

Dear Fellow Alpiners,



Since almost the beginning of time, local fire and emergency medical services (EMS) here in eastern Alpine County have essentially been provided by volunteers. But like similar communities in the US that have relied on volunteers for their fire and EMS, an aging population and changing lifestyles have increased the demand for the service and decreased the number of people willing and able to serve as volunteers. If we want to continue to receive fire and EMS when we have an accident in our home or on the road, or when we have a fire, we need to start investing more resources to support our fire

departments and emergency medical services.

As many of you know this is not a new problem. During the latter part of 2004 and early 2005 a broad-based ad-hoc committee investigated the situation and in April of 2005 made a number of recommendations in the Eastern Alpine County Fire Services Plan (EACFSP) (see <http://www.alpinefiresafe.org/pages/eacfsp.htm>). The most important of these recommendations was to form a Benefit Assessment District to raise the funds from increased taxes to improve our fire and EMS. The Board of Supervisors approved the plan at its May 17, 2005 meeting and the 2006 Grand Jury report recommended that the County implement it (see <http://www.alpine.courts.ca.gov/GrandJury/tabid/58/Default.aspx>). A group of concerned citizens (the “Implementation Committee”) has been meeting since then trying to find a way to make the numbers work to fund all the recommendations in the plan. At this time it does not appear that the community is willing to commit the resources to implement the full EACFSP, and so an interim solution is needed.

The Implementation Committee has recommended to the Board of Supervisors that the County hire a Fire Chief at an approximate cost including benefits and expenses of about \$100,000 per year. In addition to being responsible for the fire departments the Fire Chief would also work to continue and eventually strengthen the delivery of EMS after the current director of EMS retires. The Woodfords Fire Department has offered to contribute the bulk of its training budget towards funding this position and the Markleeville Fire Department would be willing to contribute their Professional Services line item. This would still leave about \$70,000 per year to come from the General Fund. There is enough money in the General Fund to pay for this, provided that the Board of Supervisors and the community considers this to be a high priority. If it is not a high priority, then there is not enough money. The Chairman of the Board of Supervisors has agreed to include the Fire Chief position in the initial budget for the coming fiscal year, but it will only survive the budget process if in the judgment of the community and the Board it is a high priority.

This letter to you is to explain why all of us who are listed below believe that hiring a Fire Chief is a high priority.

The fire departments respond to much more than just fire calls. The most common calls are medical emergencies (38%) followed by traffic accidents (23%), many of which are also medical emergencies. Although there are currently about 15 reasonably active volunteers, about half of them only respond to fire calls, which puts a tremendous burden on the remainder that collectively respond to in the order of 150 calls a year. Approximately 90% of the non-fire calls are answered by one or more of just four individual volunteers within 15 minutes. Not surprisingly about every two years these volunteers burn out and decide that they have better things to do with their time. Part of the responsibility of the new Fire Chief would be to increase the number of active volunteers by developing volunteer retention and recruitment programs, and scheduling duties so that the volunteers would have times that they could safely turn off their beepers.

In the early 1980's Alpine County had a paid Fire Marshall/Chief. Due to personality conflicts between some of the volunteers and the individual who held the position the individual resigned and the County subsequently eliminated the position. Not having a Fire Chief was possible when both the Markleeville and Woodfords fire departments each had 15 active volunteers and a waiting list of people eager to join. This is no longer the case and we need to reestablish the paid Fire Chief position.

Currently there is no Chief and there are no officers for the Woodfords Fire Department, which answers the vast majority of the non-fire calls. The volunteers are continuing to respond to calls as firemen, but not in an official capacity. A new paid Fire Chief would solve this problem.

The volunteer fire fighters and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) are motivated to serve our community for many different reasons, but generally part of their motivation is a desire to serve, and the excitement of successfully meeting the challenge of defeating a fire or saving a life. They knew that the work would involve many hours of training, but none of them volunteered to do paperwork, attend meetings, or beg for money. Consequently much of this important work does not get done. Part of the responsibilities of the new Fire Chief will be to ensure that the necessary record keeping is complete, regulations are complied with, new development meets the Fire Department's requirements, and to research and apply for grants that can be used to improve our fire and EMS.

During the week many of the volunteers are at work out of the county and unavailable to respond during the day. Some of those who work in Alpine County are not able to leave their jobs to answer a call. Part of the responsibilities of the new Fire Chief will be to respond to emergency calls during week days.

New development, which is steadily coming to eastern Alpine County, will strain our already overstrained resources. With respect to fire and EMS, new development can pay for needed new equipment and fire stations if we have a Capital Improvement Plan for the fire department. Part of the new Fire Chief's responsibilities will be to develop the needed Capital Improvement Plan.

In summary, if we as a community want to continue to have fire and EMS respond when we dial 9-1-1, we need to have someone with the full time responsibility of delivering the service, in short a paid Fire Chief. Although as a small community we will never be able to afford the level of service that some of us have experienced in large urban centers, we can ensure that the service we do enjoy now will not deteriorate but will gradually improve.

Your neighbors listed below urge you to consider the need for a paid Fire Chief a high priority, and to communicate this to your Supervisor.

David Griffith, Mesa Vista; Jim Haen (past Woodfords Asst. Fire Chief), Woodfords; Don Jardine, Markleeville; Steve Martin, Markleeville; Bill Morgan, Woodfords; Al and Patty Moss, Mesa Vista; Jerry Andrews, Markleeville; Jeff Brees (Markleeville Asst. Fire Chief), Markleeville; Patty and John Brissenden, Sorenson's; Clint Celio (past Woodfords Fire Chief), Diamond Valley Road; Kim Chatfield, Mesa Vista; Mike Gard, Mesa Vista; Scott and Leticia Hansen, Woodfords; Richard and Kathryn Harvey, Markleeville; Steve Hibbs, Markleeville; Irving Krauss, Woodfords; Buck (past Woodfords Fire Chief) and Michelle McLelland, Woodfords; Dave and Kathy Mills, Woodfords; Mike and Laura Palmer, Woodfords; Jim Parsons, Mesa Vista; Dave Peets, Markleeville; Derek Rickford, Woodfords; Dale and Paula Robinson, Woodfords; Bill Rose, Woodfords; Bob and Gail Taylor, Woodfords; Shirley Taylor, Chambers Lane; Wayne Thomson (Markleeville Fire Chief), Markleeville; Fritz and Nancy Thornburg, Markleeville; Steve Yonker, Mesa Vista; Herman and Barbara Zellmer, Woodfords