



# Gus Vina: You Can Help Improve Our Fire Services

*By Gus Vina, Brentwood City Manager*

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It is a fact: public safety is critical to the quality of life we all expect for our families. It is also a fact that the level of fire and medical services in East Contra Costa County is unacceptable. The time it takes to travel from a fire station to a public safety emergency in the district is more than twice as long as it should be – currently around 10 minutes. If you have ever required the assistance of the fire and medical folks you know this feels like a lifetime.

This heightened risk is the consequence of trying to provide more services to the community with fewer resources. The East Contra Costa Fire Protection District (ECCFPD) has had to reduce the number of fire stations from eight to three since the great recession that began in 2008. Front line first responders have been reduced from 52 to 34 with only nine fire fighters on duty any given day. During the same time period, the population has grown to more than 100,000 and that means more 9-1-1 calls for services. This is the bad news.

Here is the good news: Many members of our community are hard at work to improve fire and medical services in the East Contra Costa County. A task force was formed last June 2015 to work on this effort, which resulted in an agreement among Oakley, Brentwood, Contra Costa County and the Fire District to temporarily reopen a fourth station. But this is a temporary fix that lacks a long-term funding solution.

We are now focused on long-term solutions and need our community to participate in the discussion. Every member of the community can be heard by going to [www.ourfireservices.org](http://www.ourfireservices.org). Here you can sign up to learn more about the issues and provide input. This community discussion will help local officials in their decision making in the coming months.

In addition to the "Our Fire Services" discussion forum, a master plan is being developed for the Fire District. This plan will help us all better understand what it will take to not only serve today's existing population, but also the population 25 to 30 years from today.

One thing is clear: the Fire District is working on borrowed time and by June 2017 further reductions will be needed if a solution is not found. This problem is severely impacting the communities of Brentwood, Oakley, Bethel Island, Byron, Discovery Bay, Knightsen, and Marsh Creek/Morgan Territory. This is "our" problem and I believe that by working together the solutions will also be "our" solutions.

Please join us at [www.ourfireservices.org](http://www.ourfireservices.org). The matter is urgent and we need your input now.

Gus Vina City Manager, City of Brentwood

Member of the Fire and Medical Services Task Force

# LACK OF FUNDING HAS CRIPPLED EMERGENCY MEDICAL AND FIRE SERVICES IN EAST CONTRA COSTA

The East Contra Costa Fire Protection District is the fire department serving residents living in the cities of Brentwood and Oakley, and communities of Bethel Island, Byron, Discovery Bay, Knightsen, and Marsh Creek/Morgan Territory. The District is the first-responder to 9-1-1 calls when there is a fire or when someone needs emergency medical care.

## Formation of the District

In November 2002, three smaller fire districts were consolidated, creating the East Contra Costa Fire Protection District. The intent of this consolidation was to create a single fire agency for the cities of Brentwood and Oakley and the rural communities in this part of the county to respond to incidents requiring emergency medical and fire services.

When the District was first formed, it had eight fire stations that provided 96,000 residents with fire and emergency medical services.

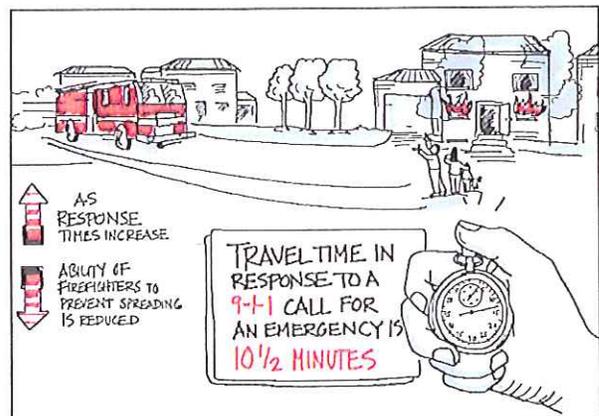
## Decline in Funding

Due to a decline in funding, from 2011 to 2015, the District had to close five stations and cut personnel, reducing the number of firefighters from 52 to 34. In addition, to maintain minimum service levels, the District has been forced to spend down its reserves from \$6 million to \$1 million, which poses financial risk and instability for funding basic fire and medical services.

At the same time these cuts were being made, the population in East Contra Costa increased by 17,500 residents. This recent growth translates into approximately 600 more calls for service each year.

## State of Emergency Medical and Fire Services in East Contra Costa

The national standard for travel time to fires and other emergencies is four minutes. The District's average travel time is about 10.5 minutes. By the time an engine and crew arrive at the scene in this amount of time, there is little hope to contain the fire to the room of origin and to prevent the fire from spreading throughout entire home. At 10.5 minutes, it takes the District five-and-one-half minutes longer than when the brain starts to deteriorate when a person stops breathing due to lack of oxygen.



## Residents of East Contra Costa are At Risk

The District is slated to grow by another 11,800 residents in the next decade. Lack of funding and personnel, combined with the surge in population, means that travel times are increasing and the District's ability to provide adequate public safety services is diminishing.

Either new revenue has to be generated to improve service levels and plan for more population growth or public safety will be put at increasing risk.

We invite you to visit [www.ourfireservices.org](http://www.ourfireservices.org) to share your thoughts with us on how to address this issue.

