



COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
Inter-Departmental Correspondence

DATE: March 17, 2015

BOARD MEETING DATE: March 31, 2015

TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors

FROM: Mark Church, Chief Elections Office & Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder

SUBJECT: Impact Analysis of Holding Even-Numbered Year Elections for the Coastside Fire Protection District

BACKGROUND:

On January 28, 2015, the Coastside Fire Protection District Board approved a resolution pursuant to California Elections Code §10404 requesting that election dates for future board elections be moved from odd-numbered years to even-numbered years. The resolution would move the scheduled election for November 2015 to November 2016. Current board members who face reelection in 2015 would have their terms extended to the next election.

On February 3, 2015, Coastside Fire Protection District submitted a request to the Board of Supervisors to move forward with the proposed change. Under California Elections Code §10404(d) the Chief Elections Officer is required to submit to the Board of Supervisors an impact analysis of a proposed consolidation of special district governing board members election to the same day as statewide general elections.

The San Mateo County Registration & Elections Division has reviewed the impact on cost and voter turnout on moving the Coastside Fire Protection District election from odd-numbered year November elections ("General District Elections") to even-numbered year November elections ("Statewide General Elections") as required by law.

IMPACT ANALYSIS ON COST AND VOTER TURNOUT:

In terms of cost considerations, cost allocations for elections are proportionally distributed based on two key factors: the number of registered voters within each entity's jurisdiction, and the number of entities participating in the given election. Generally, odd-numbered year General District Elections have higher costs for Cities,

Schools, and Special Districts because contests scheduled for these elections are borne fully by each entity, and the number of entities with elections during odd-numbered years is fewer, resulting in less cost sharing. Even-numbered year Statewide General Elections include federal, state, and county contests whose costs are borne solely by the County, and these elections constitute a substantial portion of the total cost for Statewide General Elections. When Cities, Schools, and Special Districts participate in Statewide General Elections, they accordingly benefit from a lesser portion of the total costs as a result of the County payment for federal, state, and county contests.

Although Coastside Fire Protection District did not go to ballot in 2011 and 2013 for their Board Seats (due to contests which were unopposed), the similarly sized Mid-Peninsula Water District spent \$32,081.75 in the November 2013 General District Election on their Board contest. Accordingly, the cost the Coastside Fire Protection District would pay for a General District Election in 2015 would be expected to be in the general range of \$32,000. In contrast, the Coastside Fire Protection District held a special recall election in consolidation with the November 2014 Statewide General Election and spent \$20,573.85. The difference between these two costs (around \$11,500, or a 36% reduction) represents the approximate savings the Coastside Fire Protection District may realize by changing from participating in General District Elections to Statewide General Elections.

However, there is one complicating factor to this analysis. Assembly Bill 2028 authorized San Mateo County to conduct a series of all-mailed ballot pilot elections through December 31, 2017, for local and special district elections (but not for the Statewide General Election in 2016). If the jurisdictions having an election in November 2015 or November 2017 agree to participate in the pilot program, those local jurisdictions will likely realize estimated cost savings of one-third to one-half in total costs compared to typical General District Elections. The savings from the pilot all-mailed ballot program, if it occurs, may exceed the savings the Coastside Fire Protection District would enjoy by changing to Statewide General Elections during this period. But due to the limited duration of the pilot program authorization and the fact that it is uncertain whether the jurisdictions having elections in November 2015 or November 2017 will decide to authorize the all-mailed ballot pilot election to occur, a move to Statewide General Elections is at least likely to reduce the cost of elections for the Coastside Fire Protection District compared to the cost of past General District Elections.

In terms of turnout, voter participation in General District Elections generally falls between 25% to 29%. Voter turnout in the two previous Presidential Statewide General Elections (2008 and 2012) was over 79%. Voter turnout for the two previous Gubernatorial Statewide General Elections was 65% in 2010, and 46% (a historical low) in 2014. For the past seven elections, voter turnout for Statewide General Elections has been at least 20% higher than for General District Elections, so a move to Statewide General Elections is likely to substantially increase voter participation for the Coastside Fire Protection District.

CONCLUSION:

Moving Coastside Fire Protection District Board Member elections to even-numbered years will reduce its costs compared to past odd-numbered year costs and allow for more voters to determine the outcome of contests in the district.

The relative small size of Coastside Fire Protection District will not impact the Registration & Elections Division in its conduct of elections. If, however, more local jurisdictions decide to move their elections away from odd-numbered years to even-numbered year elections, General Elections will become more complex. Additionally, significant financial burdens will be placed onto the remaining districts who continue to hold elections in odd-numbered years.