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8/22/17
TMA*

HIGGINS FIRE DISTRICT
of Nevada County
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Received 22 August 2017

August 16, 2017

The Honorable Thomas M. Anderson
Presiding Judge of the Grand Jury
201 Church Street
Nevada City, CA 95959

**Re: Higgins Area Fire Protection District Response to Grand Jury Report
Published May 27, 2017**

Dear Judge Anderson:

The Higgins Area Fire Protection District ("District") has carefully reviewed and considered the Findings and Recommendations of the Nevada County Grand Jury report published on May 27, 2017. By letter dated May 25, 2017, the Grand Jury requested responses from the District on or before August 23, 2017. This letter shall serve as the official responses of the District to the Findings and Recommendations contained in the Grand Jury report, pursuant to California Penal Code section 933.05, subdivisions (a) and (b).

A. FINDINGS:

- a. F1. As a result of the 2008 recession the Higgins District suffered an approximate 30% loss of revenue which severely hampered operations of the District.

Agree.

- b. F2. The failure of three tax measures, for a variety of reasons, resulted in reduction of staffing and services for the Higgins District. Contributing to those failures were the lack of sufficient information given to the public and the public's confusion as to the purpose of the SRA fee. Also contributing was the failure of the hired consultant to meet the deadline to file a rebuttal to a strong local opposition group that published misinformation about some of the facts of the tax measure.

Partially Agree.

District staff spent significant time and effort providing information to the public regarding the tax measures as well as the purpose of the SRA fee.

- c. F3. The Board demonstrated that they did not understand their fiscal responsibilities or fully understand Higgins District financial reports.

Partially Agree.

While some members of the Board may not have fully understood fiscal responsibilities and/or Higgins District financial reports, this was not true of all members of the Board. Different members of the Board demonstrated varying degrees of understanding regarding Higgins District fiscal responsibilities and financial reports.

- d. F4. The lack of strategic planning affected the Board's ability to meet its responsibilities.

Agree.

- e. F5. The Amador Contract is a vital element in the operations of the Higgins District.

Partially Agree.

The Amador Contract has been a vital element in the operations of the Higgins District for each year it has been in effect.

- f. F6. The Board's failure to create standing committees resulted in the formation of ad hoc committees not open to the public. Committee results were not documented.

Agree.

- g. F7. Ineffective communication to the community, including the outdated website and other community outreach, contributed to the failure of the tax measures and lack of candidates for the Board.

Partially Agree.

Many factors contributed to the failure of the tax measures including anti-tax sentiment. District staff spent significant time and effort providing information to the public regarding the tax measures.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a. R1. Educate the public as to the purpose of the Cal Fire SRA fee. (F2)

The recommendation has been implemented.

The District has educated the public as to the purpose of the Cal Fire SRA fee through various community outreach efforts, including hand-delivering informational flyers, mailing postcards, and providing information on its website and social media pages. The District plans to continue these and other educational efforts in the future regarding the Cal Fire SRA fee.

- b. R2. Develop an understanding of all financial responsibilities including all reports and budgets. (F2 and F3)

The recommendation has been implemented.

The Board has participated in study sessions open to the public regarding its financial responsibilities including all reports and budgets. The Board plans to continue these study sessions in the future.

- c. Revisit the need for an increase in the existing special tax. (F2)

The recommendation has been implemented.

The District has discussed the need for an increase in the existing special tax through its standing Strategic Planning Committee. The standing Strategic Planning Committee plans to continue these discussions in the future.

- d. Develop long-range strategic plans to address budgeting and provision of adequate fire services to the district. (F4)

This recommendation has been implemented.

The District has developed long-range strategic plans to address budgeting and provision of adequate fire services to the District through its standing Strategic Planning Committee. The standing Strategic Planning Committee plans to continue this development in the future.

- e. Form standing committees to replace outdated ad hoc committees. (F6)

This recommendation has been partially implemented.

The District has already converted one ad hoc committee to the standing Strategic Planning Committee. The District is currently evaluating which other ad hoc committees will also be converted to standing committees.

- f. Continue efforts to improve their community outreach, professionalism, and fiscal responsibility. (F7)

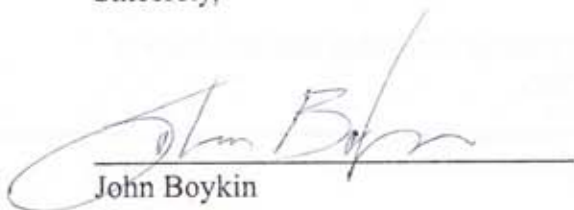
This recommendation has been implemented.

The District has continued its efforts to improve community outreach through community presentations open to the public, increased presence and visibility at community events, its website and social media pages, hand-delivering informational flyers and mailing postcards. The Board has continued its efforts to improve professionalism by discussing and implementing plans to increase Board decorum. The District has continued its efforts to improve fiscal responsibility through its standing Strategic Planning Committee by discussing and evaluating the most cost-effective means to deliver its services.

CONCLUSION

The District welcomes and appreciates the Grand Jury's interest in the District's operations, as well as the opportunity to respond to the Findings and Recommendations contained in the report. The District is confident this letter effectively addresses the concerns raised by the Grand Jury.

Sincerely,



John Boykin
Chairman
Board of Directors

cc: Members of the Board of Directors
Jerry Good, Battalion Chief
Thomas Achter, Foreperson, 2016-2017 Nevada County Grand Jury