

November 5, 2026 (Agenda)

Local Agency Formation Commission
105 East Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara CA 93101

Fire, Law Enforcement, Safety & Crime, and EMS Services and Sphere Review

Dear Members of the Commission:

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Commission receive an oral staff report and set a public hearing for December 10, 2026 in order to consider accepting the service review.

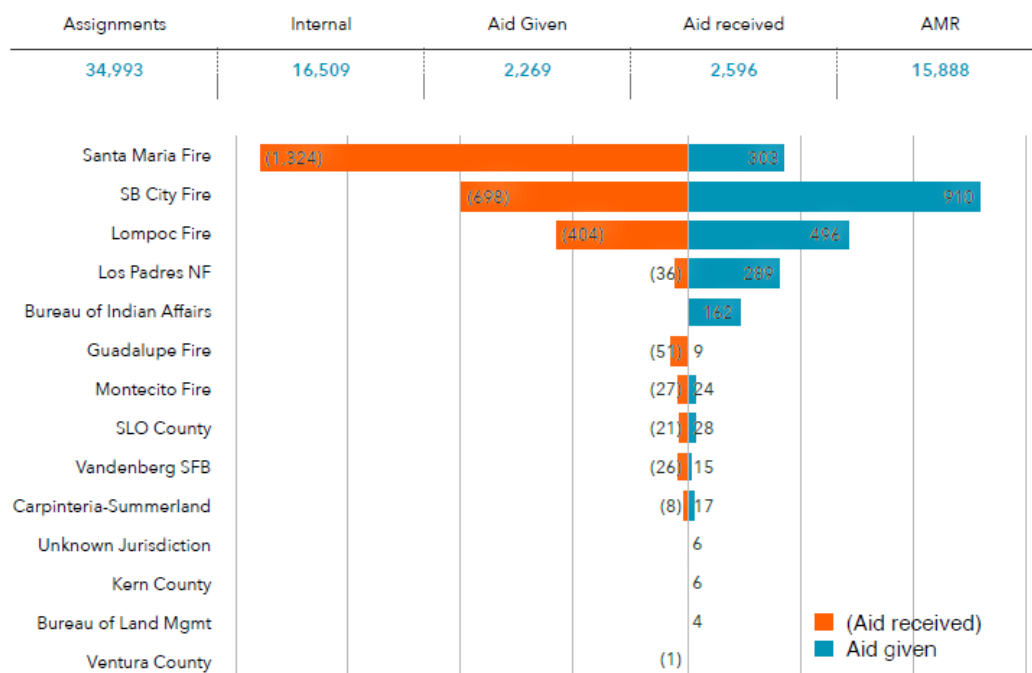
DISCUSSION:

As part of the Commission's work program, the LAFCO staff has prepared a draft service and sphere review for 12 agencies that provide Fire, Law Enforcement, Safety & Crime, and EMS Services throughout the entire county. These include three Fire Protection District (Carpinteria/Summerland Fire Protection District, Montecito Fire Protection District, Santa Barbara County Fire Protection District), one Community Services District (CSD in Isla Vista), along with all eight Cities (Buellton, Carpinteria, Goleta, Guadalupe, Lompoc, Santa Barbara, Santa Maria, and Solvang) that provide these services. The draft document is available at Santa Barbara LAFCO website **www.sblafco.org**.

The main conclusions are:

1. More than sixty-eight percent of the residents of Santa Barbara County are currently within the boundaries of a City or Special District providing fire, law enforcement, safety & crime, and EMS related services.

2. All three of the Fire Protection Districts have Spheres of Influence that match their district boundaries. Sphere expansions are recommended for and Santa Barbara County Fire Protection District. The Hollister Avenue may benefit from identifying responsibility of local services. Under the RFCC the borderless agreement continues. LAFCO recommends next step should be conducting the necessary stakeholder outreach and coordination to determine if consolidating is acceptable to citizens of Montecito and Carpinteria/Summerland fire districts. LAFCO also continues to recommend a study be conducted where a separate, dedicated agency handles emergency medical calls.
3. This Study covers approximately 2,737 acres containing lands that are serviced fire, law enforcement, safety & crime, and EMS services from 12 agencies. The MSR report also looks into governance opportunities, and dive deeper into other emerging topics like mental health concerns, use of overtime and increased cost, along with checking-in on how consolidated dispatch service model is working. Seven Study Areas covering the Cities of Buellton, Santa Maria, Lompoc, and Solvang, and Santa Barbara County Fire District were evaluated.
4. Today's fire agencies are operating under cooperative agreement to ensure timely, efficient, and coordinated emergency services delivery. The RFCC is funded through a cost-sharing model among the participating agencies. Each partner agency has an MOU with the RFCC. In 2025/26, the County Dispatch Center handled approximately 106,000 calls for service titled (Assignments), which translates into approximately 290 calls per day.



5. Most agencies support the mental health and well-being of their firefighters through multiple programs, including an in-house Peer Support Program, an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and confidential clinician services through One805 and The Counseling Team International (TCTI). When asked about reporting mental health services through LAFCO questionnaire, most agencies were not able to speak directly to the question, or did not sufficiently track statistics related to mental health. Moving forward, there are opportunities to strengthen the understanding of mental health of firefighters, exposure to trauma and related deployments of workforce.
6. Based on the last five-year trends, crime is down, cooperation between agencies has been maintained. The Sheriff's Office contracts with the Cities of Buellton, Carpinteria, Goleta, and Solvang to provide law enforcement services. In 2024, approximately 20% of all calls for service to City Police Departments were for non-violent property crime offenses. Violent crimes make up about 6.3% of calls, while assault were 4.3%. Of these, the total overall highest clearance rates come from the City of Guadalupe at 17.7%, while the lowest was from Isla Vista area at 1.5%. The Cities of Buellton and Solvang are considering contracting with the City of Lompoc for police services.
7. The current local economy has increased revenues for all local government agencies. The rate of residential and commercial development has remained slow. . In most cases personnel remain relatively the same with City of Santa Barbara reducing fire personnel and increasing police personnel, and Santa Maria increasing fire personnel and maintaining police personnel. The variation in revenue is due to a number of factors. Carpinteria, Guadalupe, Isla Vista, and Santa Maria all have measures on 2026 ballot. Pervious measures were approved by Lompoc, Santa Barbara (2026), Buellton, Carpinteria, Santa Barbara, Solvang (2024), Goleta, Guadalupe, Lompoc, and Solvang in 2022.
8. Public Safety Expenditures from the eight Cities increased substantially by a composite average of 72.5% over the last five years rising from an estimated total of \$169.3 to \$233.3 million. All of the Cities increased their public safety budgets with Santa Barbara (23%), Buellton (28%), Santa Maria (28%), Lompoc (31%), Solvang (32%), Goleta (33%), Guadalupe (34%), and Carpinteria (41%) increases to their budgets for public safety services.
9. The fund balance of the 12 agencies ranges from \$1,843,278 to \$33,000,000. On the low end of this range are the City of Lompoc (5.5%) and City of Santa Barbara (5.8%). The highest fund balance/annual revenues ratios are experienced in the Cities of Guadalupe (163%), IVCS (102.9%) and Carpinteria/Summerland FPD (100.7%). Following these are the Carpinteria (51%), Buellton (46.7%), Montecito FPD (44.8%), Solvang (44.1%), Goleta

(20.7%), Santa Barbara County Fire (25.9%), and noting Santa Maria City did not submit an audit.

10. Ten agencies reviewed in this report have prepared up-to-date fiscal and operational information. The Cities of Guadalupe and Santa Maria last audit completed was 2022 & 2023, respectively. All twelve maintain websites, with the City of Guadalupe being the most difficult to navigate.

Attachments:

Attachment A: Three-page Summary of 2026 MSR Review

Attachment B: Draft 2026 Service and Sphere Review for Fire, Law Enforcement, Safety & Crime, and EMS Services. **Available at www.sblafco.org**

Please contact the LAFCO office if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M. Prater", followed by a horizontal line.

Mike Prater
Executive Officer

Two-Page Summary: 2026 Fire, Law Enforcement, Crime & Safety, and EMS Municipal Service Review

Purpose and Scope

This Public Review Municipal Service Review (MSR) and Sphere of Influence (SOI) update follows the 2021 review. It is required under the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act (Gov. Code §§56425(e), 56430). It covers 12 agencies: three fire protection districts (Carpinteria/Summerland, Montecito, and Santa Barbara County Fire, or CFPD), the Isla Vista Community Services District (IVCSD), and eight cities (Buellton, Carpinteria, Goleta, Guadalupe, Lompoc, Santa Barbara, Santa Maria, Solvang). Together they serve about 444,974 residents. Agencies providing these services cover roughly 2,543 square miles, over 90% of the county, while the cities cover about 69.6 square miles. The report estimates these agencies receive about \$382 million a year for fire, law enforcement and EMS.

Recommended Actions

The Executive Officer recommends that the Commission adopt a resolution that:

- Finds the action exempt from CEQA as information collection (Guidelines §15306, §15061(b)(3)).
- Adopts the 2026 MSR for all 12 agencies.
- Affirms, without change, the existing (coterminous) SOIs of Carpinteria/Summerland FPD and Montecito FPD.
- Amends the CFPD SOI to add the Hollister Avenue right-of-way along the Santa Barbara Airport, which is not currently in any fire agency's boundaries. CFPD supports this and anticipates a later annexation application.

No SOI changes are proposed for IVCSD or the eight cities. Their SOIs will be addressed in future reviews covering all of their services. The report also notes that LAFCO dissolved the inactive County Service Area 32 on February 5, 2026, completing a 2021 recommendation.

Key Findings

Cooperation and Dispatch. The Regional Fire Communications Center (RFCC), led by County Fire, has operated since July 2025. It uses a closest-resource model that dispatches the nearest appropriate unit regardless of jurisdiction, and it is funded by a base rate plus per-call charges under substantially similar MOUs. In 2025/26 the County dispatch center handled about 106,000 assignments (roughly 290 a day). The report says the model has improved response times and surge capacity near agency boundaries. Montecito and Carpinteria/Summerland continue under the borderless response arrangement, and LAFCO suggests stakeholder outreach on whether consolidation would be acceptable to residents.

Call mix and a possible EMS agency. About 52,000 primary-response calls were dispatched in 2025, and about 38% were medical. Medical share ranges widely by agency, up to 94% for the City of Santa Barbara. LAFCO again recommends studying a separate, dedicated EMS agency so firefighters could focus on firefighting and training and equipment which might reduce costs. The report notes that no such study has been started.

Mental Health. Fire departments have 24/7 capacity to respond to behavioral health and substance-abuse crises through paramedics trained in de-escalation and overdose care. The report points to opportunities in community paramedicine, co-responder teams and data on high-frequency users. Firefighter wellness programs include peer support, an employee assistance program, One805 and TCTI, but most agencies could not report mental health statistics to LAFCO.

Law Enforcement. The Sheriff's Office contracts with Buellton, Carpinteria, Goleta and Solvang. Buellton and Solvang are discussing contracting with the Lompoc Police Department because of rising Sheriff contract costs, and the current agreement expires June 30, 2027. Agencies cleared about 2,752 of roughly 30,549 average annual crimes, a countywide rate of about 9%, with property crimes lowest. Record-keeping differs widely among departments, and State data lags a year or more, so data end in 2024.

Finances. City general fund revenue rose from about \$266.1 million to \$388.1 million over five years, and city public safety spending rose from about \$169.3 million to \$233.3 million (a 72.5% increase). Fire districts rely on property tax for roughly 60% to 80% of revenue. Revenue per resident ranges from \$115 (IVCSD) to \$6,645 (City of Santa Barbara). Fund balances range from 5.5% of revenue (Lompoc) to 163% (Guadalupe). Carpinteria, Guadalupe, Isla Vista and Santa Maria have tax measures on the 2026 ballot. Pension and OPEB costs are rising, and only Montecito Fire, Carpinteria and Goleta have pre-funded trusts.

Facilities and Staffing. The agencies operate 38 fire stations and 15 police stations in conditions ranging from poor to excellent, with 298 fire and 394 law enforcement personnel. Staffing is roughly stable, with a shift toward police. Santa Maria added 19 firefighters, and Santa Barbara reduced fire staffing. Resources are adequate for current demand but not at industry standards, and deferred maintenance and aging apparatus persist. New stations are planned or underway in Goleta, Santa Barbara and the County, and Goleta's Station 10 lacks full funding.

MSR Determinations

1. **Growth and Population.** Population in most areas is flat or declining, except Guadalupe (up 21.8% from 2015 to 2025) and Santa Maria (up 7.6%). Housing Element projections indicate countywide growth of 9.5%. SBCAG places 48.5% of growth in the Santa Maria Valley, with Guadalupe (27.9% through 2050) and Buellton (19.9%) growing fastest. Wildland-urban interface expansion will add fire demand.

2. **Disadvantaged Communities.** Qualifying unincorporated communities are Casmalia, Cuyama, New Cuyama, Sisquoc, Garey, Devon, Mission Hills and Isla Vista, all within CFPD's boundary and sphere. Guadalupe, Lompoc and Santa Maria have median incomes below the threshold, so any expansion by Lompoc or Santa Maria would need to identify affected disadvantaged communities.
3. **Capacity and Infrastructure.** Services are adequate but strained, as described above. AMR provides ambulance service under County contract, except at UCSB and in the Lompoc and Cuyama valleys, where County Fire does.
4. **Financial Ability.** Finances are generally sound but uneven. Guadalupe (last audit 2022) and Santa Maria (last audit 2023) did not provide current audits. LAFCO urges them to prioritize audits and recommends all agencies complete audits within 6 to 9 months of year-end.
5. **Shared Facilities.** Opportunities include joint purchasing, training, urban search and rescue, mutual and automatic aid, and a shared fire station site under study for Montecito and Carpinteria/Summerland, which is delayed by funding limits.
6. **Accountability.** All 12 agencies maintain websites and appear Brown Act compliant. LAFCO encourages quantitative performance standards and asks Guadalupe to improve its website.
7. **Other matters.** Findings are consistent with LAFCO policy on avoiding duplication and promoting sound financing. LAFCO is also interested in mental health, overtime costs and staffing retention.

Sphere of Influence Determinations

Land uses will not change because of the recommended SOI actions. The CFPD expansion adds little firefighting demand, since Hollister Avenue already receives multiple responses under the RFCC, and the District is adequately funded to serve it. The two fire district SOIs reasonably define their service areas. A future clean-up of their overlapping boundaries, identified in 2021, is still possible.

Subsequent Sections

Chapter Three profiles each agency, and the Appendix covers data sources and the relationship to prior and future reviews. The next fire, law enforcement and EMS MSR is expected in 2031, with five-year trends on dispatch costs and consolidation.