



---

# MEMORANDUM

---

Date: January 19, 2023

To: The Honorable Chair and Members  
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: Jan Leshner   
County Administrator

Re: **Possible Impact to Rural Fire Districts Following the Defeat of Arizona Proposition 310**

Arizona Proposition 310, the Sales Tax for Fire District Funding Measure, would have enacted a 0.1% sales tax for 20 years and provided a formula for distributing funds individual fire districts across the State. The Proposition was defeated 51.80% to 48.20%.

Following the defeat of this Proposition, Supervisor Scott asked staff to communicate with rural fire districts in Pima County to assess need following the defeat of Proposition 310.

Bob Meredith, Director of the Pima County Wireless Integrated Network (PCWIN), reached out to the rural fire districts, as they are all members of the PCWIN organization. Responses received from Chief Chappell, Drexel Heights Fire District, Chief Gunia, Mt. Lemmon Fire District, and Chief Delfs, Three Points and Avra Valley Fire Districts are attached and summarized below:

- Avra Valley Fire District (Attachment 1) – Chief Delfs concludes his letter by noting that ...“without future assistances from the County or the State, the Avra Valley Fire District will decline.”
- Drexel Heights Fire District – Chief Chappel responded in an email that while they will survive on getting the revenue they are used to getting, as their apparatus and infrastructure continues to age eventually they will all be hurting without the funds to upgrade and replace older equipment.
- Mt. Lemmon Fire District (Attachment 2) – Chief Gunia noted that passage of Proposition 310 would have provided an opportunity for the district to incorporate some of the new safety standards and add a third firefighter each shift.
- Three Points Fire District (Attachment 3) – Chief Delfs summarizes conditions at the District and ends, commenting that the Three Points Fire District “is struggling to provide basic services.”

The Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors

Re: **Possible Impact to Rural Fire Districts Following the Defeat of Arizona Proposition 310**

January 19, 2023

Page 2

Historically, Pima County, as a taxing district, has not funded another taxing district and, therefore, have not provided general fund support. The exceptions are situations such as Mt. Lemmon, which is funded because the area is seen as a recreation site enjoyed by many who are not tax payers in that fire district. Visitors to the area are the primary users of the fire district services. In addition, the Arivaca Volunteer Fire Department was provided CDBG/HUD funding to assist the volunteer fire district with a physical structure.

In addition, Pima County currently provides some support to the rural fire districts in the form of funding their radio subscription and maintenance fees through the Office of Emergency Management budget each year. The districts assisted are delineated as follows:

	Radio Count	Total Annual Cost
Mt Lemmon	23	\$ 10,212.00
Ajo/Gibson	20	\$ 8,880.00
Arivaca	22	\$ 9,768.00
Why	18	\$ 7,992.00
Helmet Peak/Elephant Head	50	\$ 22,200.00
	Grand Total	\$ 59,052.00

The rural fire districts would have benefited greatly from the passage of Proposition 310. I will work with our federal and state partners in coordination with Pima County's lobbyist on the possible availability of funds. In addition, the Grants Management and Innovation Department will review all potential sources of grant funding, which could be used for assistance to the rural fire districts.

JKL/vm

#### Attachments

- c: Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator
- Francisco Garcia, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer
- Steve Holmes, Deputy County Administrator
- Nicole Fyffe, Senior Advisor, County Administrator's Office
- Robert Meredith, Director, Pima County Wireless Integrated Network

# ATTACHMENT 1

# AVRA VALLEY FIRE DISTRICT

Phone: (520) 682-3255

Fax: (520) 682-5458

Website: avfire.org



15790 W. Silverbell Road  
Marana, Arizona 85653

*"Our Family Helping Your Family"*

---

January 1, 2023

Mr. Robert Meredith  
Executive Director, PCWIN  
Via Email to Robert.Meredith@Pima.gov

Thank you for reaching out on behalf of the County Administrator and the Board of Supervisors about the negative impacts to our fire district as a result of the failure of Proposition 310. The Avra Valley Fire District needs assistance to maintain or increase staffing levels, purchase emergency vehicles, maintain fire stations, and to operate in light of increasing employee related costs such as pensions, workers compensation, health insurance and the State's increasing minimum wage.

The Avra Valley Fire District (AVFD) is located north and west of the Town of Marana. We serve a large rural area of over 265 square miles with an approximate population of 12,500. The District also provides ALS transport services through its Certificate of Necessity (CON) with the State of Arizona. This CON expands our services to over 325 square miles. The District is primarily funded through property taxes and supplemented by ambulance transport services, emergency services subscriptions, and wildland firefighting fees. In addition to our residents and their property the District also protects State and County critical infrastructure including:

1. 20 miles of Interstate 10 with an average daily traffic of 107,000 vehicles per day
2. Over 20 miles of Union Pacific railway that averages 50-60 trains per day
3. 2 El Paso high pressure natural gas lines and purge valves
4. Marana Water District serving over 10,000 residents
5. Tucson Electric Power solar power field
6. The ASARCO Silverbell Mine
7. A Verizon substation
8. The Central Arizona Project (CAP)
9. The Arizona Public Service Corporation's (APS) electrical power generating plant
10. The Silverbell Army National Guard Training site
11. Pinal Airpark
12. Marana Correctional Facility (CON)
13. Marana Airport (CON)
14. Two elementary schools

## **General Fund Resources:**

The Avra Valley Fire District is heavily reliant on property taxes to fund basic services. Unfortunately, these revenues had declined over the past eleven (11) years. Property tax revenue has not kept pace with the cost increases in nearly every area. They have not kept up with the fast-paced cost growth in personnel benefits, particularly pension and workers compensation

---

## **Board of Directors**

Luis Castaneda, Jr., Chairman    Sara Bauer, Vice-Chairman    Eric Neilson, Clerk    Thomas Armendarez, Member    James Haffner, Member

In accordance with the Federal law and the U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, Avra Fire District is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD).

costs. The State's minimum wage increased to \$13.85 per hour effective January 1, 2023 which increased our personnel costs by 5.5%. The cost of capital equipment has increased dramatically leaving us unable to replace antiquated fire trucks, ambulances, cardiac monitors/defibrillators and other equipment. Our main fire station has roof leaks after every rain but we cannot afford to replace the roof. FY22 was the first year that we saw a rise in property tax revenue in over a decade. Our revenues in FY22 still only equated to the revenues received in FY11. Ambulance revenue and wildland cost recovery have increased moderately and expenses have been trimmed to balance the budget. FY23 will be the first year we will see tax revenues increase over the 2011 levels.

### **Staffing Shortfalls**

The District has worked hard to maintain staffing of 14 firefighters per shift. The National Fire Protection Association Standard 1710 requires 14 firefighters on the scenes of working structure fires. The District was awarded a 2019 SAFER grant. This Federal grant increased our staffing from 10 to 14 firefighters per shift, however, it will end in January of 2024. The loss of grant revenue will likely lead to firefighter layoffs. Without assistance, we will be unable to meet NFPA 1710 requirements and insure firefighters and community members are protected. As a result, firefighter and community safety will be at risk. Property loss will increase and critical infrastructure will be unprotected. Furthermore, the District will not meet the NFPA 1500 Safety Standard nor the OSHA 1910.134 minimum requirements of 2 members outside of hazardous areas for every 2 members inside hazardous areas.

### **Emergency Vehicle and Equipment Needs:**

Nearly all of our fire engines and ambulances will need to be replaced over the next few years. Budget shortfalls have left us unable to even consider replacement. Maintenance costs and the lack of parts for older vehicles have made it increasingly difficult to keep trucks in service. For example:

The District needs to replace our 2003 ambulance because:

1. This ambulance is 19 years old and has 215,065 miles. Life expectancy is 8 years
2. The fuel injectors need replaced and the truck needs suspension work. It is estimated that the costs will be approximately \$10,000.
3. This ambulance barely passed the last required annual State inspection due to mileage, maintenance, condition, and age. It is unlikely that it will pass its next State inspection
4. Without enough ambulances to adequately serve our District, response times will increase. We are required by the State to maintain certain response times, if we fail to maintain these response times we will lose our CON resulting in a loss of approximately 1 million dollars of revenue. This will result in lay-offs and a drastic reduction in both medical and fire protection services we provide to our community.
5. This ambulance is 2-wheel-drive. Many of our roads require 4-wheel-drive capability to reach the homes in our District.

The District needs to replace our 2003 type 1 fire engine because:

1. This vehicle is 19 years old and has 148,330 miles. Life expectancy is 10 years
2. This vehicle continues to require maintenance that is exceeding the District's vehicle maintenance budget capacity
3. The foam system does not work
4. This vehicle is unreliable. When it requires repair, we end up shutting down an engine crew which negatively affects our response times and places our firefighters, our community, and our mutual partners at risk for injuries and deaths

The District needs to replace our 2000 type 6 brush truck because:

1. This type 6 brush truck is 22 years old and has 85,347 miles. Life expectancy is 10 years
2. The water pump needs to be replaced which will cost approximately \$4,000
3. The water tank needs to be replaced.
4. This vehicle is extremely unreliable and has broken down on wildfires it responded to last year.
5. This vehicle is currently out-of-service because the pump is not working and needs repaired
6. By replacing this brush truck the District will be able to continue to support the Pima County Community Wildfire Protection Plan. This plan has identified 4% of our District's Wildland Urban Interface at high risk and 74% at a moderate risk

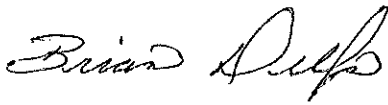
### **Major Responses:**

You would expect that we respond to fires and medical emergencies within our District. However, we also have some extraordinary calls involving overturned mining trucks, downed aircraft, parachuting accidents and even hot air balloon crashes. Twenty miles of Interstate 10 runs through our District. The AVFD continues to respond to many motor vehicle collisions on the Interstate every year due to high travel speeds and reduced visibility caused often by winds. The stretch of Interstate 10 that we cover runs from Pinal Air Park Road, north past Picacho Peak. It's known for multiple vehicle accidents requiring extrication and transport of trapped and seriously injured occupants. In 2011, the Avra Valley Fire District responded to a 21-vehicle accident on Interstate 10 near Pichacho Peak caused by blowing dust and high winds. This motor vehicle accident had 4 trapped occupants in two separate vehicles at a distance from each other of approximately 300 feet. There was a total of 23 patients involved of which 12 were transported by ambulances. In 2013, our units responded to a 19-vehicle accident on Interstate 10 also caused by a severe dust storm. This motor vehicle accident had 6 trapped and seriously injured occupants that had to be extricated from several different vehicles. There were 21 patients involved in this accident of which 5 were transported by helicopter, 8 were transported by ambulance, and 3 were pronounced deceased at the scene. Historically the AVFD responds to over 50 serious motor vehicle accidents on Interstate 10 each year. Not having enough resources and personnel available at the scenes of these accidents adversely affects the District's goal of extricating and transporting critical patients within 10 minutes or less of our arrival on the scene. If the patient is entrapped, extrication can take in excess of 20 minutes per patient – and that timeline begins after enough personnel arrive

at the scene to begin extrication. These times are part of the big picture, the golden (trauma) hour – our goal in getting the patient to the trauma center within one hour from the time of the accident.

Mr. Meredith, I can say unequivocally that without future assistance from the County or the State, The Avra Valley Fire District will decline. We will reach a point where we will lack the personnel and equipment to provide minimum levels of public safety. We are holding our own right now through the willingness of our firefighters and paramedics to continue to operate under adverse conditions with low pay because they love to serve and they love the Avra Valley Fire District. Please feel free to reach out to me again at 520-481-2554 or [bdelfs@avfire.org](mailto:bdelfs@avfire.org) if I can provide any further information.

Highest Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian Delfs". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Brian Delfs  
Fire Chief

# ATTACHMENT 2





# MOUNT LEMMON FIRE DISTRICT

13170 N. Oracle Control Rd. Mt. Lemmon, AZ 85619-Office.520.576.1201-Fax.576.3095  
CHAIR: JOHN PERCHOROWICZ - CLERK: TODD CANALE - TREASURER: TERI CARPENTER  
MEMBER: TONY MAZZA - MEMBER: TOM MCNURLIN - CHIEF JOE GUNIA

January 5, 2023

County Administrator Lesher and Board of Supervisors,

As you are aware the Mount Lemmon Fire District and Pima County have always been stakeholders in public safety. We currently have an Intergovernmental Agreement where Pima County provides the Mount Lemmon Fire District 30 thousand dollars annually to supplement our budget. This contribution has aided us in overcoming our shrinking budget each of the last five years due to assessed values going down and increased costs, such as the district's pension commitment going up an estimated 6% this year alone.

We were hopeful that Proposition 310 would have been passed this previous election cycle. In addition, to the assistance received via our Intergovernmental Agreement with your office, Proposition 310 would have provided an opportunity for our district to catch up to some of the newer safety standards recognized for firefighting. That budget increase would have provided us the means to staff a third firefighter each shift. That third firefighter, in conjunction with fire chief response would allow us to meet the Occupational Health and Safety Administration's (OSHA) recommendation of "Two In/Two Out" for firefighting operations at immediately dangerous to life or health environments.

Additionally, Proposition 310 would have created an opportunity for the first raises for full-time staff in ten years, outside of those that have increased due to state minimum wage laws. This affords an opportunity for retention of staff that has not only experience on how our operations must be performed to generate success, but also staff that demonstrates the leadership necessary to work with multiple jurisdictions to accomplish necessary tasks on complex calls for service; both of which are critical for fire service agencies with minimal staffing.

If an occasion presents itself, I would really appreciate the opportunity to further explain the challenges the Mount Lemmon Fire Districts is addressing to best serve the residents of Mount Lemmon, greater Pima County, and visitors worldwide, as well as answers any questions you may have regarding our fire district.

Respectfully,

Joe Gunia

Fire Chief

[jgunia@mlfdaz.org](mailto:jgunia@mlfdaz.org)

# ATTACHMENT 3



# Three Points Fire District

11200 South Sierrita Mountain Road, PMB 328  
Tucson, Arizona 85736  
Phone: (520) 822-1086

January 4, 2023

Mr. Robert Meredith  
Executive Director, PCWIN  
Via Email to Robert.Meredith@Pima.gov

Thank you for reaching out on behalf of the County Administrator and the Board of Supervisors about the negative impacts to the Three Points Fire District resulting from the failure of Proposition 310. The Three Points Fire District was hopeful that Proposition 310 would provide nearly one million dollars per year to assist us to: Maintain or increase staffing levels, purchase emergency vehicles, purchase cardiac monitors, and to operate in light of increasing employee related costs such as pensions, worker's compensation, health insurance and the State's increasing minimum wage.

The Three Points Fire District (TPFD) is located twenty-five miles west of Tucson and twenty-five miles north of the Mexico Border. The District is located in southwest Pima County and serves a large rural area of over 245 square miles with an approximate population of 5500. The District also provides ambulance transport services through its Certificate of Necessity (CON) with the State of Arizona. This CON expands our services to well over 300 square miles. The District has an influx of population on a daily basis from the over twenty-five miles of Highway 86 and Highway 286 which serve as main travel routes to and from Mexico. The District has responded to several multiple vehicle accidents on Highway 86 and Highway 286 between Sandario Road and Arivaca.

Our District has continued to struggle with balancing our budgets for the past several years. Our tax revenues have been in continual decline. For example, our FY22 total revenues were \$614,998 less than our FY19 revenues. Additionally, the State legislature has implemented a new firefighter cancer law which has resulted in our previous worker's compensation carrier eliminating coverage for firefighters. This change forced us to quickly obtain coverage with a risk pool which now levies huge annual capitalization and maintenance assessments in addition to premiums. The Public Safety Personnel Retirement System has increased our employer contribution requirement for pensions from 16.9% to 33.75%. The State's minimum wage increased to \$13.85 per hour effective January 1, 2023 which required us to increase our personnel's wages and associated benefits by 5.5% just to pay our newest employees minimum wage.

While some other Districts are climbing out of the past economic downturn, we are experiencing a slow rebound from several consecutive years of negative growth. Additionally, the severe decline in housing values from 2008-2014, led to a State Legislature tax rate cap of \$3.25/\$100 of secondary assessed property value. We are at the maximum tax rate allowed by the State.

These difficulties have had a serious impact on the District's ability to keep pace with inflation and planning for growth. Increasing staffing to meet NFPA 1710 response guidelines is impossible due to inflation, healthcare, liability insurance and worker's compensation costs. The only option has been to continue to staff engines with only one to two firefighters for a total of five firefighters per shift. Even with our mutual aid partner's assistance, we will remain unable to meet NFPA 1710 guidelines unless we increase staffing to three per engine – an increase of twelve employees.

We have taken the following actions in an attempt to overcome the decreases in revenue:

1. We have entered into a management agreement with the Avra Valley Fire District to cut administrative costs.
2. We have written for grants in an effort to meet the unfunded needs of the District.
3. We have restricted purchase of non-safety related equipment
4. We have limited costs for community services and fire prevention programs
5. We have streamlined general operating expenditures as narrowly as possible
6. We support and promote business and housing development projects planned within our District

### **Staffing Needs:**

The Three Points Fire District (TPFD) has only three stations to cover our vast response area. With our current staffing levels, we are unable to meet NFPA 1710 staffing recommendations. At our current level, the District is forced to staff one of its pumpers with only one firefighter and the other two with two firefighters. At two of the three stations, the two firefighters staff both an engine and an ambulance. When the engine is dispatched, the ambulance is placed out of service due. And when the ambulance is dispatched, the engine is placed out of service due to staffing. If we were able to hire twelve additional firefighters, we would be able to meet the NFPA requirement of fourteen firefighters responding to structure fires but we would still rely on help from our mutual aid partners.

The biggest concern the District has is that firefighter and community safety will continue to be at risk. Without increasing our staffing, injuries and potential deaths to firefighters and the public may occur. Property loss will increase and critical infrastructure protection will continue to be insufficient. Furthermore, our NFPA compliance will continue to be impacted as follows:

1. The District will not meet the minimum NFPA 1710 requirements.
2. The District will not meet NFPA 1500 requirements of two members outside a hazardous area for every two members inside a hazardous area.
3. The District will not meet OSHA 1910.134 standard which also requires two members outside a hazardous area for every two members inside a hazardous area.
4. The District's mutual aid partners that are short staffed may not comply with NFPA standards since they rely on our assistance to do so.

Adequate staffing would reduce response times, provide for safer operations, increase resident's safety, and decrease property loss. Adequate staffing will enable us to respond faster and perform better, which in turn will ensure reliable services to the community we serve and the critical infrastructure we protect, which includes:

1. Old Tucson Studios
2. Ryan Field Municipal Airport (CON)
3. 70 miles of State Highway
4. The Altar Valley School District #51
5. Water Treatment Plant
6. 64 miles of 36" high pressure gas line that provides Mexico with 75% of their fuel needs for mining, electric, and residential
7. 38 miles of high-power lines that provide electrical service to all of Southern Arizona
8. A US Customs and Border Patrol Station

### **Fire Stations:**

One of our fire stations, station 301, needs major repairs including replacing the roof, apparatus pad and asphalt, upgrading the electrical system, and upgrading other structural components. We have had the station evaluated by a third-party contractor and they provided us the projected costs for these repairs which total \$500,000.

### **Emergency Vehicle Replacement:**

**Ambulances:** The District desperately needs to replace two ambulances. Our 2002 ambulance is twelve years beyond its life expectancy of eight years and in extremely poor condition. This vehicle is no longer reliable and continues to require excessive maintenance due to the worn-out suspension system, brake system, oil leaks, and cracks in the body and frame. Our goal is to replace this vehicle with new reliable 4X4 ambulance that meets NFPA 1917 requirements and KKK-A-1822 specifications. The District is unable to keep up with these types of vehicle replacement needs and this will continue to affect our service delivery.

Response times will increase without enough ambulances to adequately serve our District. We are required by the State to maintain certain response times, if we fail to maintain these response times we will lose our CON resulting in a loss of approximately \$500,000 of revenue from transports. This will result in lay-offs and a drastic reduction in the fire protection services we provide to our community. Consequently, without the staffing and support that our ambulances provide to our fire responses, we will be unable to meet NFPA and OSHA standards.

**Fire Engines:** The District recently purchased two used pumpers that were surplus by other fire districts. These fire engines are an upgrade from the vehicles we placed out of service but they are old and require constant maintenance. We often end up shutting down engine crews which negatively affects our response times and places our firefighters, our community, and our mutual aid partners at risk.

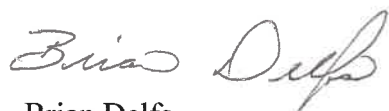
**Brush Engines:** Brush engines support the Arizona Department of State Land and they provide protection within the Three Points Fire District and to its neighboring Districts. The District responded to thirty in-District brushfires last year and deployed to twenty fires at the request of the Arizona Department of State Land. Our brush truck is a 2002 Ford 350. It is twenty years old and has 348,858 miles. These trucks have a life expectancy of twelve years.

### **EKG Monitors:**

The District responds to approximately 1,500 EMS calls each year. EKG monitors are critically needed for patients experiencing chest pain, heart attacks, rapid heartbeat, fainting episodes, confusion, difficulty breathing, slow heartbeat, and cardiac arrest. However, these are not the only calls they are needed for. Heart monitors/defibrillators are needed on 90% of EMS calls to obtain vital signs. The District currently has 3 EKG heart monitors. These EKG monitors are between 13-20 years old and do not allow data upload to the District's reporting software program. Our EKG monitors do not allow the transmission of EKG's to local hospitals. Due to the age of these monitors, extensive repair needs have placed them out of service on several occasions requiring the District to borrow monitors in order to maintain its ALS services. We have been notified that our current EKG monitors will no longer be supported by the manufacturer due to their age.

Mr. Meredith, The Three Points Fire District is struggling to provide basic services. Without some relief from the County or State, we will soon reach a point where we will lack the personnel and equipment to provide even minimum levels of public safety. Our personnel are enduring low pay and working excessive numbers of overtime shifts to provide the best services we can. Any assistance that Pima County could provide to help fund our critical needs would be truly life-saving. Please feel free to reach out to me again at 520-481-2554 or [bdelfs@avfire.org](mailto:bdelfs@avfire.org) if I can provide any further information.

Highest Regards,



Brian Delfs  
Fire Chief