

Forest Grove Cooperative Fire Services Study Next Action

City Council
February 8, 2016



History

- Cooperative Services Study performed by ESCI December 2014-May 2015
- An in-depth analysis of our fire departments operational, financial and logistical needs was done, and recommendations were made.
- Five agencies participated:
 - City of Forest Grove
 - Forest Grove Rural Fire Protection District
 - City of Cornelius
 - Cornelius Rural Fire Protection District
 - Gaston Rural Fire Protection District
 - Banks Fire District

Study Recommendations

- Phase 1: Expand existing IGA to include Gaston (complete)
- Phase 2:
 - Establish a fire authority to test the concept of a future fire district
 - If successful, establish a fire district

Implementation Recommendations

- First step, conduct vision session with policy makers to answer the question, “Do we want to move forward or not?”
- Visioning session conducted in October 2015
 - Facilitated by ESCI consultant Sheldon Gilbert
 - Representatives:
 - Mayor Pete Truax, Forest Grove
 - Mayor Jef Dalin, Cornelius
 - Chair Cleo Howell, Forest Grove Rural Fire Protection District
 - Chair Wes Van Dyke, Cornelius Rural Fire Protection District
 - Chair Michael Piedmonte, Gaston Rural Fire Protection District

Vision Session Consensus Recommendations

- Immediately work with participating agencies to pursue a comprehensive IGA “Western Washington County Fire Authority” with participation from all five agencies present at the visioning process.
- Long Term, all five agencies will work toward the development, approval and implementation of a single integrated fire district to serve all participating jurisdictions.

What could an IGA look like?

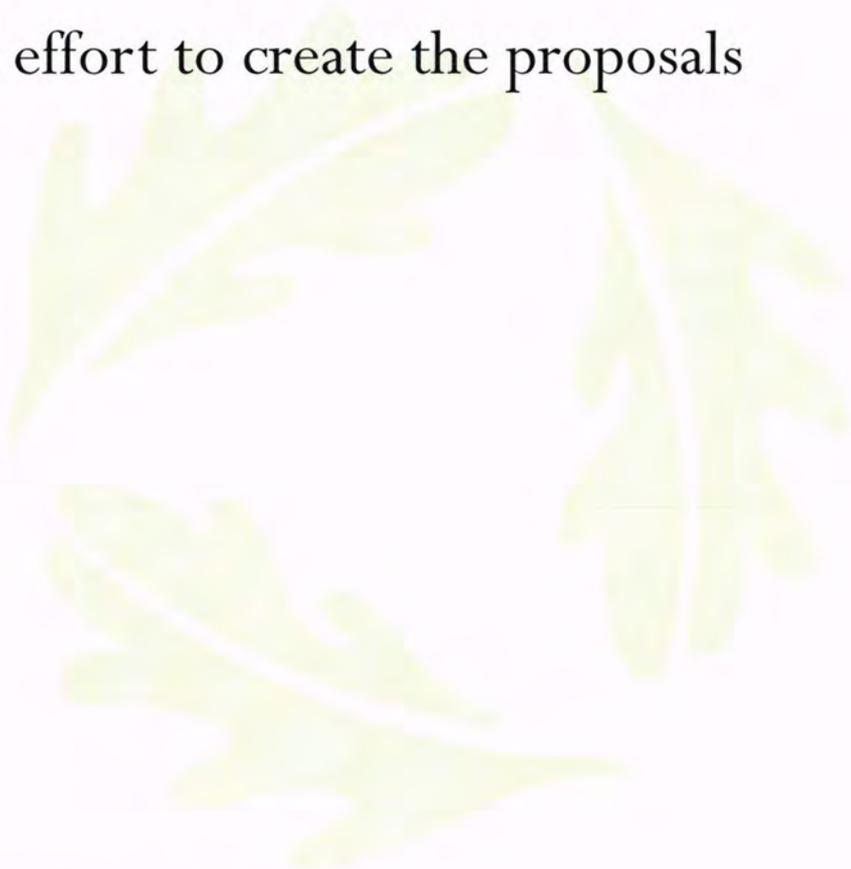
- Intergovernmental Agreement establishing a operational, administrative and financial framework of all participating agencies.
- Volunteers and Administrative Assistant Example

Advantages of this Proposal

- Increased operational, administrative and financial network.
- Non-permanent – participants can withdraw
- Modular, can be expanded or contracted as we move forward
- Demonstration project, offering proof of concept to elected officials and public
- Demonstrates good governance

Disadvantages of this Proposal

- Time and effort to create the proposals



Needed Tonight:

- The following agencies have reviewed the proposal and have directed the Fire Chief to move forward with the development of a draft IGA
 - Gaston Rural Fire Protection District (December 2015)
 - Cornelius City Council (January)
 - Forest Grove Rural Fire Protection District (January)
 - Cornelius Rural Fire Protection District
- Question to Forest Grove City Council:
 - Should the Fire Chief develop a draft IGA to form the Fire Authority?
 - Are there know concerns or questions we would like him to research further?

Staff Recommendation

- Direct the Fire Chief to create a draft IGA for consideration by the Forest Grove City Council

City of Forest Grove

City of Cornelius

Forest Grove Rural Fire District

Cornelius Rural Fire District

Gaston Fire District

Oregon

Cooperative Services Visioning Process



As a result of the recently presented cooperative service delivery study, a recommendation was made to conduct a visioning process with local officials to answer the question: "Do we want to move forward or not?" It is extremely important that, at this stage of the process, it is clearly recognized that this is a public policy decision on the part of the governing entities involved. A decision to consider altering the way in which a critical public safety service is provided, in some cases even permanently altering the governance of those services, is clearly in the purview of the elected bodies. While senior management input should be considered, the final decision should not rest at any level lower in the organization than those who are elected to represent the customers.

For this reason, a visioning process was conducted on October 20, 2015, for elected representatives of the cities of Forest Grove, Cornelius and the Forest Grove Rural, Cornelius Rural and Gaston Fire Districts. The Mayors of Forest Grove and Cornelius and Fire District Presidents from the Forest Grove Rural, Cornelius Rural and Gaston Fire Districts met together for the initial discussion of the feasibility study and its projected operational and fiscal outcomes.

The policymakers met and developed the following visioning priorities and next steps to include all the elected officials assigned to represent each governing entity. During this visioning process, involvement by staff was limited to the fire chief for the sole purpose of providing technical support. During the visioning process, it was identified that stakeholder input is vitally important; there was consensus that plentiful opportunity in multiple forums would be provided for this once the policy bodies have determined what is in the best interest of their citizens as a matter of public policy.

The visioning group agreed it is equally important that the policy bodies recognize exactly what decision is being considered in the initial vision meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to weigh the strategies, operational advantages, fiscal outcomes, and potential impediments of the feasibility to determine whether to commit local resources to move the process forward. The decision is not, at this point, a final decision to "flip the switch". The final commitment to take legal actions necessary to finalize implementation of any given strategy will come much further into the process.

This initial vision meeting can be likened to the court process known as a probable cause hearing. The purpose of such a hearing is for a judge or grand jury to determine if sufficient evidence exists to warrant an arrest and a trial. The probable cause hearing does not determine the final verdict or sentence. That occurs after the much more thorough process and deliberation of the trial. Likewise, the vision meetings are for the policymakers to judge whether sufficient evidence exists to warrant moving forward. The final verdict on whether to take legal or contractual actions to implement will come after weeks, months, or even years of additional detailed planning work involving stakeholders, operations staff, legal counsel, finance personnel, and others. As this actual implementation planning work moves forward, there may be several points at which new information or significant obstacles arise that cause one or more communities to decide not to finalize and implement the plan.

The term “vision session” is used here because the policymakers assembled to determine their joint decision on a future vision toward which the additional work of implementation will be directed. In many cases, several legal, operational or functional strategies are presented as being feasible in the study. These recommendations involve various options for governance, finance, and organizational structure. The recommended direction and priorities presented from this visioning session will be sent to the full governing bodies for further refinement with the intent of becoming the joint vision of the policymakers.

Each entity representative was asked to present a short description of those critical issues, service gaps, or service redundancies that might be concerning them relative to their provision of public safety services as they relate to the cooperative service study recommendations. As each entity took its turn presenting these issues, a picture emerged of those shared critical issues the entities have in common. This brainstorming session assisted in focusing the discussion on which of the feasible options from the study best address those critical common issues and how. The following were the common general impressions and themes relating to how these agencies can move to the next steps:

- Supportive of moving forward to the “next steps”.
- Acknowledged the challenge and need to maintain individuality.
- Felt the volunteer work forces are supportive of moving forward.
- Financially sustainability is a big driver and must be thoroughly addressed in the process and selected regional model.
- Current response times and service levels are seen as good.
- Supportive of standardized equipment and functions.
- Desire to build upon current efficiencies and enhanced effectiveness.
- Agreement that the current model is not financially sustainable into the future.
- Fire agencies are seen as a core element of each community’s identity.
- Pursue a model that provides increased efficiency and effectiveness and is sustainable.
- Ensure local identity, local control, and community interactions are preserved.
- Agree that all participating agencies are interdependent upon one another and need to move forward together.
- The timing is good and all agencies are optimistic for a smooth transition to the next steps based on past experience of working together.

Next the discussion focused on those feasible options with the greatest opportunity to positively impact shared critical issues; the discussion centered around the strengths and weakness of the strategies relative to the conditions, financial abilities, and cultural attitudes of the communities involved. There was a concerted effort to remain at a policy level without becoming overly embroiled in operational discussions of implementation details. The participating policy makers agreed they would be addressed once a common vision has been established that is in the best interest of all the communities involved. The participating policy makers were asked to share what they feel are the strengths and weaknesses of a comprehensive intergovernmental agreement (IGA) and the formation of a

common fire district (Single Fire District Solution). The following themes were identified based on these approaches:

Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA):

- Serves as a good initial step to serve a “proof of concept” for a fully integrated fire service delivery system between all five agencies.
- Maintains individual financial, fiduciary, and service delivery authority for each governing body.
- Personalities and local politics will always play a big role in the policy and contract development as well as implementation.
- The strength of the IGA is proportional to how well the contract is written, how well the scope of work is defined and how well compliance is measured and monitored.
- If one agency opts out, it can impact operational and financial feasibility for the whole system.
- The IGA, if not created and implemented well, can be a single point of failure for future regional efforts and initiatives.
- A well written IGA can serve as a great public education framework to ensure adequate information flow to and from the community.

Single Fire District Solution:

- In a district, no one agency can exclude the other or easily break the coalition.
- Clearly exposes financial differences and forces an integrated financial solution.
- A degree of loss of financial and service delivery control that is transferred to a new fire district board with proportional representation.
- Will require multiple and simultaneous ballot measures.
- Requires a significant public education and voter information campaign.
- Once established very hard to turn back.
- Need to address perceived revenue expenditure and revenue equity to all the communities served.

This was also the time that participants were asked to make the decision to opt out of further involvement. This may occur for a number of reasons. There may be legitimate concern that an individual community does not truly share an adequate number of common critical issues with the other communities. There may also be a legitimate concern that the feasible strategies do not do enough to benefit a given community and would leave it with too many remaining critical issues. And, of course, there is always the possibility that a given community will not feel that the projected financial outcome is within its ability or provides a cost-benefit that is better than its current situation. All of the participants decided to continue in the process with no one expressing a desire to opt out at this point in the process.

The goal of the vision session was to come out with a decision by the policy bodies on whether to continue with the next steps and, if so, what direction those steps should take. The following consensus vision, policy priorities, and next steps were determined to be

actionable by senior appointed officials and staff. While there will be many, many details to work out in the implementation process, the proposed vision clearly articulates the intention of the agreeing policy bodies on the desired outcome from the specified cooperative service strategy or strategies. Once this vision is refined and adopted by the policy bodies, the real work begins.

Consensus Vision:

- Immediately work with the participating agencies to pursue a comprehensive IGA “Western Washington County Fire Authority” with participation from all five agencies present at the visioning process.
- Long term, all five agencies will work toward the development, approval and implementation of a single integrated fire district to serve all participating jurisdictions.

Consensus Policy Priorities:

- Ensure both the IGA and long-term fire district initiatives are sustainable financially, administratively, and operationally.
- Preserve local identity and responsiveness in the development and implementation of future regional service delivery models.
- Both the IGA and future fire district option must provide same or better service levels than today’s delivery system.
- Both options must provide for adequate local determination and accountability.
- Cost and service allocations must be fair, equitable, and measurable.
- All elements of service delivery should be based on locally determined and adopted standards.
- Short and long-term service delivery models should be built to accommodate future participation by additional agencies.

Consensus Next Steps:

- A Vision process document and briefing will be provided to all policy bodies for input, refinement, and approval.
- An IGA workgroup chaired by the fire chief and including operational, administrative and finance representation will be convened to establish an IGA framework for consideration by all participating policy bodies.
- Developed IGA framework will be presented to all policy bodies for review, refinement, and approval of the concept and IGA framework.
- Upon approval of the IGA framework, IGA Development and Implementation Committees will be convened and work on a comprehensive IGA contract and an operational implementation plan will be completed for approval by all policy bodies.

After setting this joint vision, this policymaker group recommended they meet together at set intervals, or as needed, to hear the progress of the Implementation Committee and its Working Groups and refine direction when necessary. The appropriate interval will depend

on the situation and the complexity and length of the process itself but often a quarterly meeting is sufficient.

In closing, all five agencies were very committed to accurately and appropriately addressing their jurisdiction's needs, concerns, and desires. There was good and honest dialogue that allowed each agency to accurately express its perspective and community's thought process relating to this initiative. ESCI feels that all the participating agencies showed a great amount of due diligence and commitment to this process and the next steps. Based on the current level of cooperation and experience with these five agencies, there is a high likelihood these agencies will be successful in pursuing an enhanced and more integrated fire service delivery system.