

CITY PROVIDES ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT MEASURES E & G

You are likely aware East Contra Costa Fire Protection District is responsible for providing fire suppression, fire protection, fire prevention, emergency response, and emergency services among other services related to the protection of life and property. The district covers 249 square miles, including the cities of Brentwood and Oakley, and the unincorporated areas of far East County.

The District's ability to fulfill its mission is challenged due to insufficient funding. While the financial troubles are not new, they've continued to grow worse. In 2010, the district had to close five fire stations. Presently there are only three stations, with nine firefighters at a time to serve the entire service area. A recent master plan study indicated a minimum of nine stations are needed just for a basic level of service.

ECCFPD's funding challenges don't stem from mismanagement. There's nothing to cut. There are only three fire stations for 249 square miles and a population of over 113,000 residents. The administrative overhead is at a minimum consisting of the Fire Chief and one administrative assistant. The District's firefighters' pay is the lowest in the area and pensions for the new staff are capped by State law. The firefighters are stretched beyond any reasonable limit, yet continue to serve diligently and with great distinction.

Looking back, we can paint the story of the District's financial woes. Almost all (97%) revenues for the district's operations come from property taxes. Forty plus years ago, when agencies determined the share each would receive of the 1% residents pay in property taxes, there wasn't as a great a need for fire services in East County. Then, the community was mostly undeveloped. On average, the East Contra Costa Fire District only receives about 8 % of the 1% -- in some areas of the District, it is 4%. By some comparison, ConFire receives 14%, San Ramon Valley Fire 15%, and Orinda-Moraga Fire 21%.

In 1978 voters rolled back property taxes with Proposition 13 and put the 1% cap in place. This kept taxes in check for property owners, but also significantly cut revenues of governmental agencies. The set allocation of the 1% also created a "zero-sum" game, in that if one agency is to receive more, then it has to come from other agencies. Further, the schools' portion of the 1% is nearly 70% of the total and the State does not allow the schools to give up any of its portion. The zero-sum game and the schools receiving almost all of the 1% makes any reallocation extremely difficult and highly unlikely. (It is also important to note that Prop. 13 and other subsequent laws prohibit local agencies from raising taxes without a vote of the people. In other words, the City Council has not and cannot raise your taxes. It can only place a measure on the ballot for your consideration – which it has done with Measures E & G).

So, the East Contra Costa Fire Protection District has a very small share of the 1% property tax and the Great Recession devastated those revenues and only made matters worse. The District was forced to close five fire stations. The financial crisis led the District to try on two occasions to pass property-based tax measures in 2012 and 2015. Both of the measures were not successful. After two unsuccessful attempts, the District and members of the public called on the cities and County to

“help.” After months of meetings and research by a Task Force, both the Brentwood and Oakley city councils decided to put measures on the ballot to assist the Fire District that can provide the much-needed and lacking fire protection and medical emergency services.

The City of Oakley also has a very small portion of the 1% property tax and our overall tax revenues are very low. We have had to be very prudent with our spending and we often seek outside grant funds to improve the community. When you see nice parks and landscaped areas maintained, road improvements, signage, etc., know that these projects come from funds or grants that are legally restricted to be used for those purposes and are usually one-time funds. These funds cannot be used to operate a fire station. Furthermore, much of the City’s budget and existing revenues goes to pay for the Police Department, which is the most essential service provided by cities.

Even though the Fire District is a separate legal entity and the City’s existing resources are limited, the critical need from fire and emergency medical services is a huge priority. The City of Oakley, like Brentwood, is asking residents to consider Measure E that could help support the District. Measure E is a general purpose tax to be collected as a Utility Users Tax of 3.5% on certain utility bill charges (much like a sales tax). This amount would be included in your billings for gas, electricity, cable TV, water, and sewer. The tax would be collected by utility providers.

For those concerned that the funds would not be used for Fire, please vote accordingly. Measure G asks that if Measure E passes, “Do you want the revenues to be used to restore and enhance fire protection and emergency medical response services in Oakley?” Measure E also establishes a citizen review committee to monitor how funds are spent. (The City Council didn’t go to all this effort to place these measures on the ballot, if it didn’t intend to allocate the general purpose revenues to the Fire District).

Measure E requires a simple majority to pass and is one the Fire District is not able to propose.

Below are some additional questions and answers, and you may also obtain more information and the initial list of Frequently Asked Questions at: <http://www.ci.oakley.ca.us/measures-e-g/>. Any further questions can also be sent to info@ci.oakley.ca.us.

Q. Are you thinking, “have the developers paid?”

A. Developers are already on the hook to build a new fire station and to provide a new engine. As stated, this additional station is very critical in the provision of fire and emergency medical services to protect our families. The District does not have money to staff this station and Measure E would help provide the necessary funding.

Q. Why not make new homes pay for the staffing costs, or stop building altogether?

A. Legally we can not stop property owners from building. Much of the land in Oakley is already entitled with proper permits and land use designations approved. Furthermore, this doesn’t solve the current problem. The Fire District doesn’t even have the funds to serve the residents of the District that are already here and all residents are at risk. Dribbling in funds from new houses would not have any measurable impact (for example, at that same rate as the Summer Lakes existing fire

assessment, another 15,000 or more homes would need to be built to address the funding that the Fire District needs now).

Please note, that those who live in the Summer Lakes subdivision and are already paying a fire tax/assessment, would be reimbursed by the Fire District per the approved Ordinance.

Q. Another question we've heard is, "why we don't bring back a volunteer fire department?"

A. The number of calls per day and the training requirements for firefighters make a volunteer operation no longer possible. A station can get 15-20 calls per day and calling out volunteers away from their jobs, that provide income to their families at the needed frequency, is not practical. Further, safety standards for volunteers are not different than those of professional firefighters, which means volunteering demands a much greater time commitment than ever before and with the same rigorous and frequent training of a professional firefighter. The District uses and welcomes volunteer assistance that can supplement, but this wouldn't be a realistic staffing solution.

Q. Some have suggested an effort to readdress how the share of the 1% property received by the various government/school agencies.

A. As stated previously, a reallocation of any significance is HIGHLY unlikely. However, should a reallocation effort be successful in generating revenues to match those that the UUT would provide, the UUT would sunset and the Council would repeal the tax. Keep in mind however, that state law does not allow school districts to give up their share. Even if the remaining agencies forfeited or agreed to give up their shares, this wouldn't be enough to address the need.

Q. Perhaps you wonder why doesn't Oakley break away and form its own fire department.

A. This is not financially feasible. Two stations in Oakley as a separate department would cost \$7-8 million per year. The proposed UUT will only generate \$2 million. The most cost effective and practical option (due to standards for personnel and engine requirements) is a regional approach.

Today, Oakley has one station with nine firefighters assigned to that station, and only three firefighters on-duty throughout the day to serve over 40,000 residents. The Oakley station alone responds to more than 16 calls a day. The demand of answering to multiple emergencies, the physical distance (249 miles) of the service area, varying complexity of emergencies etc. has resulted in longer response times. The limited staffing alone is a challenge in and of itself. In the instance of a structure fire, it can take up four or more engines to take on the fire. This automatically requires that the District call for aid and wait for its arrival before tackling the fire.

Thus said, the continued strain on fire services and risk to the community is such that the City Council felt obligated to provide the opportunity to allow residents to consider a funding measure. The residents will ultimately get to decide.

Thank you for reading this and thank you to those who took the time to complete the Engage in Oakley survey and offer comments during the Council meetings. While a 9% UUT would be needed in order to fully execute the master plan operating with three stations in Oakley, we recognized that this might be too much for voters to support at this time. Thus the Engage in Oakley poll asked for

sentiments at a 4.5% UUT (amount needed to fund the operation of one additional station). The responses were less than enthusiastic, thus the 3.5% number was determined as a prudent and realistic approach to trying to better protect our families, schools, businesses and homes.

Please ensure your vote is informed. For more information visit

<http://www.ci.oakley.ca.us/measures-e-g/>.