

# *Fortuna Fire Protection District*

## Municipal Service Review



*MARCH 2008*



**HUMBOLDT**  
*Local Agency Formation Commission*

Prepared for Development of the District Sphere of Influence Report

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## **LAFCO AUTHORITY**

### **Latent Powers, Enabling Legislation and Empowered Services**

The fundamental role of the Local Agency Formation Commission is to implement the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act (The Act) consistent with local conditions and circumstances. The Act guides LAFCo's decisions. The major goals of LAFCo as established by the CKH Act are to:

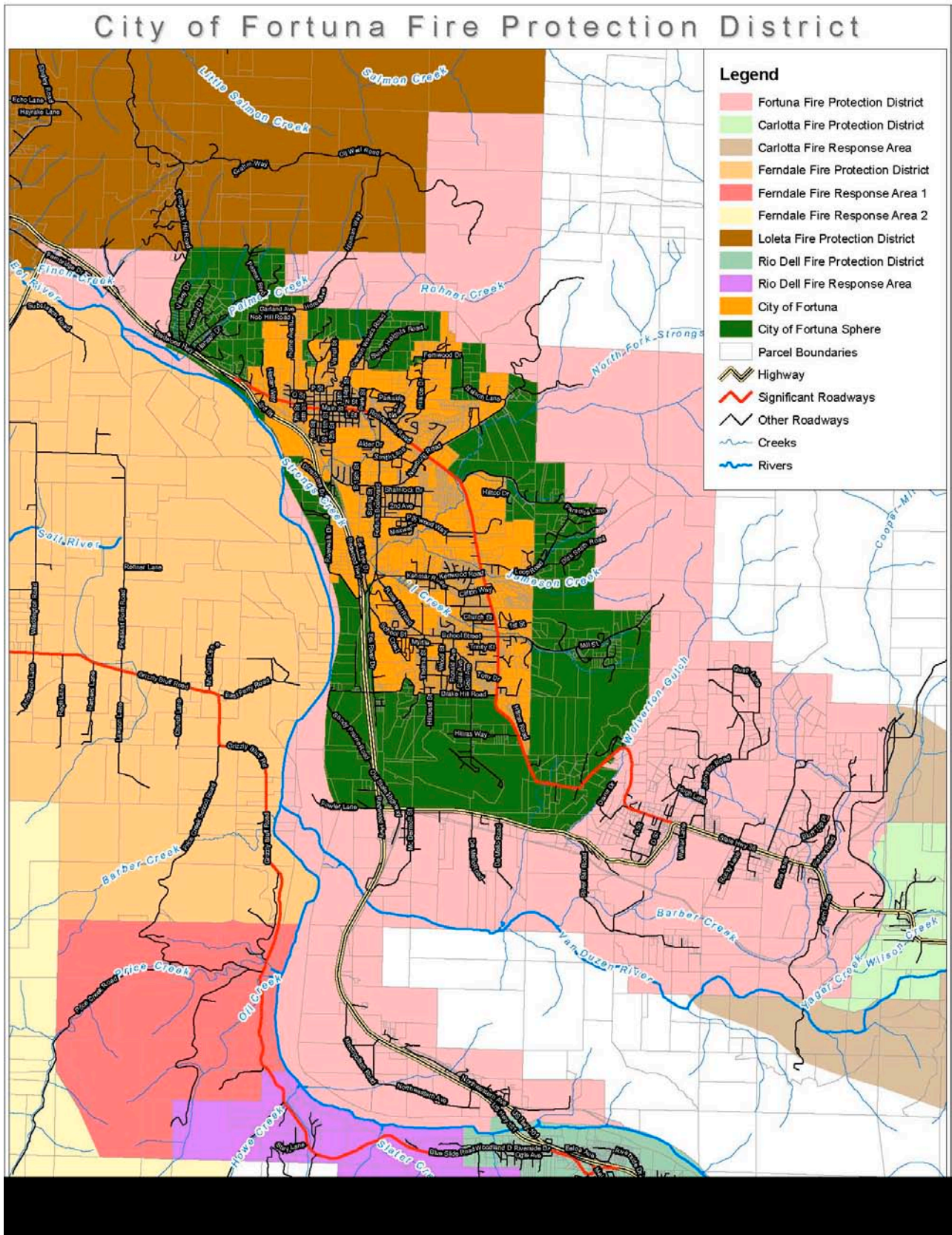
- Encourage orderly growth and development;
- Promote orderly development;
- Discourage urban sprawl;
- Preserve open-space and prime agricultural lands by guiding minimizing resource loss;
- Exercise its authority to ensure that affected populations receive efficient services;
- Promote logical formation and boundary modifications that direct the burdens and benefits of additional growth to those local agencies that are best suited to provide services;
- Make studies and obtain and furnish information which will contribute to the logical and reasonable development of local agencies to provide for present and future needs;
- Establish priorities by assessing and balancing community service needs with financial resources available to secure and provide community services and to encourage government structures that reflect local circumstances, conditions and financial resources;
- Determine whether new or existing agencies can feasibly provide needed services in a more efficient or accountable manner and, where deemed necessary,

As set fourth in Section 56425 (g) of The Act, on or before January 1, 2008, and every five years thereafter, Humboldt LAFCo shall review and update each Sphere of Influence (SOI). Additionally, an MSR shall be conducted with, or in conjunction with the action to establish or to update a SOI pursuant to The Act. Together, the SOI and MSR documents analyze the District's ability to serve existing and future residents.

In order to prepare and to update Spheres of Influence in accordance with Section 56425, Humboldt LAFCo shall conduct a service review of the municipal services provided in the Fortuna Fire Protection District (FPD). The commission shall include in the area designated for service review any other geographic area as is appropriate for an analysis of the services to be reviewed, and shall prepare a written statement of its determinations with respect to each of the following:

- (1) Infrastructure needs or deficiencies;
- (2) Growth and population projections for the affected area;
- (3) Financing constraints and opportunities;
- (4) Cost avoidance opportunities;
- (5) Opportunities for rate restructuring;
- (6) Opportunities for shared facilities;
- (7) Government structure options,;
- (8) Evaluation of management efficiencies; and
- (9) Local accountability and governance.

**Figure 1 Fortuna FPD Map-District Boundary and Sphere of Influence**



## **AGENCY PROFILE**

The Fortuna FPD is an all-volunteer fire department with three fire stations staffed by 5 fire companies. The Fortuna FPD is the most populous fire district in Humboldt County protected exclusively by an all-volunteer fire department. With the exception of vehicle accidents and mutual aid requests from City Ambulance, the volunteer fire department responds primarily to non-medical calls for service. Emergency medical services within the Planning Area are provided primarily by City Ambulance Fortuna and Fortuna Police.

Figure 1 (above) shows the district boundary, service boundary, sphere of influence, and other service providers that are near the Fortuna FPD. The Fortuna FPD boundaries cover approximately 26 square miles and extend north to Graham Road (off of Tompkins Hill Road) and Fernbridge; west to the Eel River; south to the Metropolitan area near Rio Dell; and east almost to Carlotta. The Fortuna FPD boundary extends outside of the city limits and the Planning Area. Portions of the Fortuna FPD overlap with State Responsibility Area (SRA).

The Fortuna FPD has complete responsibility within the city for fire protection services and primary responsibility for the area outside of the city, but within the district for structural fires. CAL FIRE has primary responsibility for wildland fires outside of the city, but within the Fortuna FPD.

### **Formation**

Fortuna Fire Protection District began in 1904 with the creation of the Fortuna volunteer fire department. The Fortuna FPD was formed in 1936 under the County Fire Protection District Law. The Fortuna FPD is considered a “dependent” district that is governed by Humboldt County. Most other fire districts in Humboldt County are “independent,” whereby voters within district directly elect the district Board of Directors. In 1985 the Board of Supervisors passed Resolution 85-40, delegating their governing board powers to a district board of fire commissioners. Pursuant to Health and Safety Code §13844, the Board of Supervisors “shall determine whether the commissioners shall serve at its pleasure or for staggered terms of four years subject to removal for cause.” In the case of Fortuna, the Board of Supervisors periodically appoints Fire Commissioners to serve as district board members.

The Fortuna FPD is a dependent district. It is responsible for providing fire protection services, through the Fortuna VFD, to the City of Fortuna, and unincorporated communities of Fernbridge, Rohnerville, Hydeville, Alton, and Metropolitan. The City of Fortuna is the third largest city in the County and has a large commercial downtown area. The largest facilities within the Fortuna FPD include the Pacific Lumber Mill (currently closed but being considered for new development), Redwood Memorial Hospital, Rohnerville Airport, the Riverwalk area, the community of Rohnerville, and downtown Fortuna. There are 65 volunteer employees serving the District and total response area of 29.4 square miles. The FPD maintains three fire stations. The FPD is not the primary responder on medical calls in the City of Fortuna. That service is currently provided by the Fortuna Police Department.

Based on an ISO audit that occurred in 2004, the Fortuna FPD has a PPC rating of 5 for the urbanized areas near one of the three stations and within 1,000 feet of a hydrant, and a PPC rating of 8B in all other areas of the district that are more than five miles from a fire station or more than

1,000 feet from a hydrant. The Fortuna FPD has a rating comparable to, or better than, most urbanized areas in the county.

New development pursuant to the General Plan will increase the need for fire protection services. It is unlikely that the level of service the city now receives from Fortuna FPD would continue without some fire department restructuring. The three facilities, equipment, apparatus and replacement program for equipment and apparatus should accommodate projected growth. However, the increase in call volume will necessitate an increase in volunteers to assure that adequate personnel are available for emergency response. An increase in call volume and personnel will increase administrative tasks, which are tasks that the Fortuna FPD must complete with current staffing levels. Additionally, staffing levels are already an issue for fire prevention, emergency response planning, compliance with applicable regulations and standards and tax assessment procedures.

The Fortuna FPD has not adopted a fire code. As a result, the State fire code is used to regulate building occupancy (care homes, day care facilities, and schools) and state owned buildings. The Fortuna FPD is also obligated to inspect these facilities and enforce fire regulations. The Fortuna FPD has not adopted a local fire code due to the fact that they would be obligated enforce the code, which would require manpower and time that they currently do not have. Give the current situation, only new construction is inspected, established business inspections and fire preplanning cannot be accommodated by the Fortuna FPD. General Plan implementation would increase the need for inspections and preplanning for adequate public safety.

The Fortuna FPD is also trying to stay apprised of the city's emergency response planning. However, the current staffing levels do not allow the Fortuna FPD to be at a level of comfort regarding their involvement with emergency response planning. In addition, the Fortuna FPD is in compliance with OSHA regulations and adhering to NFPA standards, but those areas would require additional work and manpower with increased growth. The Fortuna FPD also struggles to maintain the oversight necessary for tax assessment procedures. As a result, the Fortuna FPD does not realize their full share of tax assessment monies.

The city should consider assisting the Fortuna FPD with volunteer recruitment. Recruitment of Fortuna FPD administrative support is a critical issue affecting fire prevention, emergency response planning, compliance with applicable regulations and standards and tax assessment procedures.

## **GROWTH AND POPULATION**

### **Demographics**

According to the 2000 Census, the total population in Humboldt County was 126,518. The Building Communities Report for the Humboldt County General Plan Update includes a complete discussion of County Population Trends. According to that report: "Between 1985 and 1990, the County grew by about 8,000 people (7.3 percent), with an average annual increase of 1.4 percent." The US Census projects population growth in Humboldt County to increase to 135,600 by 2010 and 143,100 by 2025.

A total of 55,912 housing units existed in Humboldt County in 2000, with an average of 2.39 persons per household. The number of households in the county has grown 10.4 percent since 1990,

compared to the population increase of 6.2 percent. Consequently, the average number of persons per household has declined 6.3 percent from 2.55 in 1980. Based on population projections, the Building Communities report projects the demand for housing units over the next 25 years to be 5,961 units in all of Humboldt County, with 3,220 units to be located in the unincorporated areas.

**District Population**

The population within the Fortuna FPD is approximately 13,000. According to the 2000 US Census, Fortuna’s estimated population is 11,155 residents. By the end of the 2030 General Plan timeframe, the city is expected to grow, at the historical growth rate of 1.6 percent, to 17,721 residents. This represents an increase of 6,566 persons from the 2005 population. This increase would result in the demand for 2,298 new dwelling units, in addition to new commercial, industrial, and public facilities, which will require an increase in fire protection services to serve the additional development.

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Current Infrastructure and Facilities**

The FVFD operates out of three fire stations. The largest station is located on South Fortuna Boulevard in the center of town, with the two smaller stations located in Hydesville and Campton Heights. See the table below for locations and equipment.

Station	Address	Engines	Companies
Headquarters Station	320 South Fortuna Blvd	2 Engines 2 Aerials 1 Rescue	No. 1, No. 2 & No. 3
Campton Heights	3080 School Street	1 Engine 1 Tender	No. 5
Hydesville	3495 Hwy 36	2 Engines	No. 4
<i>Source: Fortuna Fire Protection District, 2005.</i>			

**Maintenance Schedule**

All Fortuna FPD vehicles including trucks, tenders and engines have a complete maintenance once per year and have routine check ups once per month. The District inspects and maintains Self Contained Breathing Apparatuses (SCBA) once per year.

**Infrastructure Deficiencies**

The District has not identified any infrastructure deficiencies within the District boundaries, which would result in a reduced level of service. When compared with other volunteer fire departments in the county, Fortuna FPD has the most infrastructure and equipment available to the District to provide fire protection services throughout the district.

## **Planned Improvements**

Fortuna FPD bought a new rescue rig in 2008, and is also considering purchasing a new pumper in the near future.

## **Funding Sources for Improvements**

The district has developed an assessment of \$3 per unit. Typical single family houses are considered four units, while vacant lots are considered one unit. In addition to the fee assessment, the District also collects property taxes from residents within the district boundary.

## **SERVICES**

The volunteer fire department is dispatched by the Fortuna Police Department. Once a call for service is received, the Police dispatcher pages each firefighter and triggers sirens located at each fire station and at the City of Fortuna Corporation Yard on Dinsmore Drive. After dispatch, volunteer firefighters respond to the nearest station. Average response time for the first-in unit is three to four minutes within the City limits and four to five minutes for the rest of the district. The volunteer fire department responded to 170 calls in 2004, 70 of which were fires (structure, vehicle, and grass fires), and 29 were medical aid.

The volunteer fire department responds primarily to fires and non-medical calls-for-service. The volunteer fire department also responds to medical calls in the Hydesville area and is dispatched automatically to traffic accidents within the district. The City Ambulance Company, located on South Fortuna Boulevard in Fortuna responds to all medical aid calls within the Planning Area. City Ambulance will request mutual aid from the volunteer fire department if necessary. The Fortuna Police Department will also respond to medical aid calls within the City limits.<sup>1</sup>

## **Fire Protection Services**

ISO Rating. The Insurance Services Office (ISO) establishes fire insurance ratings for communities throughout the United States. One of ISO's more well known services is to evaluate the fire suppression delivery systems of fire departments and districts. The result of those reviews is an individual Public Protection Classification (PPC) rating number assigned to the community that the respective fire department protects. The ratings are presented in a rating class structure which ranges from 1 to 10. Class 1 is the highest rating, representing excellent fire protection and Class 10 is the lowest, meaning the community's fire department did not meet the minimum requirements of the Fire Suppression Rating Schedule and is not recognized by ISO. The PPC is commonly used by insurance providers to establish home and business fire insurance rates.

The Fire Suppression Rating Schedule is used by ISO to rate the response capabilities within a community. Fifty percent of the grade is based on the fire department (equipment, staffing, training, and geographic distribution of fire companies), 40 percent is based on the water supply (condition and maintenance of hydrants, and a careful evaluation of the amount of available water compared with the amount needed to suppress fires), and ten percent is based on fire alarm and communications systems (telephone systems, telephone lines, staffing, and dispatching system). Based on an ISO audit that occurred in 2004, the Fortuna FPD has a PPC rating of 5 for the

urbanized areas near one of the three stations and within 1,000 feet of a hydrant, and a PPC rating of 8B in all other areas of the district that are more than five miles from a fire station or more than 1,000 feet from a hydrant. The Fortuna FPD has a rating comparable to, or better than, most urbanized areas in the county.

The 8B PPC rating was recently added by the ISO to recognize the efforts of fire departments to improve fire protection in areas with limited water supplies. Normally, a community whose water supply fails to meet ISO minimum standards would receive a Class 9 grading. With the new rating schedule, a community with limited water but otherwise superior fire-protection capabilities can earn Class 8B. The 8B rating acknowledges the number of firefighters responding to structure fires, training for firefighters, and water delivery capabilities.<sup>ii</sup>

Equipment: In addition to the three fire stations, the district also operates and maintains five engines, two aerials, one rescue rig, one water tender, and personnel fire fighting equipment including self contained breathing apparatuses.

Minimum Flow Requirements: The City currently has areas where fire flow capacities need to be improved. Some older sections of the City's distribution system are in need of replacement. Many sections of steel pipe have failed as a result of excessive corrosion problems the City used to have prior to completion of its corrosion control facility. Most of the old, leaking mains have been replaced by past projects. Palmer Creek CSD's water system has known existing deficiencies, including dead end mains and limited fire flow capacity at the end of Page Way.

### **Other Service Providers within Agency**

The City of Fortuna provides the full range of urban services within its boundaries, which are within the central portion of the District. The City provides and maintains fire hydrants in all areas where water service is available within its boundaries maintaining a regular program for inspecting and testing fire hydrants, specifies water main size, water flow, fire hydrant spacing, and water storage capacity to meet both the City's and the Fortuna FPD's fire protection standards.

The District is within the State Responsibility area for Fire Protection service from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire), as well as having its own volunteer fire department. The Fortuna Fire Protection District provides fire hydrants in all areas where fire protection service is available within its boundaries. Hydesville Community Water District provides fire hydrants in areas where water service is available. The County of Humboldt provides general governmental and law enforcement services throughout the territory of the district.

## **FINANCING CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

### **Budget Revenues and Expenditures**

The average annual revenue for the Fortuna FPD is approximately \$380,000 per year, about 60 percent of which comes from property tax and 20 percent from assessments. The volunteer fire department also raises funds to support its activities aside from firefighting and charitable activities. In addition, the FVFD participates in most Fortuna community events.

The County auditor reported that the total revenue in fiscal year 2007/2008 for Fortuna FPD was \$413,198.00. The table below shows the District's three largest expenses include Insurance (\$65,000), equipment maintenance (\$35,000) and clothing and personal supplies (\$35,000),

<b><u>OPERATING EXPENSES</u></b>		
<b>Acct #</b>		
5010	Salaries and Wages	\$ 20,000.00
5050	Clothing & Personal Supplies	\$ 25,000.00
5060	Communications	\$ 5,000.00
5090	Household Expense	\$ 1,000.00
5100	Insurance	\$ 65,000.00
5120	Maintenance - Equipment	\$ 35,000.00
5130	Maintenance - Structures, Improvements Grounds	\$ 7,500.00
5140	Medical Supplies	\$ 1,000.00
5150	Memberships	\$ 1,500.00
5160	Miscellaneous Expenses	\$ 500.00
5170	Office Supplies	\$ 2,500.00
5180	Professional & Special Services	\$ 15,000.00
5190	Publications & Legal Notices	\$ 500.00
5220	Small Tools	\$ 3,000.00
5230	District Special Expense	\$ 20,000.00
5250	Transportation & Travel	\$ 1,500.00
5260	Utilities	\$ 20,000.00
5280	Contributions to Other Agencies	\$ -0-
	<b>TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES</b>	

### **Sustainability of Financial Practices**

The Fortuna FPD struggles to maintain the oversight necessary for tax assessment procedures. As a result, the Fortuna FPD does not realize their full share of tax assessment monies. Discuss sustainability of Financial Practices by comparing revenues and expenditures resulting in a net profit/loss...

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR SHARED FACILITIES**

#### **Existing Facilities**

The Fortuna FPD currently has three facilities. The Fortuna FPD is the largest all volunteer fire department in the county, and each facility serves a specific area, which is critical to providing district inhabitants with adequate levels of fire protection. The District's share of property taxes and assessment fees are deducted directly from property taxes through the county auditor's office. The district also holds various fund raiser events to collect additional funds for fire district expenses.

#### **Potential Shared Facilities**

Since the district has three fire station locations, it is probable that they could consolidate to reduce expenses to the district. However, it would reduce response times to areas within the district, and therefore reduce the district's ability to provide adequate fire protection services to its residents.

## **GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE OPTIONS**

The Fortuna FPD is staffed by the Fortuna Volunteer Fire Department (FVFD), which is comprised of all-volunteer firefighters. The FVFD command structure includes a chief, two assistant chiefs, five captains, ten lieutenants, one dispatcher and forty-five firefighters that are part of five fire companies. The Fortuna FPD has 69 volunteer staff members (5 companies of 13 each, 1 safety officer, 2 assistant chiefs, and 1 fire chief). Of the five fire companies, three are located downtown, one in Campton Heights and one in Hydesville. Each company has a captain, two lieutenancies and up to 10 firefighters.

The FVFD is organized separately from the Fortuna FPD. The FVFD is a non-profit corporation made up of its members and governed by the department's chief officers. The Fortuna FPD provides the volunteer fire department with operational and capital funding, equipment, apparatus, utilities, and maintenance.

### **Opportunities and Constraints**

There are not specific guidelines or standards that regulate the transition from a volunteer to a paid department. The issues that trigger such a transition are overload of volunteers, ability to recruit new volunteers and public safety. There is little doubt that the Fortuna FPD is already at the crossroads. The move to a paid department would likely be very gradual in the form of a combination department, starting with a paid fire chief and possibly one administrative employee who might double as a firefighter or engineer. It also important to note that if adequate volunteer manpower cannot be realized, ISO ratings have the potential to be impacted with General Plan growth projections.

## **EVALUATION OF MANAGEMENT EFFICIENCIES**

### **Efficiency of Service Delivery**

All firefighters attend a 40 hour academy given by volunteer fire department instructors. Firefighters are trained to a minimum proficiency in firefighting based on the National Fire Protection Association standards. Firefighters also receive training in specialized fire and rescue subjects, including hazardous materials, first responder medical, rope rescue, automobile extrication, wildland fire, and the use of Fortuna FPD equipment and apparatus.

**Mutual Aid Agreements.** The Fortuna FPD maintains mutual aid agreements with the following emergency response agencies (Humboldt County Master Fire Protection Plan-FSC Draft Plan, September 2005):

- Carlotta Community Services District – Fire;
- Ferndale Fire Protection District;
- Loleta Fire Protection District;
- Rio Dell Fire Protection District;
- Scotia Volunteer Fire Department;
- Fortuna Police Department;
- California Highway Patrol;

- City Ambulance Fortuna; and
- CDF (for mutual aid within Humboldt County).

The City of Rio Dell is currently in the process of a General Plan update, and is considering the annexation of the Eel River sawmill site, and inclusion of the Metropolitan area into the City Planning Area. Due to the close proximity of the Metropolitan area to the City of Rio Dell, and the anticipation of the City of Rio Dell proceeding with boundary expansions, the Rio Dell FPD may expand their boundaries to include the Metropolitan and Eel River Sawmill areas, which are currently within the Fortuna FPD boundary. A shift in service providers in the Metropolitan area from Fortuna FPD to Rio Dell FPD may reduce emergency response times in the area.

### **Opportunities and Constraints.**

Fortuna is the largest all volunteer fire district in Humboldt County. They have built a fairly new fire station in the city of Fortuna and maintain an adequate volunteer staff and equipment.

## **LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **Contact Information**

<b>Fortuna Fire Protection District</b>	
<b>Contact:</b>	Lon Winburn, Fire Chief
<b>Mailing Address:</b>	320 So. Fortuna Boulevard CA 95540-0614
<b>Site Address:</b>	Headquarters Station: 320 South Fortuna Blvd Campton Heights: 3080 School Street Hydesville: 3495 Highway 36
<b>Phone Number:</b>	(707) 725-5021 Cell (707) 499-2490
<b>Email/ Website:</b>	<a href="mailto:lonwinburn@yahoo.com">lonwinburn@yahoo.com</a>
<b>Types of Services:</b>	Fire protection and suppression services
<b>Population Served:</b>	13,000
<b>Size of Service Area (Acres):</b>	18806.77
<b>Date of Formation:</b>	1936
<b>Number of Staff</b>	Up to 69 Volunteer staff + 1 secretary

### **Board Meetings**

The five member district board and secretary meets monthly on the second Monday of every month at 6:30 at the district headquarters, located at 320 South Fortuna Boulevard. Meetings are open to the public, and notifications are posted at the station prior to the meeting.

## **MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW DETERMINATIONS**

### **Growth and Population**

The population within the Fortuna FPD boundaries is expected to grow at approximately 1.6 percent, which is the historical growth rate in the City of Fortuna. New development pursuant to the Fortuna General Plan Update will increase the need for fire protection services. It is unlikely that the level of service the city now receives from Fortuna FPD would continue without some fire

department restructuring. The three facilities, equipment, apparatus and replacement program for equipment and apparatus should accommodate projected growth. However, the increase in call volume will necessitate an increase in volunteers to assure that adequate personnel are available for emergency response. An increase in call volume and personnel will increase administrative tasks, which are tasks that the Fortuna FPD is struggling to complete with current staffing levels. Additionally, staffing levels are already an issue for fire prevention, emergency response planning, compliance with applicable regulations and standards and tax assessment procedures.

The planned Annexation of the Eel River Sawmills site by the City of Rio Dell and the proposed addition of Metropolitan to the Rio Dell Planning Area could affect response in those areas. The Fortuna and Rio Dell Fire Districts should jointly review planned changes in Metropolitan to see if that would warrant changing service areas of the Districts.

### **Infrastructure**

The Fortuna FPD has adequate infrastructure to provide fire protection services within the District's boundaries. Depending on location, the fire hydrants within the Fortuna FPD are maintained by the City of Fortuna and by the Hydesville Water District. The City currently has areas where fire flow capacities need to be improved. Palmer Creek CSD's water system has and limited fire flow capacity at the end of Page Way.<sup>iii</sup>

### **Financing Constraints and Opportunities**

The Fortuna Fire Protection District currently has adequate funding and infrastructure to support the projected need for fire protection services within the Community Planning Area. Assessment fees and property tax revenues are collected annually, and the district has maintained

### **Rate Restructuring**

The Fortuna FPD has an assessment district that allows the district to collect fees from property owners within the assessment area. The district board has the ability to periodically review and adjust rates with district voter approval. However, the District is currently operating without major debt, and has one of the most financially successful volunteer fire departments in the county.

### **Cost Avoidance Opportunities**

Because of the District's location away from other water service providers, there are no significant cost avoidance opportunities available to the District for fire protection services. The District

### **Opportunities for Shared Facilities**

Depending on location, the fire hydrants within the Fortuna FPD are maintained by the City of Fortuna and by the Hydesville Water District. Due to the rural location of Fortuna, there are no adjacent local agencies that could provide adequate fire protection services within the Fortuna FPD.

### **Government Structure Options**

Because of the location of Fortuna FPD away from other local agencies, there are no opportunities available for alternative government structure options.

## **Evaluation of Management Efficiencies**

The District is providing adequate fire protection services to the District, and there are minimal management costs and low operating expenses in the District's adopted budget.

## **Local Accountability**

The Fortuna Fire Protection District (District) was formed in 1936 by the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors as an independent multi-purpose district and adopted under the Fire Protection District Law, pursuant to Title 6, Division 2, of the California Government Code. The Board of Directors is appointed and meets once per month, and complies with all requirements set fourth in the Brown Act. District staff is available to the public via phone and email and Board meetings are open to the public.

## **REFERENCES**

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<sup>i</sup> City of Fortuna General Plan Program Environmental Impact Report. February 2008.

<sup>ii</sup> Effective Fire Protection, a National Concern, ISO, 2004

<sup>iii</sup> Humboldt County General Plan Update. Community Infrastructure and Services Technical Report, Preliminary Draft, October 2007. <http://co.humboldt.ca.us/planning/gp/gpdemo/GPU-TOC-Demo3.htm#ch7>