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October 3, 2020

President Chavez and Members of the Board of Supervisors (BOS)
County of Santa Clara
70 West Hedding Street
San Jose, CA 95110

Re: Dissolution of the South Santa Clara County Fire District

We are writing this letter regarding the agenda items 13 through 18, coming before you for consideration at the October 6, 2020 regularly scheduled meeting, which directly or indirectly impact the fire services in the City of Morgan Hill and the South County region.

We are especially concerned about the items 16 through 18, seeking your approval to initiate dissolution of the South Santa Clara County Fire District (SSCCFD) and the Los Altos Hills County Fire District (LAHCFD).

On August 27, 2020, the management audit reports of the LAHCFD and the SSCCFD were received by the Finance and Government Operations Committee (FGOC) chaired by Chairperson Cindy Chavez and Vice Chairperson Dave Cortese. Chairperson Chavez requested that the Office of County Counsel provide a formal evaluation of the audit prior to BOS consideration in October 2020, and asked County Executive Office to conduct an outreach meeting with the stakeholders in the South County region, including the City of Morgan Hill, ahead of BOS considering these items. Vice Chairperson Cortese requested, in addition to the Board receiving the audit reports, Board agendaize consideration of prospective consolidation of the fire districts as a discussion item.

On September 17, 2020, the Housing, Land Use, Environment, and Transportation Committee (HLUET) received both audit reports and forwarded to the BOS for consideration.

The BOS has yet to receive the management audit reports but are already asked to take actions to begin dissolution of the fire districts without any discussion. Further, these actions are being recommended without any community or stakeholder input or outreach, especially after being

directed to do so by FGOC committee chair, and amidst the most historic wildfire season our State and region has ever endured.

More specifically, to SSCCFD:

1. Management audit report does not suggest consolidation of the SSCCFD with the Central Fire Protection District, in fact it suggests BOS to consider increasing revenues to the District by either a revenue measure or allocating Prop. 172 public safety sales tax dollars, strengthening and formalizing of the agreements between Morgan Hill and the SSCCFD, and increasing coordination between the three south county fire agencies (SSCCFD, Morgan Hill, and Gilroy). The mutual aid and cooperative model is further recommended in the [Standards of Coverage Assessment](#), conducted jointly by the three South County fire agencies in November 2019.
2. SSCCFD contracts with CALFIRE for services, thereby providing it direct access to CALFIRE resources, bypassing the mutual aid request process. We believe this arrangement is already cost effective and provides equal levels of service for lower costs. Consolidation of this district would likely increase costs and reduce level of services.
3. Morgan Hill currently funds 50% of the Engine 67 at Station 1 and contributes to the maintenance and upkeep of the apparatus. CALFIRE owns the station where engine 67 is housed. Any consolidation efforts would prevent the District from utilizing Station 1 and further impacting the level of fire services for the Morgan Hill community and the South County.
4. Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) will need to review and approve any consolidation. To approve a consolidation, they need to find that the overall costs for providing fire protection service will decrease or stay the same. The report to the Board does not address the fiscal impacts of the LAFCO application or the timeline.

In our opinion, the actions regarding the consolidations of fire districts are premature. We hereby request the BOS remove from the agenda completely, or defer to a future date, the resolutions to commence dissolution of the South Santa Clara and Los Altos Hills County Fire Districts until stakeholder meetings are conducted and a new holistic in-depth analysis and proposal is prepared on consolidation for each of the fire districts and its impacts.

Sincerely,



Rich Constantine
Mayor
City of Morgan Hill