



NOTICE OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING/SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Tuesday, August 25, 2026 at 9:30 AM

AGENDA

LOCATIONS:

Open Session to start at or after 9:30 a.m.

Marin Water Board Room – 220 Nellen Avenue, Corte Madera, CA 94925

Public Participation:

The public may attend this meeting in-person or remotely using the following methods:

On a computer or smart device, go to: <https://marinwater.zoom.us/j/86822995553>

By phone, dial: **1-669-444-9171** and use Webinar ID: **868 2299 5553**

HOW TO PROVIDE PUBLIC COMMENT:

During the Meeting: Typically, you will have 3 minutes to make your public comment, however, the committee chair may shorten the amount of time for public comment due to a large number of attendees. Furthermore, pursuant to Government Code, section 54954.2 (the Brown Act), the Board may not take action or discuss any item that does not appear on the agenda.

-- **In-Person Attendee:** Fill out a speaker card and provide to the board secretary. List the number/letter (ex: 6a) of the agenda item(s), for which you would like to provide a comment. Once you're called, proceed to the lectern to make your comment.

-- **Remote Attendee:** Use the "raise hand" button on the bottom of the Zoom screen. If you are joining by phone and would like to comment, press *9. The board secretary will use the last four digits of your phone number to call on you (dial *6 to mute/unmute).

In Advance of the Meeting: Submit your comments by email in advance of the meeting to boardcomment@marinwater.org. To ensure that your comment is provided to the Board of Directors prior to the meeting, please email your comment 24 hours in advance of the meeting start time. Comments received after this cut off time will be sent to the Board after the meeting. Please do not include personal information in your comment such as phone numbers and home addresses.

AGENDA ITEMS:

- 1. Call to Order and Roll Call**
- 2. Adoption of Agenda**
- 3. Public Comment on Non-Agenda Matters**

This is the time when any person may address the Board of Directors on matters not listed on this agenda, but which are within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Board.

4. Regular Items (9:35 a.m. – Time Approximate)

- a.** Minutes of the Planning Committee Meeting/Special Meeting of the Board of Directors on July 28, 2026

RECOMMENDATION: Accept the minutes

- b.** Water Efficiency: Commercial, Industrial and Institutional (CII) Water Use

RECOMMENDATION: Review and comment on commercial, industrial, and institutional customers' water use trends

- c.** Marin County Grand Jury Report Responses

RECOMMENDATION: Review and comment on the proposed responses to the June 11, 2026 Grand Jury Report and provide staff with direction

5. Upcoming Meeting

The next Planning Committee Meeting/Special Meeting of the Board of Directors is scheduled for September 22, 2026.

6. Adjournment (11:00 a.m. – Time Approximate)

ADA NOTICE AND HEARING-IMPAIRED PROVISIONS

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and California Law, it is Marin Water's policy to offer its public programs, services, and meetings in a manner that is readily accessible to everyone, including those with disabilities. If you are an individual with a disability and require a copy of a public hearing notice, an agenda, and/or agenda packet in an appropriate alternative format, or if you require other accommodations, please contact the Board Secretary/ADA Coordinator at 415.945.1448, at least two business days in advance of the meeting. Advance notification will enable Marin Water to make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility.

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Posted: 08-21-2026



STAFF REPORT

Meeting Type: Planning Committee/Board of Directors

Title: Minutes of the Planning Committee Meeting/Special Meeting of the Board of Directors on July 28, 2026

From: Terrie Gillen, Board Secretary

Through: Ben Horenstein, General Manager

Meeting Date: August 25, 2026

TYPE OF ITEM: X Approve Review and Comment

RECOMMENDATION: Accept the minutes

SUMMARY: There was a Planning Committee Meeting/Special Meeting of the Board of Directors on July 28, 2026. Staff is requesting that the minutes from that meeting be accepted.

DISCUSSION: None.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW: Not applicable.

FISCAL IMPACT: None.

ATTACHMENT(S):

- 1. Draft July 28, 2026 Minutes of the Planning Committee Meeting/Special Meeting of the Board of Directors

DEPARTMENT OR DIVISION	DIVISION MANAGER	APPROVED
Communications & Public Affairs Department	 Terrie Gillen Board Secretary	 Ben Horenstein General Manager



NOTICE OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING/SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Tuesday, July 28, 2026 at 9:30 AM

MINUTES

LOCATIONS:

Open Session to start at or after 9:30 a.m.

Marin Water Board Room – 220 Nellen Avenue, Corte Madera, CA 94925

Public Participation:

The public attended this meeting in-person or remotely using the following methods: on a computer or smart device, <https://marinwater.zoom.us/j/86822995553>, or by phone, 1-669-444-9171, using Webinar ID: 868 2299 5553.

AGENDA ITEMS:

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Planning Committee Chair Larry Russell called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM.

DIRECTORS PRESENT

Matt Samson

Jed Smith

Larry Russell

DIRECTORS ABSENT

Diana Maier

Ranjiv Khush

2. Adoption of Agenda

Director Samson motioned to adopt the agenda. Director Smith seconded the motion.

There were no public comments.

Voting Yea: Directors Samson, Smith, and Russell

Motion passed.

3. Public Comment on Non-Agenda Matters

There were no public comments.

4. Regular Items

- a. Minutes of the Planning Committee Meeting/Special Meeting of the Board of Directors on June 30, 2026

RECOMMENDATION: Accept the minutes

Director Samson motioned to accept the minutes. Director Smith seconded the motion.

There were no comments.

Voting Yea: Directors Samson, Smith, and Russell

Motion passed.

- b. Fire Flow Improvement Program – Palm Avenue Pipeline Replacement Project (F26002)

RECOMMENDATION: Review and comment on the proposed Fire Flow Improvement Program – Palm Avenue Pipeline Replacement Project

Engineering Construction Engineer Mark Kasraie and Assistant Engineer Hagar Negash presented this item.

Discussion ensued between the directors and staff.

There were no public comments.

No formal action was taken.

5. Upcoming Meeting

As stated on the agenda, the next Planning Committee Meeting/Special Meeting of the Board of Directors is scheduled for Tuesday, August 25, 2026, at 9:30 AM.

6. Adjournment

There being no further business, the Planning Committee Meeting/Special Meeting of the Board of Directors adjourned on July 28, 2026, at 9:37 AM.

Board Secretary



STAFF REPORT

Meeting Type: Planning Committee/Board of Directors
Title: Water Efficiency: Commercial, Industrial and Institutional (CII) Water Use
From: Paul Sellier, Director of Water Resources
Through: Ben Horenstein, General Manager
Meeting Date: August 25, 2026

TYPE OF ITEM: Approve X Review and Comment

RECOMMENDATION: Review and comment on commercial, industrial, and institutional customers’ water use trends

SUMMARY: Staff will provide an initial update on general water use trends of District customers, focusing on commercial, industrial, and institutional customers.

DISCUSSION: The Water Efficiency Master Plan, adopted in 2024, identified regulatory compliance as an action item and the report highlighted the need for data driven solutions.

On July 2, 2024, the State Water Resources Control Board adopted regulations on the implementation of Urban Water Use Objectives for “Making Water Conservation a California Way of Life”. The regulations had been under development since 2017 and are intended to establish water use targets to increase long-term water use efficiency statewide. The targets establish water use standards for indoor residential per capita use; outdoor residential irrigation; commercial, industrial, institutional (CII) water use; large landscape water use; and water loss.

Additionally, the regulations require implementation of CII performance measures which include the following: classification of all CII customers, determining which sites are inefficient based on key business activity indicators that will be developed for each classification by the State and determining CII sites with more than ½ acre of landscaping. Staff will provide a presentation on water use by the CII customer class, along with how the information will be utilized to promote incentives and increase water use efficiency for CII customers.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW: Not Applicable.

FISCAL IMPACT: None.

ATTACHMENT(S): None.



STAFF REPORT

Meeting Type: Planning Committee/Board of Directors
Title: Marin County Grand Jury Report Responses
From: Ben Horenstein, General Manager
Meeting Date: August 25, 2026

TYPE OF ITEM: Action X Review and
Comment

RECOMMENDATION: Review and comment on the proposed responses to the June 11, 2026 Grand Jury Report and provide staff with direction

SUMMARY: Each year, the Marin County Civil Grand Jury is charged with publishing a report based on investigations conducted by volunteer members of the Civil Grand Jury under the supervision of the presiding judge. Pursuant to California Penal Code section 933, the governing body of a public agency, whose operations are the subject of any report, shall provide comments on this report to the presiding judge within 90 days following the final report. This is consistent with District Board Policy No. 44, which requires the Board to consider the response at a public meeting of the Board. This year, the Grand Jury published a report that requires responses: Better Service at Lower Cost - Optimizing Essential Services for the Future of Marin, June 11, 2026. Responses to these reports are due on September 11, 2026.

DISCUSSION: Section 933.05 of the California Penal Code prescribes the manner of response to a grand jury report. Specifically, as to each of the findings pertaining the District, the response shall indicate whether the District agrees with the finding or disagrees wholly or partially with the finding. If the latter, the response shall identify the portion with which there is disagreement and include an explanation of the reasons therefore. The response must also address each of the recommendations in the report pertaining the District by indicating (1) the recommendation has been implemented with an explanation, (2) the recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be in the future along with a timeframe, (3) the recommendation requires further analysis along with an explanation of the scope of analysis and a timeframe, within six months, or (4) the recommendation will not be implemented along with an explanation of the reasons.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW: Not Applicable.

FISCAL IMPACT: None.

ATTACHMENT(S):

1. Draft Responses to Grand Jury Report
2. Grand Jury Report entitled "Better Service at a Lower Cost - Optimizing Essentials for the Future of Marin"

DRAFT**Response of Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD or District) To
Marin Civil Grand Jury Report Findings and Recommendations
*Better Service at a Lower Cost: Optimizing Essential Services for the Future of
Marin ("Report")*****Report Findings**

F1. The current fragmented structure of special districts results in unnecessary duplication of administrative services and operational inefficiencies.

Response - Disagree partially

Statement: While it is reasonable to assume there are inherent inefficiencies with the vast number of special districts in Marin, MMWD does not have the level of familiarity with other special districts that would definitively support this finding. However, as discussed later in this response, MMWD believes there is value to exploring opportunities across special districts, and even cities and towns, where some functions could be shared to achieve greater efficiency. Examples may include: safety training, risk management, infrastructure technology, and common areas of public outreach.

F2. Some districts perform competently but lack sufficient scale to support long-term strategic investment in infrastructure, technology, staffing, and resilience.

Response - Disagree partially

Statement: MMWD agrees that in some instances larger agencies with economies of scale may provide greater value in terms of the level and efficiency of service. The grand jury report did not provide any specific details and MMWD is not aware of specific special districts where the findings would necessarily hold. The first areas to explore further may be potential opportunities with the very high number of small sanitary districts in the County.

F3. Smaller districts are disproportionately vulnerable to staffing disruptions and catastrophic events that could rapidly impair service delivery.

Response - Agree

Statement: MMWD agrees that smaller agencies with fewer staff are likely more impacted by staff disruptions than larger agencies, which may be better able to absorb such changes, and this could impact their ability to respond in the face of a catastrophic event. However, the sharing of community and other agency resources could offset some of these impacts. While MMWD is unaware of any specific special districts in Marin where this would necessarily apply, it is reasonable that this concern may warrant further review.

F4. Although consolidation is a popular idea among many elected board members, current governance structures, absence of board member term limits, and fear of loss of political influence discourage boards and administrators from initiating consolidation even when they recognize its benefits.

Response - Partially Disagree

Statement: While MMWD agrees that politics may be a consideration at times, there are many additional factors that must be fully analyzed in conjunction with any consolidation, which factors may have equal or greater impact on the ultimate decision as to whether such an action is prudent under the given circumstances.

F5. Service and pricing inequities currently exist across Marin and may increase if consolidation and functional collaboration do not accelerate.

Response - Disagree partially

Statement: Service and pricing are very case-specific. A detailed financial analysis would be needed to confirm the costs and benefits for any given specific district(s). There are many factors that drive the cost of services. For example, the geography of a given area could require more lift stations for one sanitary district, thus resulting in greater operation, maintenance and long-term infrastructure costs, over another that has less elevation changes in their service areas and therefore has fewer cost for relatively the same service.

F6. Performance metrics for essential, mission-specific services exist but they are not readily available and standardized, which prevents meaningful public comparison of district effectiveness and undermines accountability.

Response - Disagree partially

Statement: MMWD agrees with the value of performance metrics for many types of special districts, though they may not be applicable in all circumstances. Key performance metrics utilized by MMWD include main breaks/mile, and the percent of produced water that is lost through leaks. Using metrics for more granular operational and financial comparisons, however, also known as benchmarking, is very difficult as there are many site-specific factors that drive these activities. For example, MMWD is among the highest in Northern California, if not the entire State, on the cost of infrastructure for the number of customers served. The reasons include the topography in the area, the average age of existing infrastructure, and the relative lack of population density. Trying to develop meaningful metrics whereby the public can compare the effectiveness of one district to another would be daunting, if even possible.

F7. Without proactive reform, future consolidations are more likely to occur through crisis-driven intervention, resulting in greater disruption and higher costs.

Response - Disagree partially

Statement: While it is accurate that often consolidation efforts are driven by crisis, it also can occur through thoughtful discussions, as has happened in Marin County with fire

services and recently with one of the sanitation districts served by Central Marin Sanitation Agency.

Report Recommendations

R1. By January 1, 2027, all special district boards should have conducted their first semi-annual consolidation exploration meeting with similar districts and will have established a regular meeting schedule moving forward.

Status: This will be implemented in the future.

Explanation: MMWD is actively engaged with the North Marin Water District (NMWD) on a number of areas where collaboration can provide greater value to our respective organizations and customers. In May 2025, the Board of both agencies formed a "Board-to-Board" Ad Hoc Committee to facilitate regular meetings and discussion of ways to further inter-agency collaboration, including potentially sharing resources. This effort is ongoing but has already led to increased collaboration. Among the many areas where MMWD and NMWD collaborate include: water conservation messaging and joint campaigns, joint participation in a number of forums with the Sonoma County Water Agency (Sonoma Water, wholesale water provider) and other agencies who also purchase water from Sonoma Water, routine coordination of shared water facilities, and sharing of resources during emergency response, such as the 2023 landslide in North Novato that threatened a critical aqueduct owned by NMWD and utilized by both agencies.

R2. By October 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors should direct the development of comprehensive, cost-efficient shared services (such as IT, legal, finance, HR/payroll, harmonized compensation/benefits package, insurance) for special districts to optimize expenses and secure a Marin-wide acceptable quality standard. First limited-service offerings are encouraged to be made available by January 1, 2027.

Response - Requires further analysis.

Explanation: This recommendation is directed to the County, and it is therefore inappropriate for MMWD to respond. MMWD believes this is an interesting concept and would support the effort.

R3. By January 31, 2027, with the assistance of the County, all districts should develop and publish on their website standardized, comparable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) with regard to service pricing, finance, staffing, operations, and customer satisfaction.

Response - Requires further analysis.

Explanation: As described in the response to F6, the approach of developing KPIs that are standardized among similar districts is a very complex task and would require intensive effort that may not achieve the desired outcome for a uniform set of considerations. Such an endeavor to develop "standardized" KPIs would also require the participation and coordination among a number of agencies.

R4. By January 31, 2027, each district should publicly update findings and progress regarding consolidation opportunities, and share those findings with the Board of Supervisors and the public on a semi-annual basis.

Response - Requires further analysis.

Explanation: Consolidation discussions would require the participation of other agencies. At this time it is not possible to provide a date as to the pace of such discussions and analysis.

R5. By January 31, 2027, the Board of Supervisors should oversee compliance with R1–R4 and update the public on the districts' performance.

Response – Requires further analysis.

Explanation: This recommendation is directed to the County, so MMWD is unable to respond.

R6. By October 1, 2026, in the process of implementing R1 and R2, districts should prioritize functional consolidation in operations, procurement, training, and administration as a precursor to formal consolidation.

Response – Requires further analysis.

Explanation: MMWD supports the broad concepts laid out in the findings and recommendations. However, the level of effort required to meet this recommendation is considerable and the stated date of October 1, 2026 is not feasible. Further, as stated previously, these efforts would take more than MMWD alone to implement.

R7. By October 1, 2026, the district's board compensation, benefits, length of service, date of term end, and expenses related to board work should be clearly and prominently posted on each district's website and updated annually.

Status – Completed

Explanation: As per the Grand Jury Report, MMWD was identified as an example of "Best Practices" on Board compensation transparency. All of the noted items are available on the MMWD website.

R8. By June 1, 2027, special districts should adopt term limits of two consecutive four-year terms for all board members. Staggered implementation of term limits to avoid disruptions is encouraged.

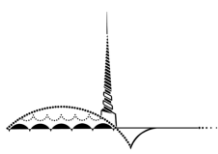
Response – Requires further analysis.

Explanation: MMWD will place on the agenda an item to publicly discuss term limits by January 2028.

R9. By June 1, 2027, board compensation structures should be reviewed across districts, and considered for adjustment. All components of board compensation should

be posted on their website (see best practice example in Appendix B).
Status: Completed

Explanation: MMWD, as part of a routine review and update of Board policies, recently reviewed and updated its policy on Board Director’s Compensation, Policy No. 42, which is posted on the MMWD website.



Better Service at Lower Cost — Optimizing Essential Services for the Future of Marin

June 11, 2026

SUMMARY

Marin County depends on more than 50 special districts to deliver essential public services including fire protection, water, sanitation, and refuse services. Many currently provide average or above average levels of service according to recent [county surveys](#)¹, due in part to conscientious local stewardship and decades of dedicated civic engagement. However, the current fragmented structure of essential service delivery has produced structural weaknesses: duplicated administrative systems; uneven service quality and fees; and limited capacity for strategic investment. In addition, vulnerability to staff turnover, and difficulty adapting to countywide risks such as climate change, aging infrastructure, workforce shortages, and rising costs present increasing challenges.

This report outlines an opportunity for the public and board members to make changes that will benefit Marin residents for decades. Optimization of these special districts into resilient, more efficient entities can offer improved services at lower costs for residents. It will also provide strategic direction and improve career opportunities and compensation for special district employees. Our inquiry revealed widespread agreement on the benefits of collaboration, and acknowledged that in many cases this may lead to legal consolidation.

Unfortunately, there is no county entity solely responsible for taking action. We are therefore calling on the directors of Marin’s special districts to work with Marin County government to realize, for all of Marin’s residents, the evident benefits of consolidation, cooperation, and simplification. Absent proactive reform, the county risks governance by crisis rather than governance by design. Unwanted results of the current stagnation could yield not just a decline in the levels of services offered, but also substantially higher cost for all.

Throughout its interview process, the Grand Jury found almost unanimous agreement that consolidation would benefit most special districts. We realize that consolidation is not appropriate for every district in every circumstance. However, functional collaboration for strategic projects and unification for common general shared services (e.g., legal, finance, human resources, purchasing, information technology) is a good first step. Strategic, mission-focused optimization, implemented locally and deliberately, driven bottom-up by the special district boards, offers a credible path toward stronger services, more equitable outcomes, and improved value for residents.

¹ https://marin.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=33&clip_id=12012&meta_id=1289454

Although this report is not about school districts, the Grand Jury believes that its findings and recommendations are relevant for school districts as well.

The Grand Jury ultimately finds that the status quo is increasingly misaligned with Marin's long-term needs. **The time to begin deliberate, structured optimization of special districts is now.**

This report presents formal Findings and Recommendations; a phased circle of success for consolidation (Graphic 3); a tactical table for meaningful next day actions (see Appendix C); and a call to leadership to special district boards, the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo), the Marin County leadership, and the public.

BACKGROUND

Special districts in Marin County were formed to provide services — such as water, sanitation, and mosquito control — that our cities and the County did not offer. Historically, these districts demonstrated that infrastructure services can be governed locally and effectively. One of the earliest major agencies was the Marin Municipal Water District (formed in 1912), followed by sanitation and fire protection districts as suburban growth accelerated after the 1937 opening of the Golden Gate Bridge. Post-World War II population growth led to the creation of many additional utility and fire districts, especially in unincorporated areas. In 1963, LAFCo was established as a state-mandated local California regulatory body that oversees the formation and boundaries of cities and special districts. Today, Marin has a multitude of independent and dependent special districts providing focused public services across the county. For a more comprehensive overview, see the [LAFCo website](#)².

The Grand Jury's inquiry has focused on how accelerated collaboration and consolidation could be achieved and why it has not occurred despite decades of discussion, including at special district board meetings and in previous Grand Jury reports.

APPROACH

The investigation relied on structured interviews with stakeholders across local and county government, special districts, and union representatives; attendance at special district board meetings; analysis of district documentation, past Grand Jury reports and publicly available information; examination of historical trends in special district governance; and review of comparative data regarding district consolidation statewide. The Grand Jury evaluated governance structures, board dynamics, financial pressures, workforce challenges, and public accountability mechanisms to determine the practical barriers and opportunities related to broader collaboration and consolidation.

DISCUSSION

Marin's special districts generally deliver average to above-average services at reasonable cost. But this stability has led to complacency, and reinforces the erroneous belief that structural

² <https://www.marinlafco.org/special-districts-list>

reform is unnecessary. The pressures of climate change, aging infrastructure, demographic shifts, workforce shortages, and funding uncertainty are cumulative and accelerating, and will require a different long-term strategy.

Smaller sanitary and fire districts struggle to compete as employers. Some districts have just one employee. They often offer limited advancement opportunities, narrower service offerings, and non-competitive compensation. These constraints increase turnover risk and reduce institutional resilience. In contrast, larger, consolidated agencies such as the Southern Marin Fire District offer greater stability, broader expertise, improved training environments, and stronger succession planning.

The Grand Jury heard consistent testimony that no single actor is empowered or incentivized to lead collaboration or consolidation efforts. Boards fear political consequences and/or an elimination of their roles; administrators fear career disruption; and the public often misunderstands both the risks of inaction and the benefits of reform. This diffusion of responsibility has resulted in decades of analysis with limited structural change.

BENEFITS OF OPTIMIZING FOR BETTER SERVICES

The evidence reviewed by the Grand Jury supports numerous benefits of collaboration and consolidation, including:

- Reduced administrative overhead and elimination of duplicative functions. *Every special district has a similar need for basic administrative services in the areas of finance, legal, human resources (HR), insurance and information technology services (IT). Significant opportunities exist to harmonize and save costs through shared services in these areas — either provided by the County or organized by the special districts themselves.*
- Increased purchasing power and potential cost savings by aggregating and standardizing equipment, services and supplies — *e.g., Southern Marin Fire fronted the cost of new self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) equipment for San Rafael, Novato, and Tiburon to be repaid when the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Assistance to Firefighters Grant money is received. The unit cost was reduced for all four fire districts because of this partnership.*
- Stronger professional staffing levels through improved training opportunities, career development and specialized capabilities. *Larger organizations provide the opportunity to attract and retain employees early in their careers and develop them into strong contributors over time with clear career paths and training opportunities.*
- Improved and uniform salary bands, competitive benefits, and employee assistance programs. *Firefighters from different fire departments sustaining similar injuries at the same fire might, as a consequence, receive different levels of care, long-term disability benefits and workers compensation benefits that can result in dramatically different outcomes. Outcomes can range from a speedy and healthy return to work, to a premature career end. Appendix A illustrates the wide range of base salaries for firefighting*

personnel across fire districts in Marin. Pay inequalities typically result in higher attrition, less job satisfaction and reduced training investments.

- More consistent service levels and fairer pricing across comparable communities. *See Table 7 below regarding sanitary sewer charges and water charges.*
- Enhanced asset management and long-term infrastructure planning aided by combining financial reserves. *Examples include: monitoring technology in sanitary districts and new specialized firefighting equipment.*
- Stronger governance through more strategic, less operationally burdened boards.
- Greater organizational resilience to financial and operational shocks. *Bundling reserve funds would, for example, provide substantial insurance against even larger events and at the same time free up capital for long-term improvement projects.*
- Reduce the possibility of crisis-driven interventions.

As mentioned earlier in this report, this inquiry revealed widespread agreement on the benefits of collaboration, often acknowledging that this may lead to legal consolidation. Unfortunately, there is no county entity solely responsible for taking action.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

The Grand Jury recognizes many legitimate barriers to consolidation, including:

- Public concern about loss of local control
- Resistance from board members concerned about preserving authority
- Concern from administrators about employment
- Complexity of labor and pension alignment and integration
- Differences in funding mechanisms
- Time and cost involved in consolidation studies

These barriers, however, are not unique to Marin. They have been successfully addressed in other jurisdictions and in prior Marin consolidations. The Grand Jury finds that these challenges, while real, are manageable with leadership, transparency, and structured planning. The most promising path to create larger, meaningfully-sized special districts in Marin is a bottom-up approach that puts the board members of these special districts in control of their own destiny.

The Grand Jury encourages the consolidation of a limited number of special districts at one time. Previous failed attempts had one thing in common — too many involved parties. That gave change-resistant participants a larger platform to sow doubt and fear. In the end, this derailed a successful outcome. Our research found that the main driver of resistance — aside from intimidation by the complexity of the task — was the perceived “loss of local control.”

The fight to restore the Town of Ross Fire Station is a clear example of misguided civic engagement at odds with effective service today, which relies on coordinating resources across jurisdictions, not maintaining standalone structures for symbolic reasons.

Ross’ risk profile has also changed. Stronger building standards have reduced fire risk, while an aging population requires better medical response. Staffing a standalone station is easy to

demand, but difficult to sustain, according to local firefighters. Rather than “building for yesterday,” Ross’ elected officials should focus on a coordinated countywide system, emphasizing strong medical response capabilities.

In attending special district board meetings, the Grand Jury found that discussions about consolidation were often torpedoed by a single board member advocating for “local control” and emphasizing the risk of losing it. But local control is often more perception than reality. In the end, residents care about getting good services at a reasonable cost. Residents who call for fire response are often not aware of which agency ends up assisting them. For example, because of the current consolidated and efficient emergency dispatch system in Marin County, the closest emergency unit is sent to respond to the call regardless of district boundaries. Prioritizing local control does a disservice to its residents. It ignores economies of scale, group purchasing power, collective bargaining with unions, and the ability to maintain staff who often leave for better career opportunities.

Often the local control advocates are board members who have long tenure on the board and seem reluctant to give up authority. One solution could be for special districts to maintain their voice after consolidation by requiring that there be board seats from all represented areas on their governing board for a specific period as a transition. An example of a special district consolidation doing this well is Southern Marin Fire District, where board seats represent different communities and ensure that local voices are still heard.

THE CASE FOR TERM LIMITS FOR BOARD POSITIONS

The Grand Jury finds that the majority of special district board members are passionate about the special district they govern, and take the role very seriously. Many of them have amassed an impressive amount of institutional knowledge via decades of service, and are very involved in day-to-day operations and tactical decision making. Typically, there are often a wide variety of opinions among board members about how to best perform their role. We witnessed forward-thinking, well-informed members with an impressive drive to change things for the benefit of residents. We also saw board members who did not meet that mark.

Although board tenure in some cases can add value, overall we witnessed that long tenure on the same board leads to stagnation and outright resistance to change. We were unable to find a special district board in Marin that had term limits in place, and many boards have members who have served for decades. The Grand Jury believes that adopting term limits would have a positive impact overall on the development of essential services in Marin:

- Influx of new talent — open board positions would attract interested residents with new ideas, skills, expertise and ambition, who would be willing to “throw their hat in the ring” for uncontested board positions instead of running against an incumbent.
- “Retiring” board members (after recommended two four-year terms) would get the opportunity to apply their process knowledge to new areas of local government and further improve the community through cross-pollination.

- Old ideas and concepts would get a fresh look. Projects that may have been tried unsuccessfully 15 years ago might work today. Times and opinions change.

Marin County often experiences a shortage of residents willing to serve on smaller special district boards. A welcome side effect of consolidation would be the aggregation of board seats empowered to drive strategic and meaningful change in the newly designed district. This opportunity would attract more qualified candidates as well in the long run. It would further eliminate the current observed practice of “board seat accumulation”; the Grand Jury noticed that the same persons serve on multiple agencies, councils and committees within their area of expertise. This is particularly concerning when the same person is serving in capacities that are meant to supervise and monitor the operations and decisions of a special district, thus muting the intended checks and balances.

THE CASE FOR HARMONIZED FEES, PRICING MODELS AND SERVICE LEVELS

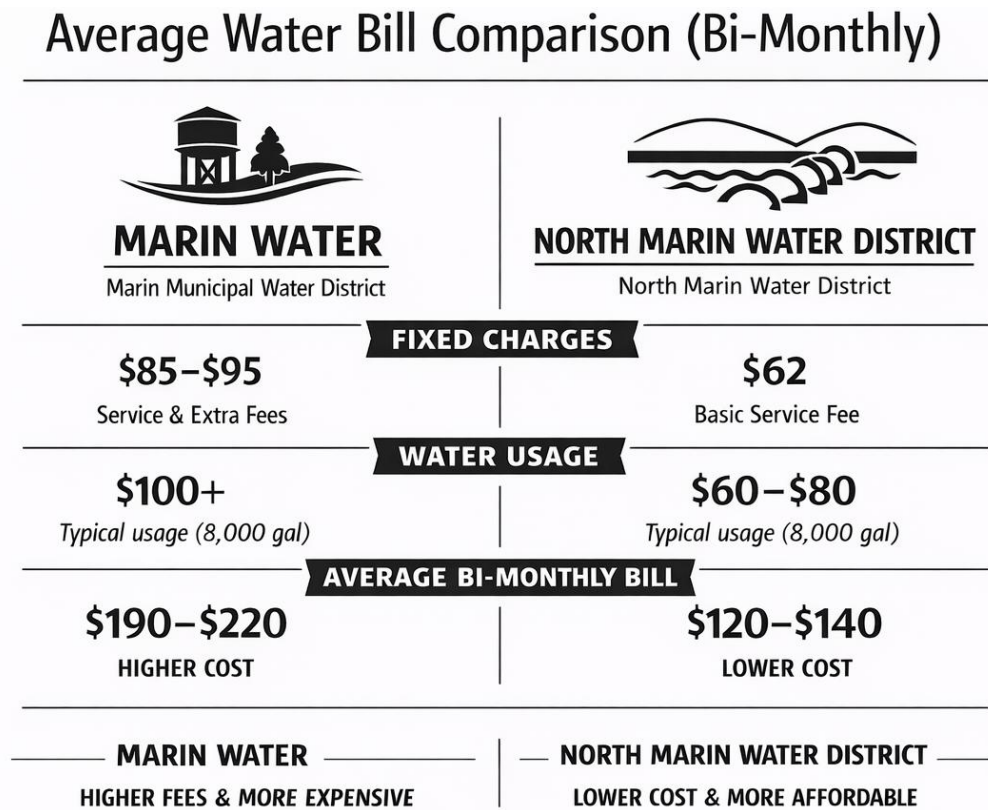
One obvious shortcoming of the current special district structure is wide variation in service fees and service levels. Residents in the same neighborhood sometimes pay a very different price for the same service. Sewer service fees (see Graphic 1 below) are a prime example. Sanitary districts differ widely in their approach to cover costs — from yearly flat fees to a fair and transparent usage-based approach. Advances in technology have made the usage-based approach practical, efficient, and fair, giving households an incentive to act responsibly with scarce resources. If Marin County had one uniform scale for these services, it could be an opportunity to show that cooperation and partnership is possible without legal consolidation. It’s up to the boards to organize themselves and deliver.

Graphic 1: Annual Sewer Service Charges — [Novato Sanitary District Final Budget 2025–2026](#)³

AGENCY	RATE(\$/yr.)
Sanitary District No. 5 - Belvedere	\$2,237
Sanitary District No. 5 - Tiburon	\$2,237
Sanitary District No. 1 - City of Larkspur	\$1,844
City of Mill Valley	\$1,595
Tamalpais Community Services District	\$1,584
Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District	\$1,492
Ross Valley Sanitary District (SD#1)	\$1,288
Vallejo Sanitation & Flood Control District	\$1,272
City of Santa Rosa	\$1,260
City of Petaluma	\$1,087
Sausalito-Marín City Sanitary District	\$1,053
City of San Rafael	\$1,012
Sanitary District No. 2 - Town of Corte Madera	\$906
Napa Sanitation District	\$739
NOVATO SANITARY DISTRICT	\$729

Notes: All charges for FY 25-26 (proposed or adopted) unless otherwise noted

³ <https://novatosan.com/doc/10320/>

Graphic 2: Comparison of water charges in Marin based on published customer water rates

Source: Calculated customer water rates effective 2025 from Marin Municipal Water District and North Marin Water District.

Chart created by the Grand Jury.

The Grand Jury also observed another barrier for successful self-optimization of essential services: The emotional resistance to modernization by some of the recipients and payers of more complex, situational services such as fire protection and health-related emergency services. Small groups of residents and town officials share the perception that they don't receive "value for money" and lobby for outdated solutions that are not based on current and future needs — as noted earlier about the fight to restore the Town of Ross Fire Station.

THE CASE FOR COUNTY-WIDE SHARED SERVICES FOR COMMON ADMINISTRATIVE NEEDS

Duplication of efforts for common administrative services is another significant opportunity to improve quality and lower cost — without compromising core services or a loss of perceived "local control." Every special district has currently organized these services in ways it perceives to be affordable and meet its needs, and cover its risks. These common administrative tasks range from general IT services (cyber security, web hosting), legal support and advice, finance (reporting, accounting), purchasing services, HR (payroll, employee relations, staffing processes and procedures) to general business insurance needs. All of these functions take a significant amount of time to organize and divert energy from tasks and responsibilities that are key

contributors to the success of each district. During our investigation, the Grand Jury found these services organized along many different standards, from highly professional, to very basic, to substandard. We believe that providing these services on a county level would result in:

- Efficiency gains and lower operating cost
- Fair and improved employee benefits with a county-wide standard
- Increased sharing of best practices and best-in-class vendors across all special districts
- Combined purchasing power and transparent vendor selection
- Reduced exposure to legal risks by more consistent practices and quality across all services
- Lowered risk of self-dealing and mismanagement through greater financial transparency

We conclude that the County of Marin could help support these efficiency efforts by developing a comprehensive set of cost-efficient, general shared services for special districts to optimize expenditures and secure a Marin-wide acceptable quality and standard.

THE CASE FOR LEGAL CONSOLIDATION

For situations when it makes strategic sense, the Grand Jury identified a clear pattern for successful legal consolidations in Marin, with the best example being the Southern Marin Fire District. This was a proactive, collaborative consolidation where the parties embraced the principles of efficiency that we highlight in this report. Consolidation typically follows a three-phased approach and can still be considered the safest road to significantly improving service delivery and managing costs because it reduces overhead, simplifies reporting structures, and eliminates expensive redundant management layers.

Phase 1: “Dating” — Districts engage in structured dialogue with similar districts, comparing key performance indicators (KPIs), exploring shared service agreements, and increasing transparency to the public.

Phase 2: “Engagement” — Districts expand shared services, commission formal studies, consult with LAFCo (the state-mandated local regulatory body that reviews and approves changes of special district boundaries), and begin governance and labor harmonization planning.

Phase 3: “Marriage” — LAFCo issues a Certificate of Completion, formalizing consolidation. The new entity must demonstrate transparency, accountability, and measurable performance outcomes.

Graphic 3: Special District legal consolidation — circle of success (starts at the top and perpetually recycles)



Source: Created by Marin Civil Grand Jury 2025–2026.

CONCLUSION

The Grand Jury concludes that Marin’s special districts are staffed by dedicated individuals and have historically served the county well. But the structure in which they operate is increasingly fragile in the face of modern challenges. Consolidation is not always the solution, but it is a practical and necessary tool for strengthening governance, improving service equity, and enhancing long-term resilience. It is most effective when organized around mission-specific services (e.g., fire with fire, sanitation with sanitation) rather than geographic bundling of unrelated services. Mission-specific consolidation may be more challenging in West Marin because of its geography.

Our inquiry revealed widespread agreement about the benefits of collaboration, often acknowledging that this may lead to legal consolidation. Kudos to the special districts who have already taken proactive steps in this direction. Unfortunately, there is no county entity solely responsible for taking action. We are therefore calling on the directors of Marin’s special districts to work with their peers and the County to realize for all of Marin’s residents the evident benefits of simplification, cooperation and consolidation. Absent proactive reform, Marin County risks governance by crisis rather than governance by design. **The time to begin deliberate, structured optimization and/or consolidation is now.**

FINDINGS

- F1.** The current fragmented structure of special districts results in unnecessary duplication of administrative services and operational inefficiencies.
- F2.** Some districts perform competently but lack sufficient scale to support long-term strategic investment in infrastructure, technology, staffing, and resilience.
- F3.** Smaller districts are disproportionately vulnerable to staffing disruptions and catastrophic events that could rapidly impair service delivery.
- F4.** Although consolidation is a popular idea among many elected board members, current governance structures, absence of board member term limits, and fear of loss of political influence discourage boards and administrators from initiating consolidation even when they recognize its benefits.
- F5.** Service and pricing inequities currently exist across Marin and may increase if consolidation and functional collaboration do not accelerate.
- F6.** Performance metrics for essential, mission-specific services exist but they are not readily available and standardized, which prevents meaningful public comparison of district effectiveness and undermines accountability.
- F7.** Without proactive reform, future consolidations are more likely to occur through crisis-driven intervention, resulting in greater disruption and higher costs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1.** By January 1, 2027, all special district boards should have conducted their first semi-annual consolidation exploration meeting with similar districts and will have established a regular meeting schedule moving forward.
- R2.** By October 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors should direct the development of comprehensive, cost-efficient shared services (such as IT, legal, finance, HR/payroll, harmonized compensation/benefits package, insurance) for special districts to optimize expenses and secure a Marin-wide acceptable quality standard. First limited-service offerings are encouraged to be made available by January 1, 2027.
- R3.** By January 31, 2027, with the assistance of the County, all districts should develop and publish on their website standardized, comparable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) with regard to service pricing, finance, staffing, operations, and customer satisfaction.
- R4.** By January 31, 2027, each district should publicly update findings and progress regarding consolidation opportunities, and share those findings with the Board of Supervisors and the public on a semi-annual basis.
- R5.** By January 31, 2027, the Board of Supervisors should oversee compliance with R1–R4 and update the public on the districts' performance.
- R6.** By October 1, 2026, in the process of implementing R1 and R2, districts should prioritize functional consolidation in operations, procurement, training, and administration as a precursor to formal consolidation.

- R7.** By October 1, 2026, the district's board compensation, benefits, length of service, date of term end, and expenses related to board work should be clearly and prominently posted on each district's website and updated annually.
- R8.** By June 1, 2027, special districts should adopt term limits of two consecutive four-year terms for all board members. Staggered implementation of term limits to avoid disruptions is encouraged.
- R9.** By June 1, 2027, board compensation structures should be reviewed across districts, and considered for adjustment. All components of board compensation should be posted on their website (see best practice example in Appendix B).

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the Grand Jury requires responses to all findings and recommendations (F1-F8 and R1-R9) from the following governing bodies:

From the following governing bodies within 90 days:

- Marin County Board of Supervisors
- San Rafael City Council, City of San Rafael
- Town of Ross
- Almonte Sanitary District
- Alto Sanitary District
- Central Marin Sanitation Agency
- Corte Madera Sanitary District #2
- CSA #28 (West Marin Paramedic)
- CSA #31 (Marin County Fire)
- Homestead Valley Sanitary District
- Kentfield Fire Protection District
- Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District
- Marin City Community Service District
- Marin Municipal Water District
- Marinwood Community Service District
- Murray Park Sewer Maintenance District
- North Marin Water District
- Novato Fire Protection District
- Novato Sanitary District #1
- Richardson Bay Sanitary District
- Ross Valley Sanitary District
- Ross Valley Fire Department
- Ross Valley Paramedic Authority
- San Quentin Village Sewer Maintenance District
- San Rafael Sanitation District
- Sausalito/Marin City Sanitary District
- Sewerage Agency of Southern Marin (SASM)
- Sleepy Hollow Fire Protection District
- Southern Marin Emergency Medical-Paramedic System
- Southern Marin Fire District
- Strawberry Recreation District

- Tamalpais Community Service District
- Tiburon Fire Protection District
- Tiburon/Belvedere Sanitary District #5

INVITED RESPONSE

From the following county official within 60 days:

- Marin County Executive

The governing bodies indicated above should be aware that the comment or response of the governing body must be conducted in accordance with Penal Code section 933, subdivision (c) and subject to the notice, agenda and open meeting requirements of the Brown Act.

Note: At the time this report was prepared information was available at the websites cited.

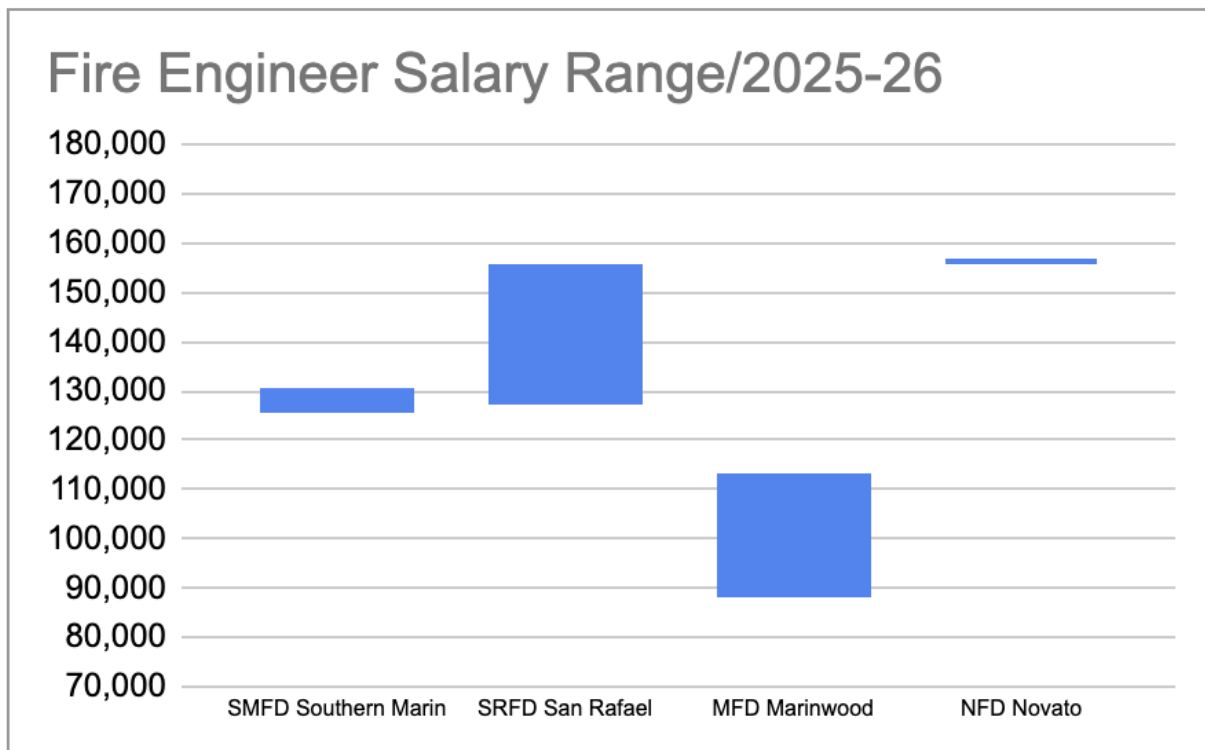
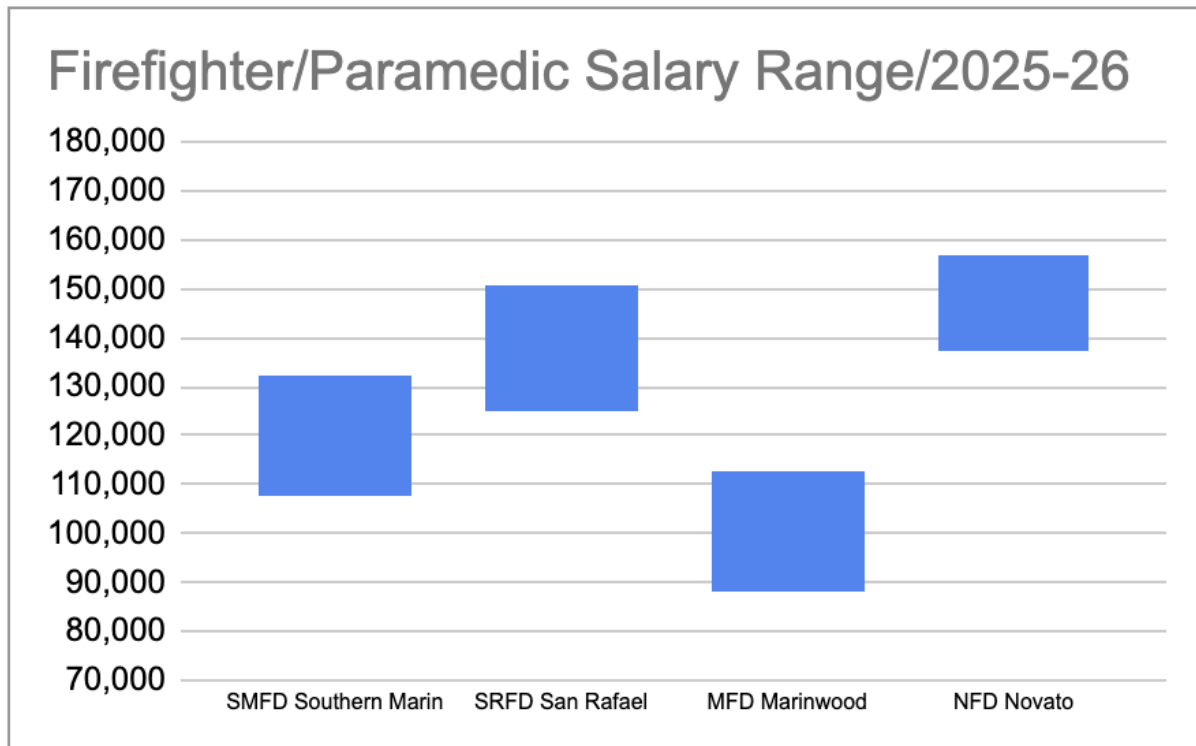
Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury *not* contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury. The California State Legislature has stated that it intends Penal Code section 929 to encourage full candor in testimony in Grand Jury investigations by protecting the privacy and confidentiality of those who participate in any Civil Grand Jury investigation.

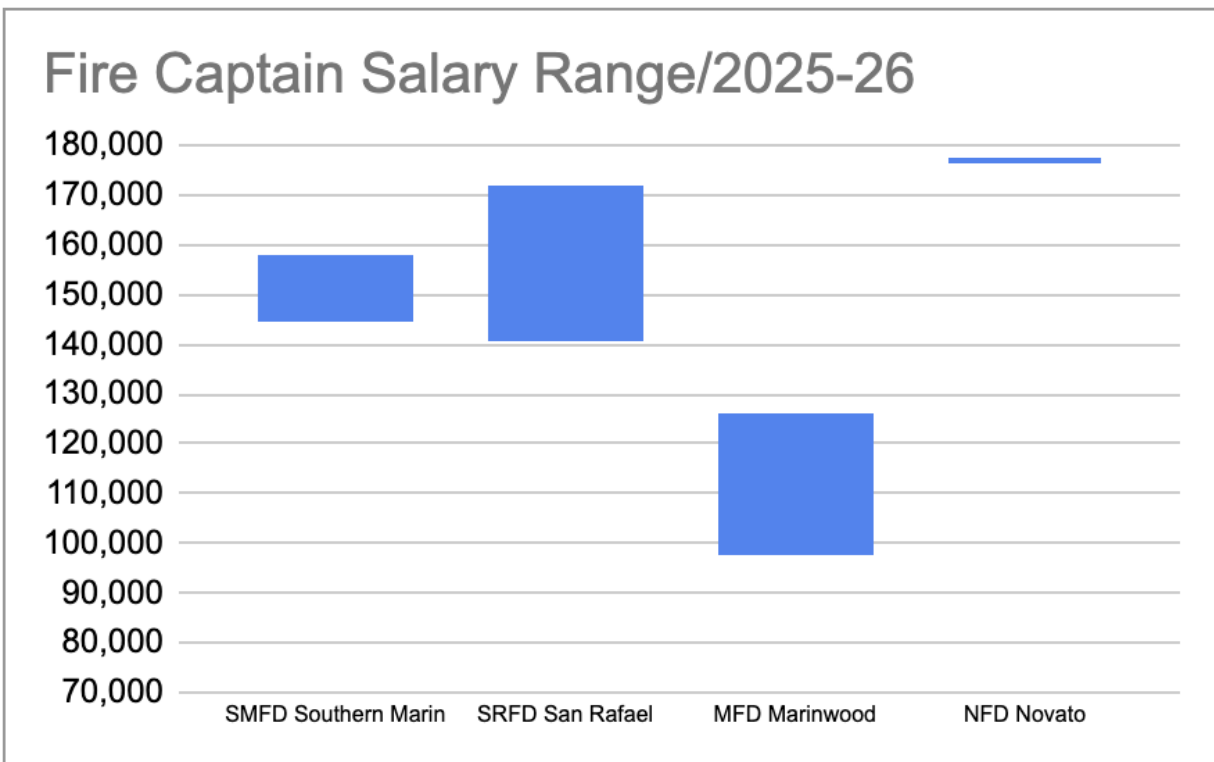
GLOSSARY

A comprehensive overview of special district related terms and acronyms can be found on the [Marin LAFCo⁴](https://www.marinlafco.org/special-districts-list) website.

⁴ <https://www.marinlafco.org/special-districts-list>

APPENDIX A: Examples of Marin County Fire Departments Salaries, FY 2025-2026





Source: Websites of Southern Marin, San Rafael, Marinwood and Novato Fire Departments.

APPENDIX B: Example of Best Practice Board Compensation Transparency

Shown: Marin Municipal Water District, 2024–2025

Board of Directors Expenses - 2024/25						
Type of Activity or Benefit	Ranjiv Khush	Diana Maier	Larry Russell	Matt Samson	Monty Schmitt	Jed Smith
Regular Board Meetings	5,550	4,000	5,800	4,850	1,800	5,550
Board Committees and Other Special Board Meetings	5,600	3,000	5,750	5,550	1,800	5,300
Liaison Assignments to Advisory Committees, Councils and Forums	2,650	1,250	4,950	4,600	200	5,500
Conferences, Training and Memberships	990	3,882	8,159	2,095	-	30
Medical/Dental Benefits	-	14,071	6,831	116	8,941	-
Total	\$ 14,790	\$ 26,203	\$ 31,490	\$ 17,211	\$ 12,741	\$16,380

Source: <https://marinwater.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Board-Mem.-Expenses-FY23.pdf>

APPENDIX C: Special District Consolidation Tactical Table

STAKE-HOLDERS	Phase 1 Collaboration	Phase 2 Functional Consolidation	Phase 3 Consolidation
SD Board	Conduct consolidation exploration workshop (risk & reward, financials, Key Performance Indicators, staffing, service offerings, roadblocks, capital infrastructure). Meet with peers at corresponding districts to agree on areas of collaboration and compare notes. Key Deliverable: Shared Service Agreement.	Implement Shared Services Agreement; review and monitor, assess and adjust services. Evaluate progress against deliverables. Regular reports back to public stakeholders Key Deliverable: Certificate of Completion.	Reconfigure board, execute consolidation (new services, pricing, staffing). Prepare the next consolidation opportunity.
SD Staff	Prepare consolidation impact analysis on staff opportunities, assets and services. Continue to meet with peers at corresponding districts to agree on areas of further collaboration. Key Deliverable: Staffing Impact Analysis, Culture Mapping.	Execute functional consolidation activities and provide feedback and improvement opportunities to board.	Execute consolidation activities and provide feedback and improvement opportunities to board. Perform as one entity.
Unions	Support staff and board; map out benefits of consolidation for their members; lead discussion among their members. Present county-wide assimilation of compensation, benefits and pension structure for the desired end state (one SD per county). Key Deliverable: County-wide MOU proposal.	Negotiate and agree on MOU (memorandum of understanding). Evaluate retirement systems, workers comp.	
Elected Officials	Openly support mission-specific SD consolidation in their jurisdiction. Encourage SD boards to drive consolidation. Provide access to infrastructure (facilities, counsel, staff). Actively dismantle CSDs (community service districts). Drive towards county-wide ordinance. Establish “State of SDs” as a fixed agenda point.	Endorse, campaign for and validate consolidation efforts (in public). Assist and remove roadblocks, share best practices, role model and embrace change. Support constituents with adapting to change.	Assist and remove roadblocks, share best practices, role model and embrace change. Endorse, campaign for and validate consolidation efforts (in public). Support constituents with adapting to change.

STAKE-HOLDERS	Phase 1 Collaboration	Phase 2 Functional Consolidation	Phase 3 Consolidation
Public	Attend board meetings and inquire about consolidation efforts. Speak to your neighbors and start a movement. Provide input for desired service offerings, send letters to the editor, and contact SD board, offices and administrators to express support for their cooperation and consolidation efforts.	Continue to stay engaged, offer feedback and service improvement opportunities, support consolidation, and defend consolidation during hearings.	Monitor success and benefits. Encourage further consolidation.
Media	Continue to cover the benefits of SD consolidation through articles, case studies, and best practices. Activate the public to attend board meetings (publish board meeting dates).	Continue to cover the benefits of SD functional consolidation through articles, case studies, and best practices. Activate the public to attend scheduled and posted board meetings.	Continue to cover the benefits of SD consolidation through articles, case studies, and best practices. Activate the public to attend scheduled and posted board meetings.
LAFCo	Advise districts about resources available, benefits, external consulting support, timelines, cost, and the process of consolidation. Hold workshops about how to mitigate potential roadblocks.	Provide analysis, accept application, manage public hearings and protests, issue Certificate of Completion.	Review, encourage and facilitate further consolidation efforts.
Board of Supervisors	Mandate and oversee compliance of GJ recommendations, provide funds pursuant to Gov. Code sections 60350–60356 (District Consolidation Assistance Program), provide strategic direction and monitor optimization progress. Provide shared services for special districts.		