



San Benito County Fire Services Options

OCTOBER 22, 2024



1. Renegotiate the Contract with Hollister

Pros

- Hollister is already familiar with the county and its needs, leading to continuity in service.
- A renegotiated contract could include tailored service levels or mutual aid agreements that help reduce costs.
- Avoids the administrative burden of establishing a new fire department or finding another external provider.

Cons

- The high cost may still be a sticking point if Hollister cannot reduce rates significantly.
- Dependency on an external provider means San Benito County might face similar challenges in future negotiations.
- Limited long-term control over the level of service or operational priorities.



2. Explore a Hybrid Model with CalFire and Local Staffing

Pros

- Leverages CalFire's expertise in fire management while supplementing with local or seasonal staffing for cost efficiency.
- CalFire can help cover state responsibility areas during fire season, reducing local burden during critical times.
- Possible shared infrastructure and training opportunities.

Cons

- CalFire's migration to a 66-hour workweek makes their services expensive.
- Coordination between state and local teams could introduce complexity.
- Seasonal limitations in CalFire staffing outside of fire season may leave gaps in year-round coverage.
- CalFire is expensive, they recently quoted to the County OES manager that it cost 6 million a fire station.



3. Form a Regional Fire Protection District with Neighboring Counties

Pros

- Sharing resources with neighboring counties could reduce costs for all participants.
- A regional model can provide a larger pool of staff and equipment, ensuring coverage even during peak demands.
- Enables shared training, operational oversight, and capital investments in infrastructure and equipment.

Cons

- Neighboring departments are geographically distant, making it difficult to staff and station within San Benito County.
- Forming a new district would require extensive intergovernmental agreements and likely a lengthy setup process.
- Could face similar challenges regarding funding and long-term sustainability.
- Establishing a fire district would take away property tax from the County.
- LAFCO process likely takes 1 – 2 years.



4. Build a New San Benito County Fire Department

Pros

- Complete local control over services, staffing, and budgeting, leading to potentially more responsive and flexible operations.
- Can be scaled to fit the county's specific needs, allowing for tailored service models (volunteer, combination, or fully paid staff).
- Long-term potential for cost control, as the county won't be locked into expensive contracts.

Cons

- Significant upfront costs for infrastructure, equipment, and staffing.
- High operational complexity, especially starting from scratch without an established department.
- Recruitment and retention of qualified staff could be difficult, especially in a competitive market for firefighters.



5. Contract with Private Fire Service Providers

Pros

- Private providers may offer more flexible and cost-effective service packages compared to public agencies.
- Allows for performance-based contracts with service-level agreements that ensure accountability.
- Potential for faster implementation compared to building a new department or forming a regional district.

Cons

- Limited number of private fire service providers capable of handling public-sector requirements.
 - Private companies may prioritize profits over community needs.
 - Long-term sustainability and consistency could be a concern, as costs could rise after an initial contract period.
 - Labor issues that occur when using private firefighters that do not enjoy the same governmental protection nor workers comp and firefighter death benefits.
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6. Leverage Volunteer or Combination Fire Department Models

Pros

- Volunteer departments offer a low-cost solution and are common in rural areas.
- A combination model (paid staff supplemented by volunteers) provides a middle ground for cost control and operational flexibility.
- Strong community engagement in fire protection, which can improve public trust and resilience.

Cons

- Volunteer recruitment and retention can be challenging.
 - May not provide adequate response times or service levels in more populated or industrial areas.
 - Limited capacity for handling major incidents, which could lead to reliance on mutual aid during emergencies.
 - The County would still need to acquire infrastructure, equipment, and staffing to supervise the volunteers, and the significant upfront costs.
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7. Create a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) with Hollister and Other Agencies

Pros

- A JPA allows for shared decision-making and cost-sharing while giving the county more influence over operational aspects.
- Can help reduce costs by pooling resources like equipment, personnel, and training across agencies.
- Provides flexibility to adjust service levels based on demand and budget constraints.

Cons

- The process of establishing a JPA can be bureaucratically complex and time-consuming.
 - Potential for interagency conflicts or misalignment in priorities and service expectations.
 - San Benito County may still face higher costs than desired, depending on the structure of the JPA agreement.
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Thanks!

Questions?

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