



JIM DESMOND
SUPERVISOR, FIFTH DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: July 16, 2024

02

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: ADDRESSING INEQUITIES IN FIRE PROTECTION IN COMMUNITIES SERVED BY UNDERFUNDED FIRE DISTRICTS (DISTRICTS: 1, 2 & 5)

OVERVIEW

The County of San Diego has made significant strides in promoting equitable fire service to ensure that all communities, regardless of socioeconomic status or geographic location, receive exceptional fire protection and emergency response services. One of the key initiatives has been the allocation of resources and funding to underserved-rural communities that have historically faced disparities in fire protection and emergency medical services.

The County of San Diego has prioritized collaboration among the various fire districts to ensure a high level of fire preparedness. By fostering a more inclusive and responsive fire service, the County of San Diego is working towards a future where all its residents can feel secure and protected from fire-related hazards and receive emergency medical services.

Fire districts currently receive a portion of property tax collected by the County of San Diego. Fire districts that serve the unincorporated communities rely on this tax allocation for their annual budget. Districts formed after Proposition 13 was passed in 1978 receive a lower percentage of their district's property tax revenue.

The impact of Proposition 13 on fire districts in San Diego County varies significantly depending on whether the districts were formed before or after its passage in 1978. Fire districts formed after Prop 13 face substantial financial challenges due to the constraints on property tax revenue growth. These newer districts are limited in their ability to generate sufficient funding through property taxes, as they have a significantly lower share of tax base and growth allocation negotiated at the time of formation. Consequently, they often struggle to secure adequate resources to meet their operational needs. To address these challenges, newer districts must rely more heavily on alternative funding sources, such as grants, special assessments, and community fundraising efforts, to bridge the gap and provide effective fire protection services.

SUBJECT: ADDRESSING INEQUITIES IN FIRE PROTECTION IN COMMUNITIES SERVED BY UNDERFUNDED FIRE DISTRICTS (DISTRICTS: 1, 2 & 5)

The Valley Center Fire Protection District (VCFPD) and the Deer Springs Fire Protection District (DSFPD), both formed after 1978, only receive approximately 2% of allocated tax revenue within their boundaries. The average fire district receives 12.2%. Other comparable districts receive 5-7%. This inequity in tax allocation has created a situation where VCFPD and DSFPD are scrapping by. While the firefighters in these districts do a lot with less, these fire districts are relatively understaffed, under equipped, and have longer response times. By studying the impact of changing VCFPD and DSFPD's base tax allocations from their current, and approximate, 2% to 6%, to align with the 6% rate for the San Diego County Fire Protection District (SDCFPD), we can consider addressing the funding inequities in our unincorporated areas.

There are other communities and populations within SDCFPD that also should be included in a review to determine if there are any remaining service gaps. In particular, the Pauma Valley area has historically been served by state resources instead of SDCFPD resources, and the level of service in East Otay Mesa and Jamul should also be considered.

Additional steps must be taken to enhance fire protection and emergency medical services in underserved communities. Today's action directs the Chief Administrative Officer to perform a feasibility study to increase funding for fire protection and emergency medical services, with a focus on addressing tax allocation inequities in the unincorporated area.

**RECOMMENDATIONS
SUPERVISOR JIM DESMOND**

Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to review the level of resources, funding and sustainability of fire protection in the communities of Valley Center, Deer Springs, Pauma Valley and other parts of the San Diego County Fire Protection District and return to the Board of Supervisors with recommendations within 90 days, including a negotiated change to the property tax allocation to VCFPD and DSFPD.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

San Diego County's efforts to promote equitable fire service have significantly enhanced protection and emergency response across all communities, irrespective of socioeconomic status or location. By directing resources and funding to historically underserved areas, the County has worked to bridge gaps in fire service access. Investments in modern equipment, comprehensive training, and increased fire station presence aim to improve safety and reduce response times, particularly benefiting vulnerable populations. Community outreach and inclusive planning further ensure that the diverse needs of all residents are met, fostering a more secure and resilient county.

SUBJECT: ADDRESSING INEQUITIES IN FIRE PROTECTION IN COMMUNITIES SERVED BY UNDERFUNDED FIRE DISTRICTS (DISTRICTS: 1, 2 & 5)

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This proposed action contributes to the County of San Diego’s Sustainability Goal of protecting the health and well-being of all San Diegan residents. Enhancing public safety is of paramount priority for the County’s more vulnerable residents.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with today’s recommendation. There may be fiscal impacts associated with future related recommendations which staff would return to the Board with identified funding source for consideration and approval.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

The County of San Diego has made significant strides in promoting equitable fire service to ensure that all communities, regardless of socioeconomic status or geographic location, receive exceptional fire protection and emergency response. One of the key initiatives has been the allocation of resources and funding to underserved-rural communities that have historically faced disparities in fire protection and emergency medical services.

The County of San Diego has prioritized collaboration among the various fire districts to ensure a high level of fire preparedness. This regional approach allows for the sharing of resources and personnel during large-scale emergencies, ensuring that even the most resource-strapped areas, such as rural regions, can receive timely and effective assistance. The County also emphasizes the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives in planning and decision-making processes, seeking input from community leaders and residents to address specific needs and concerns. By fostering a more inclusive and responsive fire service, the County of San Diego is working towards a future where all its residents can feel secure and protected from fire-related hazards.

Additional steps must be taken to enhance fire protection in underserved communities.

Fire districts currently receive a portion of property tax collected by the County of San Diego. Fire districts that serve the unincorporated communities rely on this tax allocation for their annual budget. Districts formed after Proposition 13 was passed in 1978 receive a lower percentage of their district’s property tax revenue.

The impact of Proposition 13 on fire districts in San Diego County varies significantly depending on whether the districts were formed before or after its passage in 1978. Fire districts established

SUBJECT: ADDRESSING INEQUITIES IN FIRE PROTECTION IN COMMUNITIES SERVED BY UNDERFUNDED FIRE DISTRICTS (DISTRICTS: 1, 2 & 5)

before Prop 13 typically have more stable and predictable funding because they were able to set their base tax allocation and receive higher growth rates that established a financial baseline prior to the imposition of the property tax cap. These older districts often have established infrastructure, better equipment, and more comprehensive services as a result of having secured their revenue streams before the restrictions were put in place.

In contrast, fire districts formed after Prop 13 face substantial financial challenges due to the constraints on property tax revenue growth. These newer districts are limited in their ability to generate sufficient funding through property taxes, as they have a significantly lower base revenue and growth allocation due to the proposition, subsequent legislation and low negotiated property tax exchange and growth allocation. Consequently, they often struggle to secure adequate resources to meet their operational needs. To address these challenges, newer districts must rely more heavily on alternative funding sources, such as grants, special assessments, and community fundraising efforts, to bridge the gap and provide effective fire protection services.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed action supports the Equity Initiative of the County of San Diego's 2024-2029 Strategic Plan by ensuring equitable fire service regionwide.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Desmond". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jim" and last name "Desmond" clearly distinguishable.

JIM DESMOND
Supervisor, Fifth District

ATTACHMENTS

N/A