



NEWS



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Signs point toward Victorville reactivating city fire department

Shea Johnson , Daily Press

Posted: January 18, 2018 , 5:47 p.m.



San Bernardino County Fire Station 315 was built in 2008, but never fully staffed. It was promised to open had Measure K passed in November. County Fire and Victorville have discussed alternatives to bring it alive as part of talks about the department's own future in the city. [James Quigg, Daily Press]

VICTORVILLE — San Bernardino County Fire was welcomed this week to submit its second “best and final offer” to the city for handling services beyond June 30, when its contract officially expires. But elected officials were still proceeding with plans to reactivate a city-run department.

Mayor Pro Tem Jim Cox was clear to temper Tuesday evening that an absolute decision had not been made, a suggestion that the Council still maintained a collective open mind to renewing a contract with County Fire. Yet signs have begun to point to Victorville returning to a city fire department for the first time in a decade, which city officials said would save money over time.

By a 4-1 vote, the Council agreed to the most clear-cut indication to date that the front-runner was the in-house option: It directed staff to “begin steps to implement” a city-run fire department and approved job descriptions, an organizational chart and a budget amendment necessary to prepare for such an overhaul.

City officials have stressed that the possibility it would pivot away from County Fire, which has performed fire services here for 10 years, was triggered as only a matter of cost management and never an indictment on the quality of the county's operations.

The looming decision spurred high-ranking county officials, however, to address the dais and urge elected leaders to allow ongoing talks to finish and consider outstanding questions raised Tuesday.

Yet city officials also noted the need to make some headway now on the County Fire alternative as they stared down a short timeline to enact their in-house plan.

“I believe that every trip starts with the first step, every venture starts with the first step, and the longer that we delay,” Cox explained, “the longer that it's going to take this city to accomplish almost anything.

“On the other hand, it is clear that very serious questions have been raised and comments have been made that deserve answers.”

Many of the key points that the county sought for officials to reconsider were raised by Asst. Fire Chief Dan Mejia, who oversees Victorville operations and rattled off the department's accomplishments in a city that sees more calls for service than any other under County Fire's purview besides San Bernardino.

In the past decade, the city's yearly calls for service have skyrocketed from 12,000 to 20,000, but County Fire's budget has increased just 5 to 6 percent from \$11 million to \$13.5 million, Mejia noted.

The brunt of spikes in public safety costs felt by the city have come from the Sheriff's Department. Its contract will have increased 300 percent between 2001 and 2020, city officials previously said.

Mejia questioned how a city-run department might replicate County Fire's regional network or creativity in securing front-line equipment — queued capital upgrades still need to be addressed — or its specialized personnel who have expertise in Hazmat, rescues, investigations, active-shooter situations and paramedicine. A 24-page city staff report made available before Tuesday's meeting laid out the findings of a consultant study that analyzed several elements of a would-be transition, including staffing and recruiting.

The study came on the heels of an earlier report conducted by consultant Citygate Associates, LLC, but also factored in an implementation plan, city officials said.

"I think altogether what you're going to find in the report, which actually validates the cost findings in the Citygate report," interim City Manager Keith Metzler said, "is that on an annual basis, over the first five-year plan, there's about a 5.2 percent savings with a positive net present value of about \$3.8 million and that's while funding the necessary upgrades to the equipment."

Metzler said there would be roughly \$4.8 million in upgrades within five years and that savings to the city would exceed 5.2 percent beginning in year six.

But even with savings, he said, a city-run fire department could not mirror the extras that would have been available had voters last November passed the half-percent sales tax, Measure K, which projected \$8.5 million yearly in new money to use for fire and public safety services.

"It does not bring that supplemental form of revenue that we've been looking for," he summed, "to help solve the large equation of needing funds to keep up with the pace of cost of service for fire."

County Fire Chief Mark Hartwig suggested that conversations between the county and city could still be fruitful, noting some of the various workarounds that the two parties have already discussed.

Those include a drop in costs to the city if the county were to assume County Fire unfunded retirement liabilities equaling roughly \$33 million. Another bit of ongoing talks had considered how to open Fire Station 315 on Eucalyptus Street, which was built in 2008 but never fully staffed.

City officials had promised to open the station as part of its Measure K campaign. Hartwig revealed that the two sides had since discussed the impact of shifting staff and equipment from Station 314 on Silica Drive to Station 315, then serving Station 314 out of Spring Valley Lake, a county area.

"We had a partnership with the city for 10 years," he said, "and we value that partnership."

County Fire had earlier submitted a one-year contract offer as its "best and final" proposal upon request from the city, but Victorville leaders were apparently told there was another offer to be made.

If the city does opt to continue utilizing County Fire services, it has the choice to pursue a contractual deal, as is set to expire, or a permanent agreement — an annexation that fire officials say would improve services and

drive down costs, but would also be accompanied by a \$153 yearly parcel tax. Cox has also lamented the loss of local control.

If Victorville does re-activate its fire department, city officials said they plan to sign a contract with County Fire spanning July 1 to Dec. 31, the first half of the next fiscal year, to assist during the transition.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20180118/signs-point-toward-victorville-reactivating-city-fire-department>

Firefighters stop spread of flames from garage to house

Sara Kernan, Hi-Desert Star

Posted: January 18, 2018 1:05 pm



A San Bernardino County firefighter faces off with flames consuming a garage next to a house in Landers just after midnight Monday. Firefighters were able to keep the flames from spreading.

LANDERS — Flames blazed through the early morning in Landers as a structure fire destroyed an outbuilding on Lutz Lane north of Reche Road Monday.

Supervised by a battalion chief, medic engines from the **county fire stations** in Yucca Valley, Yucca Mesa and Joshua Tree along with a water tender usually stationed at Twentynine Palms responded to the call at 12:50 a.m., with medic engine 42 from Yucca Mesa the first on scene.

The fire burned a two-car garage on a property that also had trailers and buildings nearby, Capt. Jason Moore said. The burning garage was between the house and a semi-trailer, and the crews saved both of those structures. The rest were engulfed in flames.

“It took a long time to mop it up — about an hour for the fire to be under control,” Moore reported.

It was an estimated three hours before it was fully cleaned up and it took the crews several hours to overhaul the property, Moore said.

The crews also faced the additional challenge of the closest hydrant being 1,300 feet away. They were able to put a water on the fire continuously despite the additional hurdle, Moore said.

The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

http://www.hidesertstar.com/news/article_4686f2ee-fc93-11e7-9893-bfdd73efe493.html

Hesperia man and his dog killed in collision with tractor-trailer

Kevin Trudgeon, Daily Press

Posted: January 18, 2018, 10:43 a.m.



A man and his dog were killed when the Hyundai SUV were traveling in crashed into a tractor- trailer on Eleventh Avenue in Hesperia on Wednesday evening. [Submitted Photo]

HESPERIA — A man and his dog were killed after crashing into a tractor-trailer here Wednesday evening. According to authorities, the crash was reported at approximately 7:58 p.m. on 11th Avenue, south of Sultana Street, and involved a 2005 Hyundai SUV and a 2012 Kenworth tractor-trailer.

Based on evidence at the scene, authorities believe Manuel Gomez, 73, of Hesperia was traveling north on 11th Avenue in the Hyundai as Joaquin Bernal, 30, of Hesperia, was backing his tractor-trailer into a residential property. Authorities said Gomez failed to stop for the blocked roadway and collided with the tractor-trailer, nearly severing the roof of the Hyundai in the process.

Emergency personnel from the **San Bernardino County Fire** Department and Hesperia Sheriff's Station were dispatched to the scene and found the Gomez was trapped in his vehicle, along with his adult Pit Bull-mix dog, authorities said.

“Gomez was pronounced deceased at the scene by rescue personnel,” sheriff's officials said. “Despite efforts from first responders to free the dog from the vehicle, the (was) dog suffering from major injuries (and) Hesperia Animal Control units were requested to the scene also to assist. To prevent further suffering to the dog, ACO Officers euthanized the animal while still trapped inside the vehicle.”

Both Gomez and the dog had to be extricated from the vehicle, which took several hours, and 11th Avenue was shut down in both directions from Sultana to Lime Street until approximately 3 a.m. Bernal was not injured and was cooperating with the investigation.

The Hesperia Sheriff's Stations Major Accident Investigation Team is conducting the investigation into the collision and it is unclear whether alcohol or speed contributed. Anyone with information is urged to contact Deputy Jeremy Deberg or Sgt. Doug Hubbard at 760-941-1500. Callers wishing to remain anonymous may call the We-Tip Hotline at 1-800-782-7463 or visit www.wetip.com.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20180118/hesperia-man-and-his-dog-killed-in-collision-with-tractor-trailer>