



## Sonoma County Fire District Board of Directors Staff Report

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**Date:** 12/2/2020

**Topic:** Contract with Redwood Empire Air Care Helicopter (REACH) to form a public/private partnership for the delivery of air ambulance, rescue, and firefighting helicopter services.

**Recommendation:**

1. Sign a Letter of Intent to participate in the REACH public safety helicopter program.
2. Direct the Fire Chief to negotiate a draft contract between the Fire District and REACH for consideration by the Board of Directors at their January 2021, meeting.

**Financial Impact:**

Analysis in progress.

**Background:**

REACH has implemented a public safety helicopter program whereby REACH partners with a local fire agency to jointly operated a helicopter program to provide EMS, firefighting, and rescue services. Highlights of the program are:

- REACH provides and pays for a pilot and a flight nurse.
- The District provides a Firefighter/Paramedic with REACH providing 100% of the fully burdened rate of the position.
- The helicopter program is jointly managed by REACH and the Fire District and will reside within the Fire District's organization chart managed by the Fire Chief and the Deputy Fire Chief/Operations.
- REACH is responsible for the costs associated with the helicopter itself including fuel, maintenance, pilot proficiency.

A similar program is in place with the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. The Fire Chief and Deputy Chief Busch have met with the Fire Chief in Contra Costa to hear of their experience in the program. Their experiences have been very positive with only minor program issues that were quickly mitigated with REACH.

Staff has prepared a preliminary Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats (SWOT) analysis which is attached to this Staff Report. In general, it is the conclusion of Staff that the program provides essential operational components for the population we serve as well as the entire Sonoma County operational area in the form of rapid EMS response, rescue services, and initial attack firefighting response.

The Fire Chief has met with the Sheriff to identify how our program will work in partnership with the Sheriff's Henry One program. There are strong partnership opportunities between our two agencies.

The Fire Chief has also met with CalFire Lake-Napa Unit Chief Jones and Operations Chief Parkes. CalFire is supportive of the potential initial attach firefighting role that our program can provide. The firefighting mission would provide immediate air support for structure defense and would provide a critical air asset for aerial surveillance and firefighter safety.

Staff recommends signing a Letter of Intent to REACH to participate in the program and to direct the Fire Chief to negotiate a proposed contract with REACH for Board consideration at the January meeting or earlier.

Attachments:

1. Staff prepared SWOT analysis.
2. Proposed Letter of Intent.

**Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunity, and Threat Analysis**  
**(SWOT)**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weakness</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant operational tool (firefighting, rescue, EMS)</li> <li>• We manage the program</li> <li>• Provides medical control and CQI</li> <li>• Pays for BC position and alleviates budget position impacts</li> <li>• Ship is branded for us</li> <li>• New high-performance copter</li> <li>• REACH pays for pilot, nurse, medics</li> <li>• REACH pays for copter insurance, mechanical needs, FAA licensing</li> <li>• Creates public safety helicopter system with Con Fire and future others</li> <li>• Fills critical op area needs</li> <li>• Does not require County involvement</li> <li>• 24hr immediate availability reduces response times</li> <li>• One helicopter performs multiple missions</li> <li>• Strengthens our EMS footprint</li> <li>• Con Fire good partner and educator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No experience with air program management</li> <li>• OES prepo and ABH require copter committed only to firefighting mission</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revenue generation               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ OES prepositioning</li> <li>○ CalFire ABH</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Initial attack firefighting for structure and life safety defense</li> <li>• Create network of public safety helicopter programs for depth of resources and interoperability in disasters</li> <li>• Program expansion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsuccessful placing the program under our command structure</li> <li>• Difficulty in recruitment and retention of flight medics</li> <li>• Culture clashes at airbase</li> <li>• Difficulty for medics passing FPC testing and certification</li> <li>• </li> </ul>

# SONOMA COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT

Honesty ♦ Respect ♦ Integrity

December 2, 2020

Mr. Shawn Russell  
President, Pacific Region  
REACH Air Medical  
8880 Cal Center Drive, Ste. 125  
Sacramento, Ca 95826

Dear Mr. Russell,

Re: Letter of Intent to Participate

On behalf of the Sonoma County Fire District Board of Directors, please accept this letter of intent from the Sonoma County Fire District to become a host agency for a multi-mission (HEMS, hoist rescue, aerial firefighting) helicopter program in Sonoma County.

The information that we have been provided and reviewed thus far has led us to believe that our Fire District and the communities that we serve would benefit from this type of program and it is our intent to move forward to bring this program to Sonoma County.

While we feel positive about the prospect at this point, we retain the right to withdraw this letter should additional information and/ or negotiations reveal negative aspects of the program we are not yet aware of and that we cannot agree to.

We look forward to working out the additional details required to bring this program to fruition.

Sincerely,

John Nelson, President  
Sonoma County Fire District Board of Directors