

FIKE DEPARTMENT
SAN MATEO COUNTY TIMES
SEPTEMBER 9, 2012

SAN CARLOS

City faces gaps in fire staff

Plan on tap to use firefighters from Redwood City

By Bonnie Eslinger

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To make up for staffing shortages in the fire department, the San Carlos City Council on Monday will consider approving an agreement to use Redwood City's higher-paid fire captains, firefighters and paramedics as needed.

But the proposal makes Mayor Matt Grocott wonder if the big cost savings San Carlos expected by dissolving its joint fire department with Belmont last year was just a mirage.

"The thing that I am afraid of is we're spending more, or as much, as we would have if we had kept with the department that we had," Grocott said Friday.

In October, San Carlos established its own fire department after complain-

ing that Belmont wasn't paying its fair share under their joint arrangement. San Carlos hired its own firefighters and contracted with Redwood City's fire department to manage them.

But right from the outset San Carlos has struggled to fully staff the department. Although it has budgeted for 24 positions, only 18 of them are filled, according to Redwood City Deputy Fire Chief Stan Maupin, who oversees San Carlos' operation. He said five candidates are being trained at an academy but won't be available until February at the earliest.

As a result, the city occasionally had to close its fire station on Alameda de las Pulgas this summer. And in June the City Council authorized City Manager Jeff Maltbie to spend up to \$400,000 to reimburse Redwood City for helping to staff both San Carlos fire stations from January to

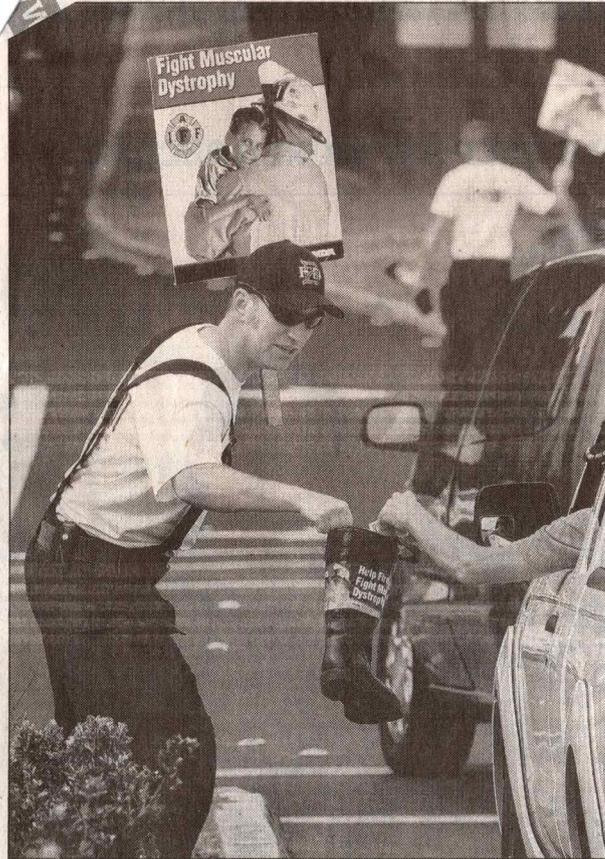
June.

According to a contract amendment the city manager's office is asking the council to approve Monday, the city could continue to use Redwood City firefighters until Jan. 31, 2013, but pay them overtime. The agreement also allows Redwood City, which recently had 15 fire department employees retire, to use San Carlos' firefighters when needed and similarly compensate them.

Because Redwood City firefighters are paid more than San Carlos' firefighters, however, their overtime rate would be higher. According to the city manager's memo, a Redwood City fire captain's overtime pay would be \$71.33 an hour, a firefighter/paramedic's would be \$63.23 and a firefighter's would be \$56.45. For a San Carlos fire captain overtime would be \$54.54, for a firefighter/paramedic \$51.27 and for a firefighter \$47.12.

FIRE DEPARTMENT
SAN MATEO COUNTY TIMES
AUGUST 24, 2012

THE BOOT' FUNDRAISER



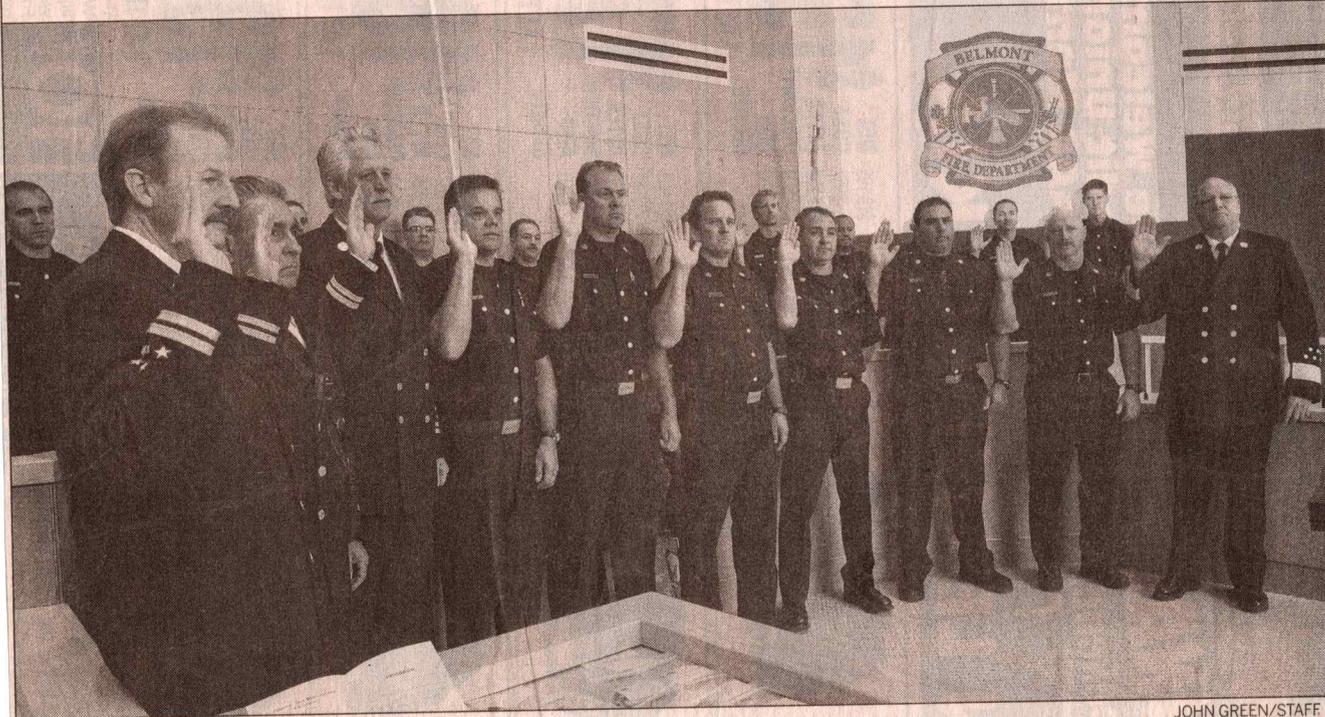
JOHN GREEN/STAFF

Belmont firefighter Brian Banks collects money for the Muscular Dystrophy Association as part of the "Fill the Boot" campaign Thursday in Belmont. Firefighters hit the streets at the intersection of Ralston Avenue and Alameda de las Pulgas between 8:30 a.m. and 2 p.m. to collect donations for the nonprofit. One hundred percent of donations collected will be used by the MDA to fund services for Bay Area patients with neuromuscular diseases and their families.

BELMONT FIRE DEPT.
SAN MATEO COUNTY TIMES
OCTOBER 2, 2011

BELMONT GOES ITS OWN WAY

New fire department opens



JOHN GREEN/STAFF

New crew: Members of the new Belmont Fire Department are sworn in Saturday at City Hall in Belmont. The department debuted with 15 firefighters, two engines and a 100-foot aerial ladder truck at two stations. The fledgling agency is a result of the breakup of the Belmont-San Carlos Fire Department, which had formed in 1979.

(over)

FIRE DEPT.
SEPT. 15, 2010
SAN MATEO TIMES

CITY COUNCIL

Belmont after its own fire service

Officials concede department would be expensive, but they say it's better than sharing with another city

By Mike Rosenberg

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Belmont wants its own fire department.

Facing the breakup of the Belmont-San Carlos Fire Department in 13 months, the City Council on Tuesday said it did not want to team up with any other cities or the state to form a new fire department.

Officials conceded that a stand-alone fire department would be the most expensive option, but they said they had grown tired of sharing with outsiders the power to manage one of their most critical services.

"We need some more control over what's going on in the fire department," said Councilman Dave Warden, citing what has been an at-times acrimonious relationship with San Carlos.

Still, though, council members said they would ask their neighbors to share some of the smaller duties of a fire department, such as training, the fire marshal and chief positions and oversight of medical responses.

Council members said they had no interest in contracting out fire services to a local city or Cal Fire, as San Carlos plans to do. They said they had already "learned their lesson" during the partnership with San Carlos and were now "gun-shy."

MORE ONLINE

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"You probably wouldn't want to contract out the entire department unless financially you just have to do so. And we're not expecting that," Councilman Warren Lieberman said Wednesday. He was the sole member of the council in support of studying the contracting idea, saying he wanted all options on the table.

Another option, to find a new city to join fire departments, was also shot down for the same reasons.

But the costs of running a fire department have been high enough that most cities around San Mateo

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IN THEIR WORDS

"You probably wouldn't want to contract out the entire department unless financially you just have to do so. And we're not expecting that."



Warren Lieberman,
councilman

County have chosen to share them by merging, particularly smaller communities.

Two pairs of cities with stand-alone fire departments — San Bruno and Millbrae, as well as San Mateo and Foster City — are considering merging, and South San Francisco is studying whether to contract out fire services to Cal Fire. All other cities in the county, with the exception of Redwood City, already have merged departments or contract to Cal Fire.

In Belmont, officials and three city-hired consultants will begin studying the costs of running a fire department and reach out to neighbors to determine what services could be shared.

The city currently pays \$5.7 million annually for fire services, which is about

one-fourth of the total cost for city operations.

The city's fire district gets about \$6 million each year from property taxes, according to Finance Director Thomas Fil.

"Is that enough" to start our own department, asked Vice Mayor Coralin Feierbach. "I don't know. That's the bottom line."

"If we don't have enough money, then we're going to have to look at the other options," she said. "I would prefer to keep our own fire department, if we can do it carefully."

But Lieberman said the stand-alone idea was simply too costly and figured that route would put the city in "big trouble" financially within a few years.

"There are many ways in which working together just makes a lot of sense — financially, as well as the ability to provide the level of service you want," he said.

They will also figure out

what it will take to maintain the current level of fire services.

In addition to firefighters and captains, the department will need a chief, three battalion chiefs, a fire prevention position such as a fire marshal, an office support staffer and possibly someone to manage emergency preparedness.

The city expects to continue staffing two fire stations.

Officials briefly discussed combining the city's police and fire operations into an office of public safety, which is done in Sunnyvale and Rohnert Park, but dismissed it, citing operational problems and lack of savings.

The city expects to release the results of the research in the winter and begin forming the new department in the spring.

Contact Mike Rosenberg at 650-348-4324.

FIRE VET
SAN MATEO COUNTY TIMES
SEPT. 2010

BELMONT

Union concessions up for vote

City will determine if offers reach target or if more cuts are needed

By Mike Rosenberg

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BELMONT — The last employee group in the city has agreed to concessions, leaving management to vote on four offers from union groups as it tries to raise nearly half a million dollars in worker cuts.

Meanwhile, a separate union that represents Belmont-San Carlos firefighters is still due at least a 5 percent pay hike and has not offered any concessions.

The local chapter of the Ameri-

can Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees — a union representing 38 city workers — submitted

a concession offer to Belmont city management on Wednesday, a day before a deadline imposed by the City Council. Three separate unions representing six department heads, 37 mid-managers and 38 police officers had submitted proposals within the previous week.

The City Council will vote on the offers in closed session during a special meeting tonight.

Council members said they will

By the numbers

\$455,000

expected in employee cuts

\$2.8 million

what's left in the reserve fund

include \$455,000 in employee cuts on Tuesday when they adopt the budget for the fiscal year that starts Thursday. They told unions one month ago they needed the money to boost a reserve fund that has dropped to \$2.8 million, a fall of \$2 million from two years ago.

Since the union offers are confidential until they are ratified, it remains unclear whether the total concessions offered by the city's

bargaining group would share a proportionate amount of the burden.

In separate negotiations, the three unions representing employees of the Belmont-San Carlos Fire Department met in closed sessions with department management on Wednesday.

Although officials cannot discuss what happens in closed sessions, San Carlos officials have called for

119 employees will be enough, or if the council will need to cut further. Union representatives said they had joined together so that each

concessions from all their employees, while Belmont leaders said they wanted to keep their fire budget static.

The two cities split the fire department costs. In the case of Belmont, the city funds the department using an account that is separate from the operating budget.

The 42 firefighters, captains and inspectors in the department are due 5 percent or 6 percent pay hikes, depending on the market average, for the fiscal year that starts Thursday.

Under their five-year deal, the firefighters froze their pay for the

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(OVER)

Union

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first three years and received 5 percent salary bumps for the current year. Their contract expires in July 2011, just months before the department breaks up in October 2011.

Capt. Gary Jacobs, the union vice president, said they have not been approached by leaders about concessions and are willing to meet with management to discuss cuts.

"We're not immune to what's going on in the world, and the communities," Jacobs said. "We're always willing to sit down and talk about costs and controlling costs."

But fire board chairman Andy Klein, a San Carlos councilman, said he thinks the process to break up the

"We're not immune to what's going on in the world, and the communities.

We're always willing to sit down and talk about costs."

*—Capt. Gary Jacobs,
firefighters union VP*

fire department has broken any possibility the two sides had at working out a deal.

"I would be shocked if they would be willing to give concessions," Klein said. "They want to play hard ball. There's no good will between the two groups right now."

Mike Rosenberg covers San Mateo, Burlingame, Belmont and transportation. Contact him at 650-348-4324.

FIRE DEPT.
SAN MATEO COUNTY TIME
JUNE 24, 2010

BELMONT

City enlists help in forming new fire department

Council OKs hiring of consultants

By Mike Rosenberg

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Belmont has assembled a pricey team of experts to help guide officials through the process of forming a new fire department.

The Belmont City Council, acting as the fire protection board, approved without discussion Tuesday the hiring of three consultants: a lawyer, an accountant and a fire department expert.

INSIDE

Belmont city employees will cut \$455,000 to help fill reserve funds. **PAGE B1**

The trio will join city officials as they figure out how to provide fire services in the city after

(OVER)

Belmont

Continued from Page 1

the Belmont-San Carlos Fire Department breaks up in October 2011. Officials in San Carlos want to outsource their fire services to save money and in April launched the 18-month process to dissolve the joint department.

In coming months, officials and the consultants will investigate the cost and feasibility of forming the city's own fire department, merging with another city or contracting services to a larger department.

The city will pay the firms from \$65 per hour for administrative work

Officials and the consultants will investigate the cost and feasibility of forming the city's own fire department, merging with another city or contracting services to a larger department.

to \$250 hourly for full consulting.

One of the consultants will be Stu Gary of Folsom-based Citygate Associates. Gary will earn \$212 per hour, and a typical 40-hour week including some minor administrative work and four trips would cost the city \$10,482.

Gary is a former chief of the Livermore-Pleasanton Fire Department, which he helped merge, and

has 39 years of experience in the fire-protection field. His firm is also conducting the study that will determine whether it makes financial sense for Burlingame, Hillsborough, Millbrae and San Bruno to merge fire departments.

The main consultant will be Michael Colantuono, an attorney with Penn Valley-based law firm Colantuono & Levin. Colantuono will employ

two subconsultants: Gary and Cory Biggs, an accountant with Pleasant Hill-based Mateo & Associates.

Colantuono previously worked with Belmont officials when they negotiated a deal with San Carlos in 2007 to keep their joint fire department. Given his knowledge of the city's history, officials decided to hire him without asking for proposals from other firms.

Finance Director Thomas Fil said the city may need to add extra specialists depending on how the process unfolds.

Mike Rosenberg covers San Mateo, Burlingame, Belmont and transportation. Contact him at 650-348-4324.

BELMONT

City's fire service is up for discussion

Options are start own department, find new partner or contract out

By Mike Rosenberg

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BELMONT — With the Belmont-San Carlos Fire Department on the brink of collapse, Belmont officials will consider whether to launch their own fire department, merge fire services with those of another city or contract out the services.

Belmont leaders will soon begin discussing the future of the city's fire services, perhaps as early as next week, after the San Carlos City Council voted Monday to put in motion a plan to dissolve the joint fire department. Facing budget problems, San Carlos intends to pull out of the joint department and contract fire services to an outside agency, but must wait 18 months before doing so.

Belmont Mayor Christine Wozniak said the city has three options should the joint department disband. In order, from most to least expensive, they are: Start its own fire department for the first time in 37 years, find a new city or cities to

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Fire

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partner with or outsource fire services to an outside agency.

Councilman Dave Warden, one of the architects of the agreement that led to the formation of the current department in July 2006, said the "platinum option" — forming a Belmont-only department — would give the city the most control.

"I think it makes things a lot simpler, but it's the most expensive option," Warden said Wednesday. "I honestly don't know if we can afford it. I don't think in the long term it's sustainable. But maybe it is sustainable."

The other options, to merge existing fire services with those of another city or cities or contract out, are also picking up steam. Warden mentioned the possibility of Belmont joining with its northern neighbor, San Mateo, as officials discussed last decade when they considered breaking up with San Carlos. Belmont and San Carlos ultimately decided to keep the partnership but created a different name and structure.

One potential partner is located south of Belmont. Menlo Park Fire Protection District Chief Harold Schapelhouman said Wednesday he will ask his

board Tuesday to research whether to put together proposals to provide fire services for Belmont, San Carlos, or both, or merge with Belmont. The district provides fire service for Atherton, Menlo Park, East Palo Alto and some unincorporated areas.

"Where that will go is anybody's guess," Schapelhouman said. "I just know that we're interested in looking at them."

At Wednesday night's fire board meeting, Chief Doug Fry was expected to lead a discussion on searching for other cities with which to merge. Redwood City has also expressed interest recently in sharing services with its neighbors, while Burlingame and Hillsborough are considering merging their joint fire department with San Bruno and Millbrae.

As for contracting out fire service, another potential suitor, as it was four years ago, is Cal Fire, the only agency that has submitted a proposal to take over fire services in San Carlos.

Warden, for one, is not a fan of that idea.

"What's the point of being a city if you're going to allow most of your public services to be provided by other entities, and you're just writing a check?" Warden said. "You might as well just become unincorporated and let the county run you

at that point. And I don't want to do that."

Officials have already made it clear they were not willing to increase funding or cut spending to keep the relationship with San Carlos.

In January, the Belmont council voted down a proposal to increase its \$5.6 million share of the joint budget by \$100,000, with Vice Mayor Coralin Feierbach saying San Carlos, which pays \$6.3 million annually, could find a new partner if it didn't like the funding agreement.

Then in March, Wozniak, a member of the joint fire board that governs the department, shot down an idea to draft up a list of department cuts.

Belmont's other fire board member, Councilman Warren Lieberman, said he was not yet ready to talk about what option appeared best. Like Wozniak, he was confident Belmont — which is facing a \$1.3 million deficit but has steered clear of the type of cuts proposed in San Carlos — will ultimately keep its level of fire service intact.

"The people of Belmont do not need to worry about having an issue with that service," he said.

Mike Rosenberg covers San Mateo, Burlingame, Belmont and transportation. Contact him at 650-348-4324.

*Fire Department.
San Mateo Times
April 15, 2010*

*Fire Department
Daily Journal
April 13, 2010*

Fire agency partnership on the rocks

In split vote, San Carlos decides to send letter of dissolution to Belmont

By Michelle Durand
DAILY JOURNAL STAFF

The San Carlos City Council narrowly authorized the city to begin dissolving its shared fire department with the city of Belmont, overriding the public and two members who wanted more time before starting the 18-month process.

Councilmembers Bob Grassilli and Matt Grocott tried to first pass an amended motion to delay vote for 90 days but it failed with Mayor Randy Royce casting the deciding vote. Councilmembers Omar Ahmad, Andy Klein and Royce then

passed a resolution authorizing a dissolution letter. Royce's vote appeared to catch some in the audience off guard, coming after a lengthy council discussion in which he admitted struggling between making a business decision and best working with people.

Grocott and Grassilli's insistence that sending the dissolution letter very well begins a point of now return was compounded by Belmont Councilman Warren Lieberman who said it would "set in motion a chain of events ... that spell the end of the

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FIRE

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fire department."

Fire union representative Gary Jacobs, and many residents who spoke, didn't tell the council not to leave the Joint Powers Authority but called Monday's vote rushed.

"To give notice tonight is extremely premature and irresponsible," Jacobs said, adding that it would destabilize the working environment of the department.

But Ahmad and Klein, both who sit on the JPA board that oversees the two-city fire department along two members of the Belmont City Council, said Belmont has had four years to make the agreement work and that another delay wasn't going to change anything.

"We need to show them we can walk away ... It's time to pull the trigger. It's time to show them we're serious," Klein said.

The interest in dissolving the JPA grew from San Carlos looking to fix a \$3.5 million budget deficit and revamp the current funding formula in which it pays more than Belmont. The Belmont City

Council, acting as the Belmont Fire Protection District, voted in January against changing the criteria to a method that would give less weight to population and assessed property value. San Carlos estimated it would have saved \$120,000 annually on the JPA's approximately \$12 million budget.

During those discussions, some San Carlos councilmembers suggested looking beyond funding to a completely different fire service arrangement. As the city moved toward outsourcing its parks maintenance and both police and fire services, the sentiment grew.

The city has a proposal on the table with Cal Fire and is still seeking other proposals.

The agreement with Belmont requires an 18-month notice to dismantle the JPA although both parties could agree to end the relationship sooner. Both sides could also decide at any point during the 18-month process to remain together.

Those favoring the letter believe it is a starting rather than ending point for negotiations with Belmont or even an expansion of the JPA to include other jurisdictions. Without a definitive statement from Belmont on whether they favor regionalization, Ahmad said a 90-

day delay could be a waste.

Ahmad told the audience it needed to be realistic about the city's finances, particularly as tied to fire service and previously unsuccessful attempts to pass fire taxes.

"Fact: We're going broke. I hate to tell you, but go to the cupboard. It's bare," he said.

The two cities nearly parted in December 2004 when Belmont sent a letter to dissolve the then-named South County Fire Authority. Both ultimately opted to reform the JPA into the Belmont-San Carlos Fire District and established the evenly-weighted funding formula.

Grocott, who helped reform the JPA, said a dissolution is difficult to retract.

"It's a lot of hard work guys. You want to go there? Be my guest," Grocott said.

Grassilli worried that giving Belmont the letter could endanger passing a fire JPA budget which in turn freezes its ability to spend money. But Ahmad said the only way the two sides can negotiate is with an ultimatum in place.

Many who spoke from the audience disagreed and advised against threats.

"It's much harder to make nice after someone kicks you in the shins," Pat Bell said.

Joint fire deal may end

COST-SAVING MOVE: Council votes to start process of dissolving agreement with Belmont

By Shaun Bishop
Bay Area News Group

A divided San Carlos City Council voted Monday to start the 18-month process of dissolving its joint fire department with neighboring Belmont.

The council voted 3-2 to send a letter of dissolution to Belmont, indicating its intention to break up the Belmont-San Carlos Fire

Department, which was formed in 1979.

The move comes as the city considers hiring outside agencies to run its public safety services to help close a projected \$3.5 million deficit in the 2010-11 fiscal year budget and reduce costs in the long term.

Councilman Andy Klein said the city needs to get control of rising fire costs.

"I think we need to do this now," said Klein, who voted in favor of sending the dissolution letter along with Mayor Randy Royce and Vice Mayor Omar Ahmad. "We need to get our house in order."

The letter starts a process in which the liabilities and assets of the department will be identified and divided between the two cities.

Under the cities' joint fire agreement, dissolution can take as long as 18 months, though it can happen

sooner if both parties agree.

Councilmen Bob Grassilli and Matt Grocott both voted against sending the letter. They urged the council to wait 90 days before a decision, saying the fire department and firefighters' union are already discussing other ways to save costs.

Grassilli said he also wants to allow more time for broader discussions on the Peninsula about

MORE INSIDE

Man pleads no contest to child endangerment.

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Fire

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regionalizing fire service. "I think this is the opportunity of a lifetime," Grassilli said.

Both Belmont and San Carlos sent letters of dissolution to each other in late 2004, but eventually came to a new agreement in mid-2006 before the end of the process.

Ahmad said the two cities could negotiate during the dissolution process on some other solution, but "you have to be able to walk away from the deal."

"It's a great department; that's not the issue tonight," Ahmad said. "The issue is exclusively how do we pay?"

Officials say fire costs in San Carlos have grown 30

percent over the past five years to \$6.3 million this year.

Belmont pays an estimated \$5.5 million for its share of the department.

Firefighters also asked the council to hold off on a decision. Capt. Gary Jacobs, vice president of the local union, said starting dissolution while discussions of other options were ongoing would be "extremely premature and irresponsible."

Warren Lieberman, a Belmont councilman, told the council he believed a letter "will set in motion a chain of events which are very likely to spell the end of the Belmont-San Carlos Fire Department."

Klein noted Belmont has refused San Carlos' requests to change the funding for-

mula for the department as San Carlos' share of the department's cost has increased.

In other business, the council voted 3-2 to not renew a contract with Redflex to operate a red-light camera at the intersection of Brittan Avenue and Industrial Road. The contract expires in October 2011.

The police department said the camera is running a deficit of \$2,200 per month because it is generating less than two tickets a day.

Council members tacked on a resolution asking the city attorney to negotiate with Redflex in an effort to get out of the contract sooner.

Contact Shaun Bishop at sbishop@dailynewsgroup.com.

Fire Department
San Carlos Times
April 14, 2010

SAN CARLOS

End may be near for two-city fire agency

Council may start split with Belmont because of cost of the service

By Shaun Bishop

Bay Area News Group

San Carlos could take the first step in breaking up with Belmont today when the City Council considers declaring its intention to possibly link up with a more compatible suitor to provide fire service.

By agreeing to send Belmont a "notice of dissolution," the council would initiate an 18-month process to end the Belmont-San Carlos Fire Department, a partnership that has existed since 1979.

Although the process could be stopped before the agency is eliminated, San Carlos officials say the estrangement period will allow them to seriously pursue other cost-reducing options, including contracting out fire services.

"I don't think we're going to have any really formative discussions until we have the clock going," Councilman Andy Klein said. "All we're going to say up there is, 'we've still got 18 months before we can do anything.'"

City Manager Mark Weiss has recommended the city outsource police and fire services, which account for up to 60 percent of the city's \$28 million general fund costs, since it faces a \$3.5 million deficit in the 2010-11 budget and is seeking a long-term solution to rising costs.

"We simply need to find a more effective way of providing services given our current funding levels," Weiss said.

If San Carlos decides to part with Belmont, both cities would spend the next 18 months divvying up assets.

San Carlos

Continued from Page 1

council has said it wants more details before making any decisions.

If San Carlos decides to part with Belmont, both cities would spend the next 18 months divvying up assets and liabilities, everything from equipment to retirement obligations. The partnership would end on Oct. 12, 2011, or earlier if the two parties agree to a faster timeline.

Weiss said the city could negotiate with Belmont during that period to consider reducing salaries and ben-

efits, changing work schedules or finding another way to reduce the \$12 million cost of the department.

The last time the department faced dissolution was late 2004, when Belmont sent a letter indicating its intention to leave the agency then known as the South County Fire Authority. Soon after, San Carlos sent a similar notice, but the cities ultimately signed another agreement in June 2006 that gave the department new life and its current name.

Under a funding formula the cities agreed to in 2007, San Carlos' share of the department's cost has grown gradually to \$6.3 million this fiscal year compared to Bel-

mont's share of \$5.5 million.

In November, San Carlos voted to change the formula to reduce its cost but Belmont rejected the idea. Given the impasse, Klein said the city has little choice but to consider leaving.

"When you don't have a partner who's willing to understand your situation, it's hard to consider it a partnership," said Klein, chairman of the cities' four-member fire commission.

Belmont Councilman Warren Lieberman, who also sits on the fire commission, declined to comment on the matter other than to say the cities have an "outstanding fire department. It's a credit to both communities."

An initial contract proposal from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection would save between \$1.2 million and \$2 million annually, Weiss said. The San Mateo County Sheriff's Office, meanwhile, has submitted a proposal for police services, though the

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Fire Department
San Mateo Times
April 12, 2010

San Carlos

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ing any follow-up work on.”

San Mateo would have to beat offers already submitted by the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office and Cal Fire to provide public safety services for San Carlos. Redwood City also has expressed interest in providing San Carlos with police services and may submit a plan in the coming month.

The San Carlos City Council, facing massive budget problems, agreed Monday to explore outsourcing both the police and fire departments at the recommendations of city management.

San Carlos City Manager Mark Weiss had asked local governments for contracting proposals in December, with little response. But with the council's decision this week, he again asked city managers if they would be interested in providing police or fire services, or both.

“We're certainly open,” Weiss said of his talks with San Mateo, noting officials specifically want to contract out the services. “From my standpoint, I've been reaching out to our neighbors now for several months.”

Weiss said any cities interested in providing police services would have to submit plans within 30 to 60 days, while plans for fire department changes will take longer because of San Carlos' current partnership with Belmont.

Loftus said San Mateo will need to strike a balance between researching the topic further while ensuring it does not waste staff time pursuing what could be a dead end.

She said any contracting of services would depend on the likelihood it would help San Mateo save money and avoid cutting its police and fire departments. San Mateo

Fire Department
San Mateo Times
March 26, 2010

officials have in the past two years faced budget cuts, as well, and have, among other things, warned of potential fire station brownouts and reduced police services.

Loftus said without researching the topic in depth, it will be difficult to tell whether San Mateo could offer San Carlos the best and cheapest service.

San Carlos officials said the sheriff's proposal would provide the same level of police services the city currently experiences while giving employment to current city police officers.

Another variable is the recent talks between San Mateo and other cities, such as Burlingame, to merge police departments. San Mateo Police Chief Susan Manheimer said Thursday that her department continues to focus on ongoing consolidation studies with Burlingame.

The fire department issue would be complicated by the possible divorce between San Carlos and Belmont that could take place during the next 18 months. Furthermore, the police and fire departments would be challenged by having to navigate around Belmont, which sits between San Mateo and San Carlos.

“It'd be unusual to do that, but it's not impossible,” said San Mateo Fire Chief Dan Belville, a former battalion chief and interim fire chief with the Belmont-San Carlos Fire Department.

He said a potential contracting relationship could help save on training costs, among other things.

“We're just trying to stretch more out of what exists,” he said. “Whether we can pull it off, I don't know.”

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PUBLIC SAFETY

San Mateo, San Carlos may share police, fire

Though details vague, partnership could help cities through recession

By Mike Rosenberg

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San Mateo leaders said Thursday that they may offer to take over police and fire services for San Carlos, the latest potential public safety partnership between Peninsula cities open to reshaping their government to survive the recession.

San Mateo City Manager Susan Loftus said officials have yet to formulate a detailed plan, but they intend to submit some ideas to leaders in San Carlos to gauge their interest. Ideas could include complete outsourcing of San Carlos police and fire services to San Mateo, a public safety merger between the two cities or contracting for specific operations, such as dispatch.

“I think this is something we'd like to look at, and at least do enough research to see if this is worth pursuing more,” Loftus said. “We'll talk with San Carlos to see what they want, and we'll put something together and see if it's worth do-

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Fire Department
San Mateo Times
March 24, 2010

'Expect the unexpected every day'



Firefighters' quick thinking helped save lives in 2009 small plane crash

Editor's note: Each day through Friday, the San Mateo County Times will focus on 10 police officers and firefighters who have been nominated to receive valor, service and heroism awards from the Peninsula Council of Lions Clubs at its 45th annual awards banquet Friday.

By Joshua Melvin

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Belmont-San Carlos fire Capt. Steve Whitmarsh and paramedic Casey Engler jumped out of a small helicopter, grabbed their equipment and hustled toward a single-engine plane that had crashed minutes earlier.

Because the Piper Cherokee had gone down just east of the San Carlos Airport in marsh land around the Steinberger Slough, it was im-

possible to drive, walk or get there by boat. So the men improvised and asked a helicopter flight instructor based at the airport to give them a ride. It was March 28, 2009, and they knew the people in the plane could be seriously hurt. The clock was ticking.

In the end, the pilot and three passengers aboard were rescued and taken to local hospitals. But without the creative quick thinking of the firefighters, the situation could have ended very differently, said Belmont-San Carlos Fire Chief Doug Fry. A higher tide or an internal injury that wasn't treated in time could have easily meant death for them.

"I couldn't be prouder of these guys," he added.

On the morning of the crash,

chopper pilot Amber Mathrole dropped Whitmarsh and Engler on a bank of dry land near the plane and then, because the helicopter only had space for two passengers, went back to get Capt. Michael Miller. Once on-site, the men found the plane nose-down in the water.

They could hear people screaming inside, but because the aircraft's windows were fogged up, the firefighters couldn't see inside. The plane's door was also wedged shut, so they finally broke a window and learned quickly that everyone was still alive. But the pilot appeared to have a broken back, a woman had broken bones and two sight-impaired children had injuries that were not life threatening, Miller said. The

Belmont-San Carlos fire Capt. Steve Whitmarsh, center, Capt. Michael Miller, left, and firefighter and paramedic Casey Engler hitched a ride on a helicopter at the San Carlos Airport to reach a small plane that crashed in marsh land. Once at the scene, they pulled four people to safety.

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DAN HONDA/BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

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group had taken off around 10:50 a.m. as part of the Young Eagles program, which gives kids an introduction to flying.

"I couldn't imagine being sightless in that situation," Miller said.

The firefighters used an ax and pry bar to force open the door. One by one, they prepared the victims and pulled them out. By this time, a Coast Guard helicopter had arrived, and its crew used a basket to hoist the people into the air. They were later loaded into ambulances and taken to Stanford Hospital.

"We were going off adren-

aline and brute strength to get them out of the situation they were in," Engler said.

Within a day, one of the children had been released from the hospital, and the other was out not long after that.

Even the pilot, whose back was broken in the crash, was out and walking around a couple of months later. Whitmarsh said he ran into the man at the San Carlos Art and Wine Faire last October, and he was in a back brace but was healthy enough to come to the event. The man was lucky, Whitmarsh said.

Investigators were not able to determine what caused the plane to go down. According to the National Transportation Safety Board report, the

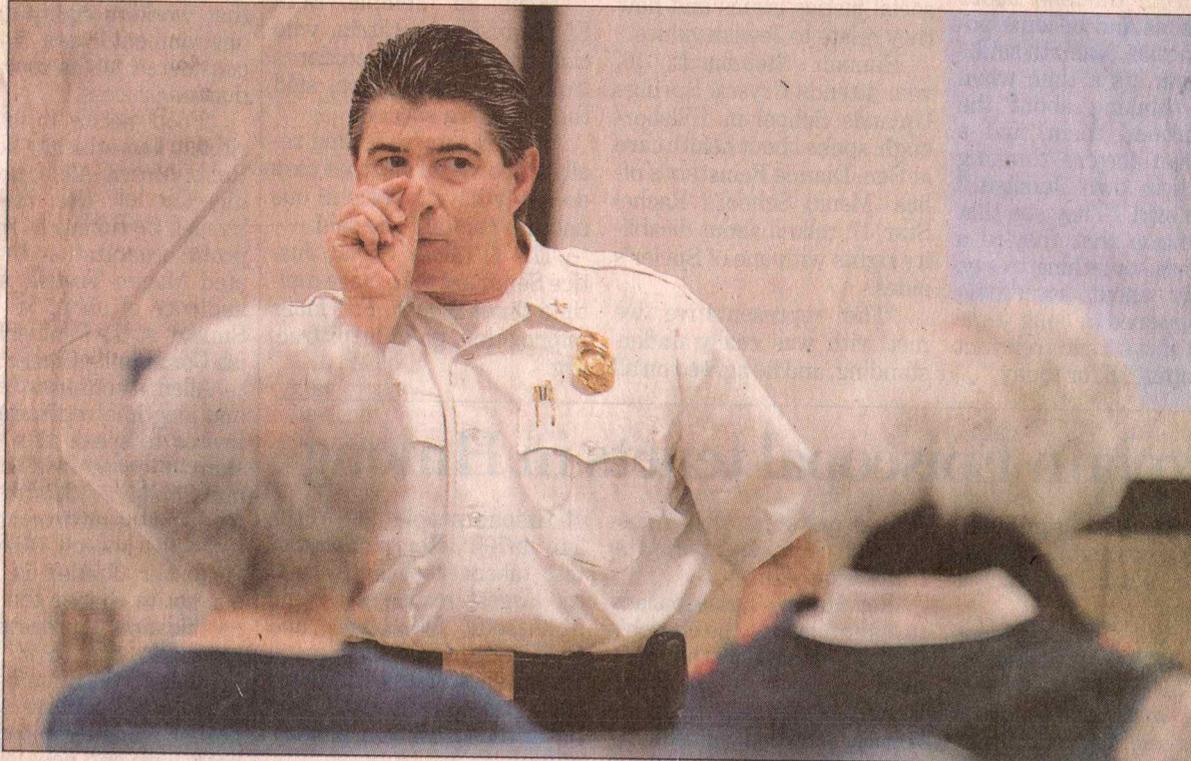
Cherokee lost power during takeoff "for undetermined reasons." Looking back on the incident, the firefighters said it was a very unusual and dramatic call for them. It brought together their training, resourcefulness and physical strength. In other words, it was an intense day that could have turned very bad for those involved. But Whitmarsh said that kind of day comes around for first responders every once in a while.

"You expect the unexpected every day," he said. "It's all about your training."

The firefighters are among 40 first responders from around the Peninsula who are up for honors at the sold-out Peninsula Council of Lions Clubs event.

*Fire Department
San Mateo Times
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SMALL STEPS, BIG DIFFERENCE



DAN HONDA/STAFF

James Palisi of the Belmont-San Carlos Fire District talks about fire safety Tuesday at Senior Safety Day at the Twin Pines Senior and Community Center in Belmont. The workshop, presented by the Belmont Police Department and the Parks and Recreation Department, covered home and fire safety, personal protection, scams and emergency preparedness.