

February 10, 2010

Commissioner Robert Larkin
Washoe County, Nevada
PO Box 11130
Reno, Nevada 89520

Dear Commissioner Larkin,

I read your comment about giving the three Sierra Fire stations to Truckee Meadows and Reno to operate in Susan Voyles' article in the RGJ. While we don't care what color the fire truck is so long as it shows up on time, the community here would rather not have Reno running their fire department. I hope as you consider how to provide better emergency service to the unincorporated area of the County that you will consider the following issues:

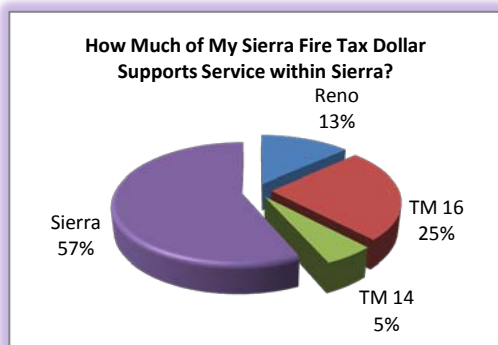
Financial Issues. The County pays Reno to run six TM fire stations. The County buys equipment at Reno's direction to equip those fire stations. The charges Reno levies as a contractor are supposed to vary, depending upon how many TM responses go into the City. At least three TM stations are now completely within the Reno city limits. Citizens here suspect both that the County equipment is used to protect the City (thus saving the City money), and that TM runs into Reno are also mis-reported. The consultants apparently could not find good records for either these responses or these purchases.

The financial analysis in the Diamante report, upon which you are presumably relying, was examined by Walker & Associates and found to be seriously flawed in favor of combining Sierra with Reno. I understand that Mr. Latipow has a copy of that preliminary analysis.

It is critical for you and your colleagues to have good data, and to share that data with the community. We hope you will undertake to collect and share it.

Fiscal Equity. While the interlocal agreement between the County and Reno for Truckee Meadows FPD is supposed to provide for fiscal equity when TM assists Reno, there is no such provision in any agreement with Sierra. Sierra was created out of the Sierra Forest Fire District, with boundaries and agreements appropriate to a State-run wildland fire protection agency and, when it became a county agency, neither was adjusted.

A large percentage of responses from two of the three Sierra stations go to Reno or TM, and are thus completely free to the City of Reno. In 2008, according to the consultant



reports, 74% of the Station 30 calls and 40% of the Station 35 calls went to TM/Reno without reimbursement. Only 57 cents of each tax dollar the citizens pay to Sierra goes to provide services within their district, as illustrated in the chart to the left. If Sierra were paid for this work, they could hire an additional 16 firefighters, more than enough to completely staff another fire station. Similarly, the new station for which the County got stimulus money will sit on a boundary between fire districts; a 50% cost share is expected there.

When this imbalance has been discussed with officials of TM/Reno, they invariably say they provide at least as many automatic aid responses into Sierra as Sierra provides to TM/Reno. However, there is no data in the consultant report to support this claim. When Sierra recently asked TM to provide figures on

automatic aid to District 30 (Washoe Valley), TM reportedly told Sierra that there were about 150 responses over the period involved. But Sierra reported only 80 calls in District 30 in that time frame, so the TM data is seriously flawed.

In summary, the citizens do not believe that their fire district finances have been protected or properly analyzed by the County, and they believe that if everyone paid for the responses into their own district or city the picture would be much different.

The solution is straightforward—if Sierra is your first responder, you live in Sierra FPD. If TM is, you live in TM FPD. All that is required is for the Fire Board to adjust the district boundaries. A second change would be to allow Sierra to charge for automatic aid responses into other districts, and pay for automatic aid responses into Sierra, but until the issues with Reno dispatch are corrected this is impossible, because the data is flawed.

Response time. The two performance parameters important to the community are response time, and equipment and training. Your consultants could not get response times for any calls run by Truckee Meadows and so were unable to assess performance; this data is readily available for the other fire districts (including Sierra) not operated by Reno.

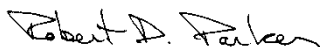
First-Responder Advanced Life Support. Sierra provides first-responder advanced life support (ALS) by providing a cross-trained fireman/paramedic with each engine company, because the citizens insist on it; most of the district is in the REMSA “best efforts” zone. Reno and Truckee Meadows rely on “tiered response” with REMSA providing the paramedic upon their arrival. Tiered response is used in only a handful of other jurisdictions in the country. An indication of how the citizens think about tiered response versus ALS is the huge outcry that arose when Sierra suggested moving the Station 30 crew from the Bowers Station in Washoe Valley. Citizens rightly feared that they would lose their paramedic. And Reno dispatch routinely sends Sierra Engine 30 on EMS responses out of district to the east side of the valley, since TM Engine 16 does not provide ALS, and REMSA is often delayed.

Fuels Management. Sierra has an aggressive, grant supported fuels management program that was the first in the County. The success of the Sierra program is due primarily to the hard work of the Sierra battalion chiefs encouraged by the current Fire Chief. The residents on the west side of the valley are very grateful for their work in intelligently cleaning up severe fire hazards such as the Galena Creek watershed, which was a serious hazard for many years because of neglect of the built-up fuel. If this leadership is lost, citizens fear the program will become ineffective again, and their danger will be greatly increased.

Community Involvement. Sierra has extensive community involvement, due to the public availability of the Chief and his staff. Volunteer involvement is a force multiplier, and the fire district readily shares information and offers training to the citizens so they can help in an emergency. Recent examples are the large evacuation drills that were held the last three springs. The Galena Steamboat CAB has never had anyone from Truckee Meadows appear and report; Sierra is there every meeting. The citizens believe that if Reno takes over, this involvement will disappear, and their protection will be the worse for it.

Commissioner, the residents of Sierra FPD have worked very hard to make their community safe. Volunteers there invest many hundreds of hours each year working with the fire district. They like their fire crews and department. Please carefully consider how they might keep them, and keep a high level of protection and community involvement that saves lives.

Respectfully,



Robert D. Parker