ROSS VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT

For the Meeting of November 10, 2026

To: Board of Directors

From: Dan Mahoney, Fire Chief

Subject: Consider the Recommendation to Establish a Deputy Fire Marshal Position Through the Creation of a New Position or Reclassification of an Existing Fire Inspector Position and Adopt Resolution 26-10

RECOMMENDATION:

Consider the recommendation to establish a Deputy Fire Marshal Position through the creation of a new position or reclassification of an existing Fire Inspector Position; and adopt Resolution 26-10.

BACKGROUND:

In 2023, Ross Valley Fire Department contracted with Local Motion Solutions (LMS) to conduct an organizational and governance study (Attachment #1) to assist the Board of Directors in evaluating future governance options in anticipation of the expiration of the Department's five-year contract for management services with the Marin County Fire Department.

The LMS study evaluated several governance alternatives and identified important organizational considerations associated with transitioning to a stand-alone Fire Department model. The study also included a typical fire department organizational staffing model and identified additional management positions that could be necessary to appropriately support the organization.

Specifically, the LMS study stated:

> "To create a management staff of appropriate size, Ross Valley would likely have to hire/promote not only a fire chief but likely a deputy chief and possibly a fire marshal."

The organizational chart included on page 22 of the LMS study also identified a Fire Marshal position in addition to fire prevention inspection staff.

At the February 14, 2024 Board meeting, staff presented a Stand-Alone Fire Chief Command Structure Proposal. Rather than creating the Deputy Chief position identified in the LMS study, staff recommended establishing a 40-hour Battalion Chief position to provide additional

administrative and operational support to the Fire Chief. The Board approved the creation of this position in July 2024. It was filled January 1, 2026 and has proven to be beneficial to the organization.

At that time, staff did not recommend the creation of a separate Fire Marshal position. Instead, the staff report stated:

> "It is recommended that the following 'RVFD Stand Alone Fire Chief Command Structure Proposal' be established and re-evaluated in 12 months to ensure the proposed positions are sufficient to support the organization."

This approach allowed the Department to transition to a stand-alone management structure, evaluate actual organizational needs and workloads, and return to the Board if additional adjustments were warranted.

DISCUSSION:

The Department's current Fire Prevention Bureau consists of two Fire Inspectors and one Wildfire Prevention Coordinator. Under the current organizational structure, the Fire Chief serves as the Department's Fire Marshal.

As the Department has better understood its operational needs under this new organizational model, staff has identified a need for additional middle-management and technical expertise within fire prevention. Establishing a Deputy Fire Marshal will provide direct supervision to the Fire Prevention Bureau, strengthen program oversight, provide greater technical support to the Fire Chief, and better position the Department to address the community's evolving fire prevention and life-safety needs.h

The Department's fire prevention responsibilities have continued to evolve beyond traditional inspection and code-enforcement activities because local and state requirements have changed, including coordination of complex development requirements (housing element), wildfire mitigation/resiliency, community risk reduction, fire and life-safety systems, and interagency planning. This, in turn, has increased community expectations and support for technical expertise.

Examples of the Department's evolving fire prevention responsibilities to be done by a Deputy Fire Marshal include:

- **Housing Element and Development Requirements:** State and local housing requirements are resulting in *larger and increasingly complex* development projects requiring greater Fire Department involvement, technical review, coordination, and expertise.
- **Fire Code Development:** Reviewing existing fire codes and recommending local amendments necessary to address community-specific fire and life-safety risks.
- **Complex Plan Review and Code Interpretation:** Providing higher-level review and interpretation involving fire access, water supply, fire protection systems, building construction, and other complex fire and life-safety issues.

- **Wildland-Urban Interface:** Coordinating traditional structural fire prevention responsibilities with the Department's expanding wildfire-prevention and community risk-reduction programs.
- **Interagency Coordination:** Working with local planning, building, public works, Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority, and other agencies on projects and policies affecting fire and life safety in the County of Marin.
- **Technical Support to the Fire Chief:** Providing subject-matter expertise and recommendations regarding complex fire prevention, development, enforcement, and code-related matters.

Under the current organizational structure, the Fire Chief, who also serves as Fire Marshal, is responsible for overseeing complex fire prevention matters. He has increasingly (over the last 10 years) relied on the Department's two Fire Inspectors to perform duties and responsibilities that extend beyond the traditional scope of their positions.

Several local fire departments employ a stand-alone Fire Marshal. These agencies include Marin County Fire, Southern Marin Fire and Novato Fire. Kentfield Fire Protection District and San Rafael Fire employ a Deputy Fire Marshal. This structure allows the Fire Chief to focus on higher-level responsibilities, strategic priorities, and rely on a subject matter expert for ever-changing fire codes and requirements.

While staff believes the Department would benefit from the creation of a new Fire Marshal position as proposed in the LMS study, the recommendation at this time is to establish a Deputy Fire Marshal position. The Deputy Fire Marshal would serve as the Fire Prevention Bureau's middle manager and provide the Fire Chief with a higher level of technical and administrative support, in his role as the Fire Marshal. The position would be responsible for coordinating the Department's fire prevention programs, providing supervisory and technical oversight to prevention personnel, managing complex code and development issues, assisting with code development and amendments, overseeing inspection programs, coordinating with partner agencies, and providing technical recommendations to the Fire Chief.

Establishing this position would also provide a clearer organizational distinction between inspection-level responsibilities and management-level fire prevention responsibilities. Fire Inspectors would remain primarily responsible for inspections, plan review, code compliance, public education, and field-level enforcement, while the Deputy Fire Marshal would provide program oversight, complex technical review, coordination, management, and supervision.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 – Create a new position of Deputy Fire Marshal

- Under this option, the Department would add a new Deputy Fire Marshal position at the Fire Captain rank while retaining both existing Fire Inspector positions.
- The estimated annual salary and benefit cost associated with adding the position is between $228,415 to $247,872 based on the step system.

- This option would provide the greatest additional capacity within the Fire Prevention Division and would most closely align with the organizational structure identified in the LMS study. However, it would also result in the greatest ongoing fiscal impact.

Option 2 – Reclassify One Existing Fire Inspector Position to Deputy Fire Marshal

- Under this option, one of the Department's existing Fire Inspector positions would be reclassified to a Deputy Fire Marshal position at the Captain rank.
- The Deputy Fire Marshal salary would be equal to the Department's current Captain rank.
- The estimated cost associated with the reclassification is $22,574, representing the difference in salary and benefits between the existing Fire Inspector position and the proposed Deputy Fire Marshal position.

Adding a new Deputy Fire Marshal position while retaining both Fire Inspectors would provide greater capacity and more closely align with the organizational model identified in the LMS study. However, staff recognizes the importance of balancing operational needs with the Department's fiscal responsibilities and is recommending Option 2 at this time.

Reclassifying an existing position provides the Department with the needed middle-management and technical expertise while avoiding the substantially greater ongoing expense associated with adding another full-time position. This approach is anticipated to result in annual cost avoidance of at least $205,841 compared with Option 1.

Staff will re-evaluate this organizational structure 12 months after the Deputy Fire Marshal position is filled. This will provide sufficient time to evaluate workload, inspection capacity, development activity, wildfire-prevention responsibilities, and the overall effectiveness of the revised Fire Prevention Bureau structure.

It is anticipated that the Deputy Fire Marshal position would be filled through an internal competitive testing process.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Recommended Option 2 – Reclassification
Reclassifying one existing Fire Inspector position to Deputy Fire Marshal at the Captain rank is estimated to increase annual salary and benefit costs by $22,574. This amount is the difference between the current Fire Inspector position and the Captain-rank position. No new position would be added. The Fire Prevention Bureau would remain at three full-time positions: one Deputy Fire Marshal, one Fire Inspector, and one Wildfire Prevention Coordinator.

The FY 2026-27 adopted budget does not include funding for this reclassification. However, the cost can be absorbed within the current budget through salary savings from vacant positions. If the position is filled on or about January 1, 2027, the prorated cost for the remainder of FY 2026-27 is estimated at $11,287. The full annual cost would be included in the FY 2027-28 budget and in future years. As an unrepresented position, the Deputy Fire Marshal would be subject to future salary and benefit adjustments approved by the Board.

Option 1 – New Position
Adding a new Deputy Fire Marshal position while keeping both Fire Inspector positions would cost an estimated $228,415 to $247,872 per year in salary and benefits, depending on step placement. Bureau staffing would increase to four positions.

Comparison
Compared with Option 1, the recommended reclassification avoids approximately $205,841 to $225,298 in ongoing annual costs.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment #1 - Local Motion Solutions
Attachment #2 - Deputy Fire Marshal Job Description
Attachment #3 - Resolution 26-10