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MENLO PARK FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

STAFF REPORT

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**To: Board of Directors**

**Meeting Date: 11/17/2015**

**From: Office of the Fire Chief**

**Prepared By: H. Schapelhouman**

**PARTICIPATION IN THE TOWN OF ATHERTONS CIVIC CENTER PROJECT – REQUEST FROM MAYOR RICK DEGOLIA**

**Staff Recommendation**

1. That the Board of Directors accepts the report as presented.
2. That the Board of Directors provides direction to staff.

**Background**

On October 19, 2015, Fire Board President Kiraly received correspondence from Atherton Town Mayor Degolia titled “Participation in the Town of Atherton Civic Center” (See attached correspondence)

The letter graciously offers that the Fire District to be involved with the design phase of the new Civic Center by proposing to “*house an emergency response team, enhancing communications, creating a response space within the new Emergency Operations Center (EOC) or planning for the future growth and response needs of the District by developing permanent space at the site*”.

This issue was collectively discussed at the joint Town and District meeting held on July 15, 2015 but was left open for the Town Manager and Fire Chief to explore. We have revisited this topic on several occasions but as much as I have appreciated the offer, I can find no practical or strategic business, preparedness or emergency response benefit to this site for the Fire District’s purposes that it does not already provide for itself or could or should provide in the future. That said, joint regional opportunities could exist for the Town.

I am excited for the Town that it will upgrade and modernize the overall life safety and practical aspects of its core essential services facilities and mission functions related to law enforcement, code enforcement, building, planning, emergency operations and governance, but opportunities for shared services from this site are limited and not practical unless other partners are involved.

**Discussion:**

1. **Housing an emergency response team** – As we reviewed in July, five of our fire stations strategically cover the Town of Atherton with only one geographically located in the Town. These locations coupled with non-impeded primary emergency response routes allows us to provide superior emergency services to our residents.

The recent Standards of Cover Assessment validated this level of service and further identified that our fire stations were in the right location. The proposed Civic Center project is 0.7 miles away from Station 3, 0.8 miles away from Station 5 and 1.2 miles away from Station 6.

Simply stated, fire station spacing under 3 miles apart is more than adequate based upon structure density and population intensity? So there is not a strategic advantage for deployment at this site and the proximity of a major rail corridor further amplifies that conclusion.

If the Fire Board wishes to further examine this topic as a viable alternative to Fire Station 3, which was rebuilt in 1997, I would suggest postponing the HAWK Joint Traffic signal at El Camino and Almondral because we have obligated \$170k of funds to share the cost of this traffic signal.

I would recommend the Town explore living quarters with the County Ambulance provider, American Medical Response (AMR) although the dynamic movement and work shift models may not provide advantages today, and it could be needed in the future as the areas housing stock and traffic congestion worsen. The same could be said for law enforcement and other critical Town staff positions.

2. **Enhancing Communications** – Dispatching services are currently jointly provided by the County for all Fire Agencies in the County. Communications infrastructure is jointly supported by the District itself, through the NET-6 JPA and at other strategic sites within the County.

I would recommend that the Town explore partnering with Menlo PD to potentially establish a redundant dispatching center if the Police Chief's agree.

3. **Creating a response space within the new EOC** – I strongly support the Town improving its emergency operations center. Under Federal and State guidelines using the incident command system which recognizes that dependent upon the incident, impact and severity, an EOC may need to be opened and the Fire District may have a significant role to play, so we may need to be a partner with the Town.

But EOC capability needs to be flexible, mobile and redundant. Atherton has risk but it is relatively minimal given larger cities with denser populations and business areas. Because of its size, the Town would benefit from being part of a larger multi-jurisdiction agency coordination center (MAC).

I proposed this at the joint meeting but it was not well received. Such a center would need to be larger than an EOC and support other regional partners like Menlo Park and East Palo Alto, who would need to be convinced of the benefit of each of these jurisdictions working collectively together which could create a force multiplier.

In summary, our need for space in an EOC is minimal and our commanders are used to being mobile with supplies kept in each vehicle. If the Town would like to support a joint MAC facility I would recommend the Board support such a concept, but a standard EOC model provides no strategic benefit to the Fire District but is required for the Town to designate.

4. **Planning for future growth and response needs of the District by developing permanent space at the site** – We looked at a joint location for fire prevention functions like plan submittal but as we move towards digital plan submittal the need to physically accept building plans is significantly reduced.

Other options could include housing for Chief Officers or staff who live outside the area but are here during the work week. I would only recommend this be done on a daily rental basis as a contract for services.

When Station 1 is rebuilt, the monthly Fire Board meeting will need to be relocated for up to two years. The District could look at renting space at the Civic Center monthly or use the Pavilion at Holbrook Palmer Park.

## **Fiscal Impact**

None at this time.

## **Attachments**

- A. Letter from the Mayor
- B. Fire Station Location Map