

**Letter Dated November 23, 2015  
from the San Bernardino  
County Fire Protection District  
with City of Needles  
Resolution No. 2015-49**

**Attachment 2**

# SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT



COUNTY OF SAN BERNARDINO

**ADMINISTRATIVE HEADQUARTERS**  
157 West Fifth Street, Second Floor • San Bernardino, CA 92415-0451  
(909) 387-5974 • Fax (909) 387-5542

**MARK A. HARTWIG**  
Fire Chief/Fire Warden

November 23, 2015

Kathleen Rollings-McDonald  
Executive Officer  
San Bernardino LAFCO  
215 North "D" Street, Suite #204  
San Bernardino, CA. 92415

**RE: Request for Reduction of Fees for forthcoming City of Needles  
application/consideration**

Dear Kathleen,

The City of Needles council recently voted through a resolution to pursue a potential annexation into the San Bernardino County Fire District. The resolution was vague and will be finalized on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015 in relation to the desired approach. This in turn will be followed by a much more defined resolution on behalf of the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

As part of the annual budgeting process for the City of Needles, they identified only a surplus of approximately \$10,000 as of the start of the FY. As such, there is a very high likelihood that the San Bernardino County Fire District will eventually pay a significant portion, if not all of the required fees for consideration of a LAFCO application process.

In factoring the costs associated with such application, we came to a collective application price of \$33,960.

Since this was an unbudgeted and frankly unexpected expenditure on the Fire Districts behalf, I would respectfully request any consideration to a fees reduction as we have discussed.

**GREGORY C. DEVEREAUX**  
Chief Executive Officer

Board of Supervisors  
**ROBERT A. LOVINGOOD**.....First District      **JAMES RAMOS**.....Third District  
**JANICE RUTHERFORD**.....Second District      **GARY C. OVITT**.....Fourth District  
**JOSIE GONZALES** ..... Fifth District

The San Bernardino County Fire District is prepared to pay the following as previously outlined:

Sphere Expansion:	\$5,000
Annexation (Single Maximum Fee)	\$7,500
Legal Deposit	\$1,150
Environmental Review	\$750
Legal Ad in-lieu of individual notice	\$1,000
This should total to:	\$15,400

**Proudly Serving:**

*City of Adelanto  
Crest Forest FPD  
City of Fontana  
City of Grand Terrace  
City of Hesperia  
City of Needles  
City of Victorville  
Town of Yucca Valley*

**And the Communities of:**

Ainboy  
Angelus Oaks  
Baker  
Baldwin Lake  
Baldy Mesa  
Barton Flats  
Big River  
Black Meadow Landing  
Bloomington  
Cedar Glen  
Crest Park  
Deer Lodge Park  
Devore  
El Mirage  
Fawnskin  
Forest Falls  
Green Valley Lake  
Harvard  
Havasu Landing  
Helendale  
Hinkley  
Iron Mountain  
Johnson Valley  
Joshua Tree  
Lake Arrowhead  
Landers  
Lucerne Valley  
Ludlow  
Lytle Creek  
Mentone  
Mt. Baldy  
Mt. Home Village  
Mt. Pass  
Mt. View Acres  
Muscoy  
Oak Hills  
Oro Grande  
Panorama Heights  
Park Moabi  
Phelan  
Pinon Hills  
Pioneer Town  
Red Mountain  
San Antonio Heights  
Searles Valley/Trona  
Sky Forest  
Spring Valley Lake  
Summit Valley  
Windy Acres  
Wonder Valley  
Wrightwood

Again, Thank you for consideration in this matter.

Respectfully,

  
John R. Chamberlin

Division Chief

San Bernardino County Fire District

760-365-3335

RESOLUTION NO. 2015-49

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE  
CITY OF NEEDLES, CALIFORNIA, ACCEPTING THE  
RECOMMENDATION OF THE FIRE SERVICES TASK FORCE  
AND DIRECTING STAFF TO BEGIN THE APPLICATION PROCESS  
FOR ANNEXATION INTO THE COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT  
FOR CONTINUED FIRE PROTECTION SERVICES

WHEREAS, on January 5, 2015, the San Bernardino County Fire Department notified the City of Needles that the annual cost of fire protection services would be increasing from approximately \$620,000 to approximately \$1.2 million due to the elimination of their limited term firefighter program which provided low cost firefighter positions (lower pay and no benefits) while allowing the limited terms to gain valuable experience; and

WHEREAS, on July 14, 2015, the City Council appointed community members to serve on a Fire Services Task Force to research options for continued fire protection services within the City of Needles, including continuing the relationship with the County Fire Department; seeking an alternative fire service provider; annexation into the San Bernardino County Fire District; or creation of a municipal volunteer/paid-call fire department; and

WHEREAS, the Task Force met on three occasions during which significant reports and other information were provided on many components of operating a local fire department all of which was explored, discussed, and debated and all questions were answered by staff; and input was received from local emergency services personnel, citizens and business owners; and

WHEREAS, by majority consensus, the Fire Services Task Force recommended that the City of Needles begin the necessary steps towards annexation into the County Fire District, and, recognizing the need for community involvement, further recommended the implementation of a reserve firefighters, paid-call and/or explorer program to enhance service and provide local residents the opportunity for involvement in their fire department.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the City of Needles, California, hereby accepts the recommendation of the Fire Services Task Force as outlined in their written report dated October 16, 2015 attached hereto and incorporated herein and directs the City Manager to begin the application process with the San Bernardino County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) for annexation into the San Bernardino County Fire District.

PASSED, APPROVED AND ADOPTED at a regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Needles, California, held on the 27th day of October, 2015, by the following roll call vote:

AYES: Councilmembers Frazier, Williams, Darcy and Richardson

NOES: Councilmembers Gudmundson and Evans

ABSENT: None

ABSTAIN: None

Cheryl/council/resolution - fire services task force recommendation - accept (Oct '15)

Resolution No. 2015-49  
(Page Two)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mayor

(SEAL)

ATTEST:   
\_\_\_\_\_  
City Clerk

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
City Attorney

October 16, 2015

To: Mayor Paget, M.D., Council members, Rick Daniels, City Manager

From: Michael Wright, representing the Fire Service Task Force Committee

Subject: Fire Service Task Force Committee recommendation of Fire Services for City of Needles, California.

The Fire Service Task Force Committee met three times in which there were many issues explored, discussed and debated. The committee was facilitated by Rick Daniels, City Manager. Committee members had the opportunity to review the cities' fire service history which brought us up to our present situation. It was determined the city had a few options to investigate.

- 1.) The city could maintain their contractual relationship with San Bernardino County Fire.
- 2.) The city could seek an alternative fire service provider, i.e. Mohave Valley Fire Dept.
- 3.) The city could be annexed into San Bernardino County Fire District.
- 4.) The city could create it's own fire department.

Obviously, continuing the current contract with San Bernardino County Fire is not feasible. The alternative to the current contract, which was closer to what the city could afford, (\$612,000), was also a consideration. This model would result in a staffing reduction of one firefighter, but would provide a full Paramedic Engine company staffed. This staffing level is equivalent to Mohave Valley Fire Department.

It was estimated that contracting with Mohave County Fire Department would cost the city \$1.2 million to staff a fire station here in Needles.

Annexation into the County Fire District would cost a permanent transfer of \$582,000 from the total property tax collected. A parcel tax up to a maximum of \$171 could be levied to decrease the cities' cost. Level of service is maintained and may be enhanced by two firefighters in the future.

The Paid Call/Volunteer, city fire service model presented an unrealistic financial burden. When a rough draft budget was formulated, it became clear the city does not have the resources to fund it's own agency. There is legitimate concern of homeowners and business insurance rates being significantly raised or even cancelled. The city made substantial outreach efforts to draw interest in a PCF/Volunteer fire agency and determine the size of an eligible pool of candidates. (Please see attached list of agencies notified.) At this point there is a total of zero applications received.

Many hours were spent discussing these options. We were privileged to have guest speakers and concerned citizens attend the meetings. Mike Lowenthal, owner/operations manager of Baker Ambulance spoke to the committee to inform us of what roll his services play in emergency response. Division Chief John Chamberlin and Battalion Chief Tom Marshall from San Bernardino County Fire attended meetings and were willing to clarify many questions the committee had regarding the service they provide. Janet Jernigan, a local business owner provided insight into the possible scenarios regarding insurance issues. Local resident Barry Menges, provided valuable fire service details and perspective.

At our last meeting we again heard input from citizens, local business owners and Chief Chamberlin. We, the committee, were charged with coming to an agreement as to how the city of Needles could best be served with fire protection. Taking into consideration cost, level of service, response time and availability, I.S.O. and insurance consequences, availability and reliability of resources, community involvement and local control, we came to an unanimous, collective decision.

The Fire Service Task Force committee recommends the the city of Needles begin the necessary steps toward annexation into the County Fire District. The committee also recognizes the need for community involvement and would recommend implementing a reserve firefighter, paid-call and/or explorer program to enhance service and provide local residents the opportunity for involvement. The citizens participation is welcomed, encouraged and would be initiated by Chief Chamberlin and Chief Marshall.

Throughout California and much of the nation, the regional approach to fire services has proven to be a beneficial trend.

The committee agrees this would be the most cost effective route for securing ongoing fire protection services for the city. While it does require the permanent transfer of funds, a parcel tax would relieve some of the cost. Even without a parcel tax levee the cost is less than the city is currently paying. The level of service would remain, with the possible enhancement of adding two firefighter positions which Chief Chamberlin in requesting. Coverage of the city would remain intact with the existing mutual aid agreement. The city currently has an I.S.O. rating of five (5) which is unlikely to change. The County Fire District has the ability to provide many emergency response resources as well as human resources which is a cost the city would not have to incur. The San Bernardino County Fire District will have complete financial responsibility. Financial, operational, logistical and supportive resources will be provided by the fire district relieving the city of other costly obligations.



**Fire District**  
**Division 5 – South Desert**

**Mark A. Hartwig**  
Fire Chief/Fire Warden

**Dave Benfield**  
Division Chief

January 5, 2015

Rick Daniels, City Manager  
City of Needles  
817 3<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Needles, CA 92362

Mr. Daniels:

Currently the City's contract with San Bernardino County Fire (County Fire) pays for six limited-term firefighters (LT's) and other costs. The LT's work a schedule like full-time firefighters, but they have much lower pay and no benefits. The LT's are allowed to work a maximum of three years for County Fire as LT's to prevent County Fire from violating labor laws.

The original vision in hiring LT's under this Limited Term Firefighter Program (LT Program) was both to implement low-cost firefighter positions, and to allow LT's to gain valuable experience so that they could ultimately become full-time firefighters with County Fire or other organizations. However, under this program, County Fire has experienced great difficulty maintaining staffing levels. As such, County Fire will begin phasing out the LT Program, and will be replacing LT's with full-time firefighters.

The time frame for this transition is not yet known and will depend heavily on revenues. This will impact the City of Needles greatly, as County Fire will no longer offer a low-cost option for firefighters. The phase-out of the LT Program will definitely increase contract costs drastically. Currently the contract cost for the City of Needles is approximately \$620,000. If we were to hypothetically (today) replace the LT's with full-time firefighters, contract costs would increase by approximately \$600,000. My intent in this letter is to advise you of County Fire's future staffing plans so that the City of Needles can adequately plan for the future increase in expenses, or explore other options. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Respectfully,

Dave Benfield  
Division Chief