

Proposed Shasta Fire Protection District Formation Plan for Services-As the Successor Agency upon Shasta Community Services District Fire Divestiture

Brief History and Background:

The Shasta Community Service District was formed under the petition process by the landowners in 1959 thus began the Shasta Fire Department providing fire protection to the residents starting in 1960. The Shasta CSD added domestic water service in 1964 after the completion of Whiskeytown Dam and the Spring Creek Conduit.

The SCSD Fire Department has a service area of approximately 7,360 acres or approximately 11.5 square miles and serves approximately 1250 improved and unimproved parcels. It does not include the recently annexed water service area of Keswick, which is serviced for fire/emergency responses by CSA #1, primarily CalFire Station 58.

The Shasta CSD Fire Department responds to a wide range of calls, including emergency medical, traffic collisions, wildland and structure fires, haz-mat, and a wide variety of public service requests. In 2018 we were dispatched to over 300 calls/year. In 2021 that number was 182, 72% medical and 28% fire related.

Shasta Fire Dept. was staffed by 1 full-time paid firefighter since 2000 working a 5 day / 40 hour workweek, and initially 1 then later 2 seasonal paid firefighters each summer. They responded after hours within the district and were paid overtime.

In early 2018 we were able to hire a 2nd full-time paid fire engineer as the Fire Chief gave up his \$12,000 annual stipend completing funding for this additional FF position. We changed the workweek to be three days with coverage in the off hours. This provided 24 hours 6 days a week coverage. We also hired 2 seasonal firefighters that worked a 5-day week stagger so we had 3 people on 3 days a week. This gave us a fully staffed engine to roll immediately on 3 days a week and 2 persons daily on the other 3 days a week. Sunday was covered by volunteer and paid personnel overtime coverage.

Shasta Fire Protection District proposes to include those services listed above and is anticipated to hire paid personnel and maintain a much higher level of service than what the SCSD board voted on; by dissolving the Shasta Fire Department and turning it over to CSA #1, Shasta County Fire. Under the SCSD plan, the Shasta Fire Station 56 would become a Shasta County volunteer-only station with the only paid fire personnel responding from CalFire Sta. 58.

Benefits of forming a new Fire Protection District:

1. By forming an independent fire district we will keep all the tax revenue locally in our Shasta community. Instead of transferring all fire apparatus, fire station, safety equipment and all tax revenue to CSA #1, Shasta Co. Fire Department as general revenue.

2. As shown in attached budget using only the annual tax revenue, we will hire 2 full-time paid professional firefighters providing emergency response capabilities and supported by volunteer firefighters, water tender operators and trained medical responders.

3. We re-signed the automatic aid agreement and the direct hire agreement with CSA #1 in June 2022. This insures CalFire Station 58 will respond to all calls in proposed Shasta FPD assisting with timely responses from both agencies. We will also reciprocate by responding to traffic accidents on 299W and responses when requested to Whiskeytown, Keswick, Centerville and French Gulch. Also providing our Water Tender to out of district fires when requested. Please note that this agreement was not current, as the SCSD did not renew it in the previous year.

4. We have almost 10 community members step up both over the past year and during the signature-gathering petition process required by LAFCO to become emergency responders for Station 56. Several other community members have stepped up to volunteer their services as grant writers, bookkeeping/accounting and general support functions as well.

5. Rapid response times will result from on-duty paid personnel responding from within the Shasta FPD boundaries along with CalFire Station 58 both being dispatched simultaneously if Station 58 is available and not committed to another incident due to their large response area.

6. The Shasta community has a unique advantage in Shasta County by having a 365 day staffed CSA #1 Fire Station 58 within our district boundary. By hiring and staffing Shasta Station 56 our community will have rapid paid firefighter responses from 2 separate fire agencies within our district boundaries. Plus both CalFire and Shasta Fire work very well together.

7. Station 58 is located right off Hwy 299W on Homestake Rd. at the intersection of Keswick Dam Rd in the eastern part of the proposed fire district. Shasta Station 56 is located in the heart of Old Shasta 1 block off of Hwy 299W on High St. in the west part of the proposed fire district. Depending on the location of the emergency either fire company (56 or 58) can be first on scene, with the other fire company arriving closely behind providing additional assistance.

8. As a fire district recently devastated by the Carr fire, there is significant grant funding available for a variety of needs. We will be very proactive in pursuing grants for fuel mitigation, equipment and apparatus replacement and other related needs. We have just secured 2 grants very recently totaling approximately \$80,000.

9. Lastly, occurring now, we are developing a website to keep the citizens of the community informed with information on the fire department, upcoming community events, fire safe information and keeping an open and transparent fire department for the community by the community.

Staffing and Response Times:

(The elephant in the room, which needs to be stated and addressed)

The SCSD in their proposal to LAFCO listed as the primary reason for dissolving Shasta Fire and transferring it over to CSA #1 was a serious lack of emergency responses.

Responders and response times were not a problem when we had personnel at the station or in the district 24/6 rapidly responding until both paid personnel went off work on injuries, one on I.I. and the other an off-duty injury.

With both full-time paid personnel injured, the SCSD district made no real effort to hire anyone to replace them. The SCSD state their primary reason for dissolving the fire department was lack of response. Yet, no one was hired to replace our injured personnel, the fire chief was fired and no one was allowed to step into that position either. This all occurred in 2020 and 2021, and this is the time span the SCSD board and manager use in their justification to LAFCO to dissolve the fire department due to lack of responses to emergencies. The only positive step they did to alleviate the situation was to hire a full-time newly minted EMT with no fire experience to cover the district 5 days a week from May 20, 2021 until March 11, 2022. She provided medical response coverage only, as she was not qualified to drive the water tender or any fire engines. She expected to train under a fully qualified paid FF supervisor, but the district hired no one. We also had 7 people apply to become volunteers but no one's application was approved or processed.

Additionally, the SCSD manager advised two of our existing members, "to quit responding to calls as CalFire was responding to our calls". And when our EMT responder resigned to go to school in March 2021, the SCSD staff took the C56 pickup she was driving and kept it at the water treatment plant so it was not available for fire department usage.

So to use the lack of response and staffing as the primary reason to dissolve the fire department is faulty logic when no real attempt was made to hire any qualified paid firefighters or bring on any additional volunteers. Additionally, Eric Ohde the Asst. Chief, was told by the SCSD manager that his position was not in SFD's chain of

command and therefore has no authority. He further stated that it was a made up position created by the then fired fire chief. Yet the Shasta FD operational manual shows the command structure with an Assistant Chief position and states, "who acts for the chief in his absence".

(See attached copy of page 4 of Standard Operating Guidelines)

These details are pertinent in the context as lack of staffing and responses were the primary reason stated for dissolution of Shasta FD. Yet neither the SCSD manager nor board made much of an attempt to hire personnel to alleviate the problem. The board kept saying it was a personnel matter therefore it was solely up the SCSD Manager to hire. Yet no accountability was applied to insure these crucial positions were filled.

Staffing going forward after forming an independent fire district:

1. The number one priority will be to hire full-time paid personnel and on-board the qualified volunteers who have already applied; with the goal to provide rapid emergency response to the citizens of Shasta.

With dual automatic dispatching of paid fire professionals from both Shasta Sta. 56 and CalFire Sta. 58 will typically respond within 2 to 5 minutes. This will allow very prompt emergency response especially crucial when CalFire Station 58 is committed on another incident. Station 58 covers from the western boundary of the City of Redding to the Shasta County line. Their initial response area is very large and includes several communities including Keswick, Centerville, Igo, Ogo, Platina, Shasta, Whiskeytown, French Gulch, and Hwy 299W to Buckhorn summit plus being on almost all wildland fire initial dispatches on the valley floor.

2. The current and future tax revenue provides sufficient funding to hire 2 full-time paid personnel to staff Station 56 using tax revenues only. Leaving grant money and reserve funds to be used for equipment replacement and upgrades, training and other capital expenditures to rebuild the fire department.

[Refer to attached budget]

3. After researching benefits and potential employees we can attract, we will provide full benefits, but will be a Non-PERS agency. This will allow us to hire paid personnel that have or are ready to retire from a Public Safety PERS Fire agency and will save our fire district considerable money by not have to carry the unfunded liability portion of PERS as well.

4. As revenue increases, probably in the 2023-24 or 2024-2025 budget year, we will look at possibly hiring 1 or 2 seasonal firefighters if enough tax revenues are available.

5. With over 80% of the emergency calls in the Shasta community medical calls, getting someone on-scene rapidly is essential. We will work swiftly once formed to quickly provide this essential service to our community.

Training and Onboarding new volunteers:

As a fire district we will concentrate on onboarding and start training the several new volunteer applicants. Asst. Chief Chris Varnum is a recently retired Battalion Chief from the City of Redding. Chris was the head of the training division at Redding Fire for two years. We also have a firm commitment from Curato Reginato, SHU CalFire Battalion Chief in charge of training; to actively assist us with training needs. We have discussed conducting joint training exercises with neighboring Co. volunteer fire companies and Shasta Co. training officers during the winter and spring. Joint training with Shasta Co. Fire comes with no additional costs incurred.

Measure H, a countywide fee, funds regional training both at the Shasta College training grounds and thru SHIELD. We as a fire district will be an active member of SHIELD, Shasta Co. Chiefs and Training Officers Associations and take full advantage to train our members.

Interim Fire Chief Eric Ohde, worked for Redding Fire for 31 years, instructed in vertical rescue, swiftwater, wildland fire behavior and firing, and ICS command. He also spent many years on national and state fire management teams and the regional Haz-Mat team. Also was on the apparatus committee and in charge of SCBA purchases, testing and repairs.

Ted Blankenheim, former Shasta FD fire chief, first paramedic in Shasta Co. and a longtime RN has committed to take charge of all EMS training for us.

We are well aware of the trend locally and regionally of recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters is an on-going problem. In looking at recent numbers of volunteers countywide in the Shasta Co. Fire Department spread over 16 stations is around 120 with only about ½ that number actively responding to incidents.

Shasta FPD will not be immune to that trend, as we have seen a drop over the years of people volunteering at Shasta FD. This is the primary reason we want to form a district so we can use our adequate tax revenue base to hire 2 fulltime paid personnel initially. As a fire district, we will continue to recruit volunteers. As a community fire department, people are more vested in the success when they are funding it, attending social functions at the firehouse and most importantly volunteering in some capacity to respond or help in some sort of support function.

Whether as a volunteer firefighter, medical responder, water tender operator, fundraiser, bookkeeper or grant writer; we can utilize each person's interest and skillset to best serve their community of Shasta.

Assets:

The Shasta Fire Protection District proposes to own and operate fire station 56, which was initially built in 1962 and has been expanded to include: Sleeping quarters for 2 responders, a full bathroom including shower, a full kitchen and four apparatus bays. The station is currently in relatively good condition and will get a new roof in September.

- Fire Apparatus includes 4 engines, 1 water-tender, 1 rescue & 2 pickups
- 2009 Ford F-150 Pickup and 2nd Rescue **C-56/R-56**
- 2011 Ford F-150 Utility Pickup **U-56**
- 2000 Ford F-350 Rescue Unit **R-56** w/ extrication and over the embankment equip.
- 2006 Type 1/2 4 door Structural Fire Engine **E-56**
- 2007 Type 3 4 door Wildland Engine **E-556**
- 2000 Type 2 Reserve Structure Fire Engine **E-256**
- 2006 Type 2 2,000 gallon Tactical Water Tender **WT-56**

The fire apparatus are generally in good condition and we do not anticipate having to purchase any fire apparatus for several years. However a bay area fire district is willing to donate or sell at a greatly reduced price a used wildland engine or structural engine and has reached out to us. We will pursue this idea, as it is great way to modernize our apparatus.

Cost of Operations for the Shasta Fire Protection District

With a tax revenue of approximately \$269,400 for 2022-23 and \$283,500 for 2023-24 the tax revenue received will adequately pay for day to day operations. The approximately \$300,000 or more of transferred fund balance to be transferred from the SCSD Fire Department account will provide an excellent cushion for unexpected expenditures. The \$90,000 in Grant monies and \$42,887 re-imburement from the Apple fire as the check from CalFire was never received and is being re-issued. These funds will pay for safety equipment upgrades and replacement and a thorough mechanical bumper-to-bumper inspection and needed repairs of all the rolling stock, and upgrading computer and office equipment.

2022-23 tax revenues	\$269,400
2023-24 tax revenues	\$283,500
Expected transferred fund balance from SCSD (Currently as of Aug 18, 2022 \$336,110)	\$300,000
Grants funds already promised are approximately	\$90,000
Apple fire 2020 Re-imburement check	\$42,887

(Please refer to the attached budget for a breakdown)

Summary:

Ultimately the decision you as the LAFCO board must make is; what is best for the citizens of Shasta when they call 911?

Can this proposed Shasta Fire Protection District; totally independent of the SCSD and not a part of Shasta Co. Fire CSA #1 successfully provide EMS, Fire and public assistance to the citizens of Shasta?

Yes we can!

Forming a new fire district is truly sustainable as proven by the realistic budget presented for the next 5 years. Shasta Fire Protection District formation has strong community support as proven by the petition campaign, community meetings, calls and offers to help, and attendance at public meetings. This along with the number of community members who have actively applied or are wanting to start the process of becoming members of the fire department; prove the viability of this formation being a long term success.

Chris Varnum and I recently met with Nolda Short, Shasta County Auditor, to confirm our tax revenue figures and go over our budget. She confirmed the tax revenue projections we can expect to receive that are shown in the budget. We also ask her to look over our budget projections and she confirmed that it appeared to be realistic and workable.

We have some very experienced people within our ranks with decades of experience and many as skilled supporters who have stepped up to help get this fire district started and keep it going into the future.

“There is a good tax base, which is paid by the community, is best kept locally in the community, has strong community support, and should be fully used for the protection of the community of Shasta.”

Respectfully submitted,

Eric Ohde
Interim Fire Chief
Shasta Fire Department
eric.ohde@icloud.com

