last year. Detroit filed in 2013 and exited the following year.

Years of cuts to public services and struggles to raise revenue in the impoverished city have battered its infrastructure and taken a heavy toll on its ability to meet basic public needs and attract new economic opportunities.

The bankruptcy process and cost-cutting efforts in years prior mean the city is now a very different place than it was just a few years ago.

Its storied Fire Department has been outsourced to the county and trash collection, recycling and street sweeping services have been contracted out.

City staff has been cut by hundreds, while street repair, libraries, parks, community centers and other services have been severely neglected. The Police Department's staffing has been cut 30%, hampering its ability to deal with a recent surge in homicides.

"The public has had to put up with a lot," Scott said. "Nothing would make us happier than to get back to where we're serving them at a higher level."

But in a city that is among the poorest in the nation, officials say raising revenue will continue to be a major challenge.

The city declared bankruptcy having been devastated by the effects of the Great Recession and housing crisis, which left it grappling with huge unemployment rates, one of the highest foreclosure rates in the nation and plummeting property and sales tax revenues.

Those tax revenues have improved moderately in recent years but are unlikely to do so significantly in the near future, officials have said.

Although city officials have explored raising various sales and other taxes to increase revenue, they concluded that the city's poor residents could be overly burdened by such increases and voters may not approve them. The city has taken steps to raise fees, which do not require voter approval.

To boost the city's economic foundation, officials hope to attract new development. But challenges including the city's high violent crime rate, difficulty in providing needed services and the well-publicized bankruptcy itself have made that difficult.

On Tuesday, officials expressed hope that the impending exit from bankruptcy would help it begin to address some of those issues.

Voters also recently approved a new charter that restructured the city's complex governmental structure.

In issuing her ruling, Jury sounded an optimistic note and congratulated the city's leadership. The city's top positions are now filled by different people from when the bankruptcy process started. Four years ago, she said, city officials appeared to be working at odds with each other.

"I've lived in this community for 40 years," Jury told the packed room of attorneys and city officials who gathered for the momentous hearing. "I've always said, 'that city needs help.' And it got it."

<http://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-ln-san-bernardino-bankruptcy-20161206-story.html>

Deadly Oakland warehouse fire cause may be faulty refrigerator

Harry Harris and Rick Hurd, San Jose Mercury News

Posted: December 7, 2016, 8:05 a.m.

OAKLAND — The fifth and perhaps final morning of recovery efforts dawned Wednesday with more than 90 percent of the rubble searched, and the cause of the catastrophic warehouse fire that has killed 36 people coming into focus.

Authorities still have not given an official cause, and they bypassed their normal 6 a.m. press conference, as approximately one-third of the world and national media exited the scene. Investigators were focusing on a swath of electrical appliances, particularly a refrigerator in the back of the warehouse.

Of the 36 victims, 35 have been identified. A new list of names was released Tuesday night, and authorities indicated it will take DNA samples and additional time to identify the 36th.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, engineers, firefighters and other city employees remained at the scene Wednesday morning. A crane took down a corner wall piece by piece on Tuesday night, allowing the final 10 percent of the building to be combed. That search continued past 6 a.m. Wednesday.

City officials were expected to have a press conference at the city's emergency operations center later Wednesday, but they have not announced a time.
