

Public Opinion Research & Strategy

TO: Adam Politzer

City of Sausalito

FROM: Dave Metz

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates

RE: Key Findings from Recent Survey on Fire Service in Sausalito

DATE: June 2, 2011

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently completed a telephone survey of Sausalito voters to gauge their attitudes on issues related to fire protection for the City. Among the key findings are the following:

- Voters express generally positive feelings about the direction of the City, and have high degrees of confidence in both the City Council and the Fire District.
- Given a brief description of the consolidation process, more than three in five local voters (62%) indicate that they support it.
- Voters clearly prefer consolidation and a \$90 parcel tax to any of the other primary options for funding fire protection.
- While voters initially support a ballot measure to fund consolidation through a \$90 parcel tax by a 50% to 35% margin, that support jumps dramatically (to 63%) after voters hear pro and con arguments much closer to the two-thirds supermajority required for approval.

While the findings help validate the policy approach the City has taken so far on consolidation, they also show that voters require more information about the issue. The results suggest that as the public dialogue continues between now and a 2012 election date, and as voters learn more about the issue, they are likely to become more supportive of both consolidation and a parcel tax.

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The balance of this memo explores these and other key findings in more detail.

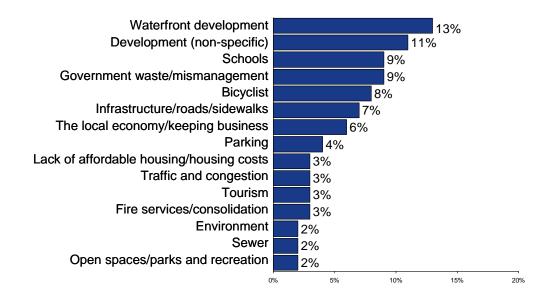
✓ <u>Local voters have a positive feeling about conditions in the community.</u> Overall, Sausalito residents have a very positive feeling toward their community at a time when the prevailing mood in the rest of the state is negative. Nearly two-thirds of local voters (64%) say that the city is generally headed in the right direction. And as detailed in **Figure 1**, voters have strongly positive attitudes toward a variety of local public agencies, including the Police Department, City Council, Southern Marin Fire Protection District, and the City Council. Fewer than one in five voters express any negative sentiment about any of these public agencies.

FIGURE 1: Attitudes Toward Public Agencies in Sausalito

Agency / Organization	TOTAL FAV.	Very Favorable	SW Favorable	SW Unfavorable	Very Unfavorable	Never Heard of / DK
The Sausalito Police Department	86%	52%	34%	7%	3%	3%
The Southern Marin Fire Protection District	84%	60%	24%	3%	0%	13%
Sausalito City Council	61%	16%	45%	13%	5%	21%

This is not to say that there are not some issues that concern local voters. **Figure 2** below details results of a question in which voters were asked to name what they saw as the biggest issue facing the City of Sausalito. Development concerns were the most frequently-named area of concern, with one in four voters volunteering a related issue as the biggest problem facing the City.

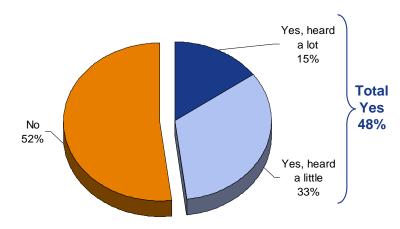
FIGURE 2:
Top Issue Facing the City of Sausalito
(Open-Ended)



✓ Few voters have focused on the issue of consolidation of fire protection services. The issue of consolidation of fire service is a relatively unfamiliar one for most voters. Fewer than one in five voters (15%) say they have heard "a lot" about the issue – and less than half (48%) have heard anything at all about it (as detailed in **Figure 3** below). Similarly, only three percent of voters volunteered a related issue as the "biggest problem" facing the state, as shown in **Figure 2**.

FIGURE 3:
Awareness of the Issue of Fire Service Consolidation

Before this survey, had you seen, heard, or read anything about the City of Sausalito consolidating fire protection services with the Southern Marin Fire Protection District?



✓ <u>Given a description of consolidation, most voters are supportive.</u> Anticipating that many local voters would not be familiar with the details of the issue, survey respondents were presented with the description of fire service consolidation shown below:

"Since 2004, the City of Sausalito has contracted with the Southern Marin Fire Protection District for fire protection and other emergency and paramedic services. Under this agreement, the Southern Marin Fire Protection District provides almost all management, operations and administrative services, including a fire chief and other key management and firefighting personnel, while the City of Sausalito owns and maintains its downtown fire station and equipment and employs 15 firefighters who are managed by the Fire Protection District.

"Under the current contract, however, the City of Sausalito is not paying the full cost of services provided by the Fire Protection District. It also includes duplication of some administrative services provided by the City and Fire Protection District.

"Together, the City and Fire Protection District are studying alternatives to the existing contract for a service approach that would ensure the fair and equitable provision of fire

protection services, increase efficiency and eliminate overlapping administrative functions while maintaining public safety.

"One proposal would consolidate fire protection services for the City of Sausalito fully under the authority of the Southern Marin Fire Protection District, with the City retaining ownership of its new downtown fire station and giving Sausalito residents the power to directly elect representatives to the Fire Protection District's Board of Directors."

Given this description, a clear majority of survey respondents were supportive of consolidation, as detailed in **Figure 4**. Supporters of the idea outnumbered opponents by a margin of three to one (62% to 19%). Only about one-third of voters expressed "strong" support or opposition for the idea, further reflecting the public's lack of familiarity with the issue, and most likely a desire for additional information.

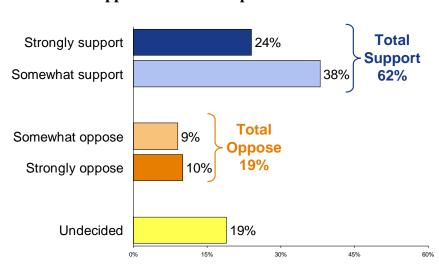


FIGURE 4: Support for the Concept of Consolidation

Initial support for consolidation tended to cut across subgroups of the Sausalito electorate, with some variations. The concept was supported by:

- 69% of Democrats, 59% of independents, and 45% of Republicans;
- 66% of men and 57% of women;
- 58% of homeowners and 67% of renters; and
- 63% of voters age 50 and over, and 52% of voters under 50.
- ✓ Residents place the highest priority on maintaining fire and emergency services particularly during disasters. Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of a series of potential outcomes of fire service consolidation, as shown in Figure 5 on the following page. The items that tended to receive the strongest reactions in terms of the proportion rating them "extremely important" were maintaining fire protection, emergency

and paramedic services, particularly in the circumstances of a disaster like an earthquake. The other items that ranked highly on this scale dealt with protecting the City's financial position, including maintaining the long-term financial viability of the City and avoiding significant cuts to basic City services.

FIGURE 5: Evaluating the Importance of Outcomes of Consolidation

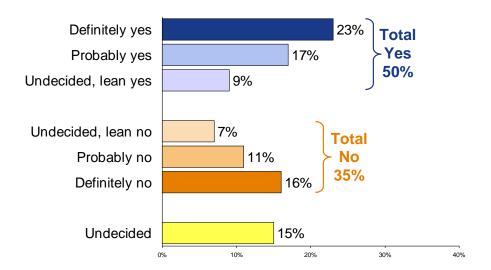
Outcome	TOTAL EXT./ VERY	Ext. Imp.	Very Imp.	SW Imp.	Not Imp.	DK/ NA
Maintaining fire protection services and other emergency and paramedic services for Sausalito	89%	44%	45%	9%	1%	2%
residents  Maintaining the long-term financial viability of the City	85%	38%	47%	11%	2%	2%
Better coordinating fire and emergency services during times of major disasters such as earthquakes	84%	48%	36%	11%	3%	2%
Avoiding significant cuts to basic City services, such as police protection, library services, road repair and parks and recreation programs	77%	38%	39%	15%	6%	3%
Preventing the City from depleting its budget reserves	72%	30%	42%	23%	3%	2%
Reducing the administrative cost of providing fire protection services	65%	27%	35%	28%	5%	5%
Preventing reductions in firefighter positions	56%	22%	34%	24%	12%	7%

Half of local voters support a ballot measure to fund fire services through consolidation, but initial support falls short of the required two-thirds majority. Early in the survey, respondents were presented with the following draft language for a ballot measure that would fund consolidation of fire services in Sausalito through a \$90 parcel tax:

"City of Sausalito Fire Protection Services Measure. To protect and maintain fire and other emergency and paramedic services for Sausalito residents through annexation of the City of Sausalito into the Southern Marin Fire Protection District for the provision of fire protection services, and to help avoid significant cuts to essential City services and programs; shall the City of Sausalito be authorized to levy a tax of \$90 per parcel per year, with annual audits and other public oversight?"

Given this language, half of all local voters indicate that they would vote "yes" (as shown in **Figure 6** on the following page). While supporters of the proposed measure outnumber opponents by a 15-point margin, initial support falls well short of the two-thirds supermajority that would be required for such a measure's approval.

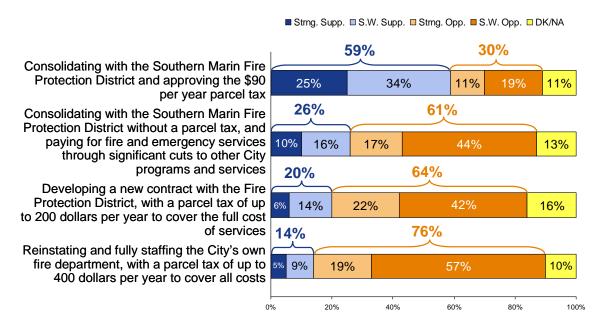
FIGURE 6: Initial Support for a Proposed Ballot Measure



Support for a proposed ballot measure varies across subgroups of the electorate. The proposed measure is initially backed by:

- 57% of Democrats, 42% of independents, and 41% of Republicans;
- 50% of men and 51% of women;
- 49% of homeowners and 53% of renters; and
- 52% of voters age 50 and over, and 41% of voters under 50.
- ✓ None of the potential options for funding fire services attracts supermajority support. Survey respondents were also presented with a variety of other strategies for providing fire service to the City of Sausalito, as shown in **Figure 7** on the following page. Not surprisingly given that all the options require either tax increases or cuts to other services none was embraced by a two-thirds supermajority of local voters. However, in comparison to the other potential strategies the idea of consolidation and a parcel tax attracted a higher level of support (59%) than it did initially, and was clearly preferred to the other available options.

FIGURE 7: Support for Alternative Strategies for Funding Fire Services



✓ After a series of pro and con messages, support for a ballot measure increases. As indicated in Figure 8, after a series of potential arguments for and against the measure, support increases to 63 percent – much closer to the required two-thirds supermajority. The most compelling messages in favor of the measure were those contrasting it to other, more costly alternative strategies for funding fire protection. The most persuasive arguments against it pointed to the overall condition of the economy, and argued that the City should find other ways to cut costs rather than increasing taxes.

FIGURE 8: Impact of Pro and Con Messages on Support for a Ballot Measure

Position	Initial Vote	After Pro and Con Messages	Change	
Definitely yes	23%	26%	+3%	
Probably/lean yes	26%	37%	+11%	
TOTAL YES	50%	63%	+13%	
Definitely no	18%	14%	-4%	
Probably/lean no	16%	13%	-3%	
TOTAL NO	35%	27%	-8%	
UNDECIDED	15%	10%	-5%	

Taken together, the survey results offer positive signs for the development of a ballot measure to fund fire service consolidation in Sausalito. Voters express great confidence in the City and the Fire District, and support consolidation by a sizable margin after hearing an initial description. Voters vastly prefer consolidation and a \$90 parcel tax to other options available for funding fire protection, and their support for a ballot measure to institute that system increases by double-digits as they get more information about it. Given the small size of the community and the ample time remaining before an election next year, the survey results suggest that efforts to engage and educate the public over the next year can put the City on a path toward voter approval of a parcel tax and consolidation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>i</sup> <u>Methodology:</u> From May 4-19, 2011, Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates conducted a telephone survey of 267 likely voters in Sausalito. The margin of error associated with the sample is +/-5.9 percentage points; margins of error for subgroups within the sample will be higher. Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.