

Financial Support El Monte Fire Station Utility Undergrounding; Hydrant Repair

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To: Mark Warren [REDACTED]; 'George Tyson' [REDACTED]; 'Kavita Tankha'

Cc: [REDACTED]; LAHCFD Clerk <clerk@lahcfd.org>; [REDACTED]

Commission President Warren, Commissioners,

Provide Financial Support to Undergrounding Utilities at El Monte Fire Station

The Town is in the final stages of considering an undergrounding project at the intersection of El Monte Road, Moody Road, and Elena Road. The location was chosen due to its proximity to the El Monte Fire Station and the critical importance of these roads as evacuation and emergency response routes. The driving force in undergrounding utilities in Los Altos Hills is to reduce fire risk from downed lines, reduce risk of blocked escape routes, and improve reliability of electricity service. In this regard the Town adopted a resolution including the following:

WHEREAS, the Town in consultation with the Los Altos Hills County Fire District (Fire District) has determined that the public necessity, health, safety, or welfare requires undergrounding the existing overhead utilities and removal of the utility poles in the area around the El Monte Fire Station would allow the Town to maintain an unobstructed emergency route that would otherwise be blocked if the roadways were blocked by fallen utility poles;

Since undergrounding in the El Monte Station area is a public safety matter that involves fire department access, emergency evacuation routes and fire risk in a WUI area, it is appropriate that residents' taxes provided for fire protection and public safety be used to support this effort. LAHCFD has an exceptionally large cash balance with ample unassigned fund balance that could be used to assist in this effort. I ask that the District consider a 50/50 participation with the Town in this project.

Hydrant Repair

At the Commission meeting held on March 16, 2021, I made a public comment on Agenda Item 12 B. Management of District Hydrant and Hydrant Related Infrastructure. I stated that some of the work F&L was doing was unnecessary, duplicative and make-work. I went on to suggest it would be more cost effective and efficient if Purissima Hills Water District (PHWD) was responsible for hydrant upgrades and repairs, since the hydrants were part of their system and they had greater capabilities and operational expertise with water systems than the Fire District. I recommended negotiating with PHWD to determine if a mutually satisfactory arrangement for handling hydrants could be reached. At the last meeting, the Commission did not consider or discuss my comments, and as far as I am aware the LAHCFD has not explored this alternative with PHWD.

Once again, the District has spent considerable time and effort inflating this infrequent activity into a major task. Spending on Outside Hydrant Repair over the past ten years, 2011-2020 as reported in the District's financial statements was \$667, \$13,778, \$18,909, \$12,910, \$2,602, \$70,208, \$3,403, \$39,086, \$24,863, and \$41,169, respectively (it is not known if these are gross numbers or after recovery from damage caused by others). A total of \$227,595 over 10 years, an average of \$22,760 per year (less than 0.2% of the District's annual budget). I believe a meaningful portion of the \$100,000+ spent this fiscal year through March 2021 and additional future expenditures could be reduced or avoided by working with PHWD, not to mention the elimination of substantial LAHCFD staff time. It should also be noted that utilizing the services of PHWD is how the Fire District successfully and cost effectively performed hydrant work for most of its history, before it had any employees, and I am unaware of problems associated with this prior process.

Before proceeding with the proposed method, I ask the Commission to consider the facts and discuss the merits of a contract with PHWD for hydrant upgrades and repair. This is in lieu of the District managing the details and contracting with a separate engineering firm and general contractor, which involves considerable additional staff, legal time, and expense.

Thank you for considering these matters.

PS. I would have sent copies to the other Commissioners, but their email addresses are not disclosed.

Best,
Allan

Allan Epstein
LAH Resident