



## Coastside Fire Protection District STAFF REPORT

**TO:** Honorable Board of Directors                      **FROM:** Ian Larkin, Fire Chief  
**SUBJECT:** Chief Report – District Admin/  
Operational Evaluation                      **DATE:** June 21, 2019

---

### **Staff Recommendation**

The Board of Directors:

### **Background**

Over the past 10 months I have had an opportunity to experience and observe the Administrative and Operational functions of the Coastside Fire Protection District (District). As part of my evaluation, I have been able to meet with staff and get a better understanding of the daily functions of the Coastside Fire Protection District and the needs of the Coastside Community.

As the Fire Chief for the Coastside Fire Protection District it is my responsibility to observe, assess and re-evaluate how we are performing as an agency. It is also my responsibility to recommend corrections and/or changes in how we deliver service to your board when necessary to better service the community.

Below I have provided my assessment of the Administrative and Operational functions of the District as well as my recommendation.

**Administration:** I have broken Administration in to three categories, Staff, Fire Marshals Office and Training.

### **Staff:**

It has been my observation, that we have some great personnel that make up our Administrative Staff. They are thorough in the current processes that have been established and are responsive to the needs of the public as well as other staff in the District. My evaluation of the first 7 months found that only having a single person in the office on a consistent basis proved to be challenging at times. The work load was significant but for the most part our Office Technician (OT), Michele Ortiz kept things moving forward. With the assistance of our Administrative Officer II (AOII) Ginny Petras, we completed our audit and processed financial documents, including invoices and processed checks for payment to vendors.

In March, we hired our Associated Governmental Program Analyst (AGPA) Peihua Ku. Peihua has spent the past several months learning the District policies and training on our processes. This has been a welcome addition and I see this position as being vital to our

success as we move into the future. I do want to point out that Peihua is a Military Reservist and will be on Military leave from June 24, 2019 to September 2, 2019. This will have an impact on the administrative staff, as we will be asking them to fill in while he is on leave.

Our immediate plan in Peihua's absence is to have Michele take on some of his responsibilities and Ginny will also assist with processing financial documents and budget reconciliation.

During my evaluation, I recognized that the type of work we have been asking Michele Ortiz to conduct is at a higher level than what her working classification allows. The processing of the Community Facilities District (CFD) applications and development of the associated resolutions for each of the CFD's as well as the management of the Fire Marshal's building inspection tracking database are just a few tasks that are outside the scope of an OT classification.

The work that Michele is performing is more in line with the classification of a Staff Service Analyst (SSA). She is consistently analyzing documents for accuracy, monitoring data bases, and providing reports that require analysis, such report would be the calculations and tracking of business inspection for the fire marshal's office and process and tracking in coming building plans. Michele also provides back up to our AGPA position and has completed many of the functional tasks that are at the SSA level. With the recent sponsorship of the Coastside Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), we will be asking Michele to take on a role in the administration of the sponsorship.

### **Fire Marshal Office:**

The Fire Marshal's Office has been without a Fire Marshal Battalion Chief (BC) since March of 2018. In March of 2017, the Board acted (at the recommendation of the Assistant Chief) to reduce services in the Fire Marshal's Office by eliminating the Fire Captain, Deputy Fire Marshal position. In a cost saving measure, a large portion of the fire marshal services were contracted out to CSG consulting and now, 4 Leaf Inc. consulting. The fire marshal's office was utilizing a Retired Annuitant to supplement staffing in the office for large projects. It was allowed (by CAL FIRE) for us to keep the CAL FIRE Retired Annuitant Fire Captain in place to aid on large projects.

While evaluating the Fire Marshal services we deliver, it is evident that we are struggling to keep pace with the work load. Our consultant has been able to keep up on the building plans, review, and onsite construction inspections, but we have struggled on maintaining compliance with our building inspections, especially our mandatory inspections. This was brought to my attention after an inquiry that we were behind in our annual mandatory inspections. We took the appropriate action to become compliant, through the use of 4 Leaf consulting, all inspections were completed.

In March of 2019 we filled our vacant BC Fire Marshal position with an internal transfer from our San Mateo County Battalion, BC Gary Silva. BC Silva is a welcome addition and is adjusting to the change in position. Gary is being indoctrinated into the Fire Marshal Office very quickly. While adjusting to the new position, Gary will be engaging in the 2020 Fire Code adoption review process, which will be taking up most his time. I want to remind

you all that the BC Fire Marshal position is a shared, funded position with San Mateo County Fire Department (SMCO) where Gary spends an equal amount of his time.

After in-depth discussion with our staff and fire marshal consultant, we need to consider a succession plan. With the increase in the current development, the proposed development, the mandated fire safety inspections, weed abatement inspections and other fire marshal duties, we will not be able to maintain the delivery of fire marshal services at the appropriate level.

The supervision of the BC Fire Marshal has historically been split between the Assistant Chiefs from the District and SMCO based on program specific needs. During my assessment, it became apparent that this model of supervision has not been the most productive or positive means of supervision. There had been mixed direction between the two assistant chiefs which caused conflicting supervision of the BC Fire Marshal, and was counterproductive at times.

### **Training:**

The Training Battalion is a very high functioning office under the immediate direction of Battalion Chief, Ken Lord. The Battalion Chief position is solely funded by the SMCO. BC Lord's office is currently located at FS 40 which is a true benefit to the district. BC Lord is responsible for the coordination and delivery of mandated training, EMS training, program specific training and in-service training for both the District and SMCO. BC Lord also performs the function of the Paramedic Coordinator for both agencies.

The District funds a Fire Captain (FC) Training Officer (TO) that is part of the Training Battalion. The FC TO reports directly to BC Lord. The FC TO position was vacant for approximately one year prior to filling the vacancy. Recently, we were successful in filling the FC TO position with an in-unit transfer, FC Robert (Bob) Simmons, who has worked in several classifications including as a paramedic. FC Simmons has been a welcome addition to the program.

As I stated, the training battalion is very high functioning program in the delivery of training. I attribute this to the coordination and leadership of BC Lord. But it became evident that the supervision of the Training Battalion was a point of contention. The Training Battalion has been supervised by the Assistant Chief at Coastsides, but is solely funded by SMCO. This had caused some tension between the two Assistant Chiefs, (Coastsides and SMCO) as the SMCO Assistant Chief felt that the dissemination of training was not equal between the two agencies. There was a period, like Coastsides, where SMCO had a vacancy in the FC TO position (over 12 months). This put a strain on the delivery of training for SMCO, even though BC Lord made an attempt to provide a balance between the two programs. It has become clear that the model of shared services has its benefits, but in turn it has its problems with providing shared supervision.

### **Operations:**

The operational functions of the District are to provide the daily supervision and delivery of all risk fire and EMS services to the communities within the Coastsides Fire Protection District. The Operational and Administration oversight of the District is the responsibility for

the Assistance Chief. The Assistant Chief directly supervises two Operational Battalion Chiefs (BC). The Operational BC's have daily responsibility of the delivery of services from the Districts three fire stations. The staffing at three fire stations consists of a Company officer, fire captain (FC) or (FAE) and two FAE's, one of the personnel will be a Paramedic.

The Operational staff is providing professional high quality services to our communities. We are responding to approximately 2600 calls for service each year. Due to the district's geographical location, we are somewhat isolated on the coast. This can provide some potential challenges at times with getting resources to support greater alarm assignments. We also can experience access and egress issues to the coast due to limited access routes leading in to and out of the coast. This could cause problems in times of a significant event or a disaster on the coast.

In accessing the operational aspect of the district, we continue to meet the demand of providing services to our communities we serve. There is one area that drew my attention as a potential problem and that is the lack of consistent BC coverage for the district. We currently have two BC assigned to the district to cover seven day a week coverage. We have historically relied on a state funded BC to provide the seventh day of coverage at no additional cost to the district. Due to the increase in statewide fire activity and longer fire seasons, the ability to rely on the state BC to be available to provide coverage has not been sustainable. With normal vacation and training coverage we pay a substantial amount of overtime. With the lack of reliable relief BC coverage, we are paying overtime to cover the seventh day of BC coverage. We are experiencing this same issue in SMCO, as they rely on the state BC for their seventh day of relief BC coverage. We have seen an increase in the need to force higher BC overtime to cover the need.

During my assessment, it also became apparent that the operation BC's lacked a delegation of responsibility from the Assistant Chief. The past Assistant Chief did not allow the BC's to engage in program management level responsibility, most decisions required the Assistant Chiefs approval. This can be counterproductive and provide for a lack of ownership and responsibility for a program.

### **Summary:**

In summary, the district continues to provide professional, high level service to the Communities in the Coastside Fire Protection District. We have areas where improvement is needed to meet our continued responsibilities and commitments as a fire district. On a scale of one to ten I would give the district a rating of 7. As I stated above, we are asking our administrative staff to perform functions that are outside the scope of the work classification, we are struggling to maintain our fire marshal services duties due to the lack of a permanent FC Deputy Fire Marshal, and we continue to rely on overtime to meet our BC coverage needs. I feel the most important part of my assessment is the lack of consistent supervision of our shared services functions such as the fire marshal and training. Let me be clear, the personnel that do the daily work are not the issue. It is the higher-level supervision where priorities are established for each agency. Providing a balance where both agencies receive equal services is and will be my priority.

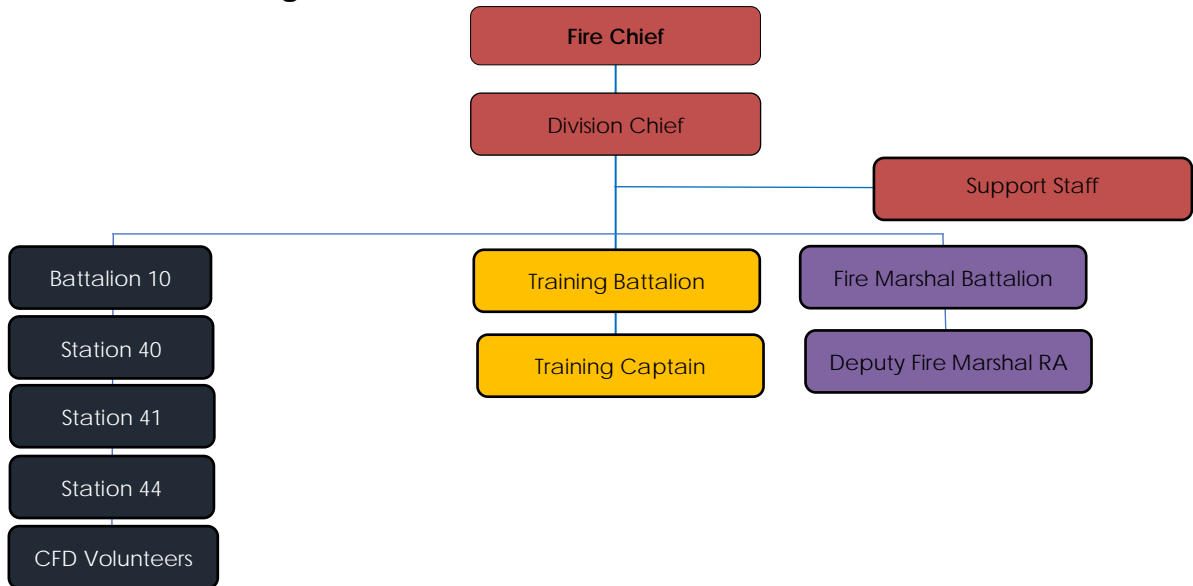
**Recommendations:**

The following is my recommendations to address four distinct problems that I feel will provide an opportunity to better fulfill the needs of the district as we move forward.

1. I recommend your board approve the Upgrade of the OT position to an SSA to represent the actual functional work that is conducted. The upgrade will have a minimal financial impact.
2. I recommend you board approve the re-instatement of the full-time FC Deputy Fire Marshal position in the Fire Marshal's office. This will provide the needed staffing in the fire marshal's office to insure we are providing the services and meeting our mandates. This will have a significant financial impact, but can be managed within future budgets.
3. I recommend your board approve funding for a relief BC position that will be split funded with SMCO. This will have a financial impact, but can be managed within future budgets. SMCO has approved the funding in the new six year agreement for their portion of a shared position.
4. Lastly and most importantly, I recommend your board approve funding for an upgrade of the Assistant Chief position to a Deputy Chief. This will allow for a re-organization to occur that will correct the supervision of shared services. Currently, shared services are managed by each Assistant Chief in their specific agency, the District and SMCO, which has created prioritization problems. This upgrade will have a minimal financial impact as you currently fund a full Assistant Chief position and would only be funding half of the 1.9 percent pay differential.

The total financial increase to the CAL FIRE contract will be approximately \$350,000.00 with most the cost being the FC Deputy Fire Marshal and the split funding of half of one relief BC. Below is the current and proposed Organizational chart for the district.

## Current Coastside Organization



## Proposed Organizational Chart

