

Below is the finding of the audit done by the Stanislaus Civil Grand Jury (SCCGJ) on 14 fire districts in Stanislaus County. Below each finding/recommendation is the response from the Westport Fire Protection board of directors.

*F1. Few districts are in full compliance with state laws in transparency, accountability, and governance.* The Westport Fire board of Directors agrees with the finding.

*F2. Many board members are not adequately prepared to assume office. Stanislaus County lacks a standardized governance training program.*  
The Westport Fire board of directors agrees with the finding. It would be beneficial for all districts if Stanislaus County could provide this training. This is something that could be done on election years and offered on a few different dates.

*F3. Most districts board members are appointed by the SCBOS.*  
The Westport Fire board of directors partially agrees with the finding. While some board members of been appointed other have been voted in. In the past five years it has become increasing harder to replace outgoing directors. There has been no one filing to run and once the outgoing director(s) term is done, the board is left with seeking a replacement. Current board members then reach out multiple times to residents asking for patronization. When someone is interested, the Westport fire directors ask the SCOBOS to appoint the person. The directors would prefer an election takes place.

*F4. The SCCGJ observed that some fire districts perceive that they are accountable to the SCBOS. Conversely the SCOBOS has no responsibility beyond appointment of board members.* The Westport Fire board of directors agrees with the finding. As a small fire district, assistance from the SCBOS on certain issues is appreciated.

*F5. Citizen participation is lacking at board meetings.* The Westport Fire board of directors agrees with the finding. As a volunteer organization it is becoming increasing harder to find volunteer Firefighters and board of directors. As of June of this year, a sign will be placed in front of the fire station announcing the board meeting 24 hours in advance of the meeting. Date and time will be listed.

*F6. Most board meetings are not welcoming to citizens.* The Westport Fire board of directors partially agrees with the finding. The Westport board of directors is always open to meeting with any community member. The board of directors is transparent with all district business. Agendas call for public comment. Seats will be available at all district meetings.

Res 8/14/18

*F7. Many of the district websites lack required information about governance and finances.* The Westport Fire board of directors agrees with the finding. The Westport Fire District does not currently have a web page. The district has had a web page in the past but found it too difficult to maintain. This is a continued cost and maintenance issue and more time is needed by the board to study this finding.

*F8. No apparent effort exists to increase citizen participation and involvement.* The Westport Fire board of directors disagrees partially with the finding. In 2016 Westport Fire sent out over 600 letters asking for volunteer Firefighters. Two residents showed interest. In the same year the Board of directors held several town hall meetings to discuss the fire service being provided. Two different town hall meetings were held with about 15 people attending each meeting. The district has tried and will continue to reach out to its community.

*F9. The fire districts spend \$26 million yearly with little public scrutiny.* The Westport Fire board of directors agrees with the finding. The operating budget for fiscal year 18/19 is \$275,000.00 for the Westport Fire District.

*F10. While the SCCGJ focused its investigation on independent special fire districts, our findings and recommendations should be of interest to all special districts in Stanislaus County.* The Westport Fire board of directors agrees with the finding. The Westport Board is open to any ways it can improve its service and transparency.

Below are the recommendations made by the SCCGJ for

*R1. All Stanislaus County fire districts boards should adhere to California law. All districts should have a written manual of generally accepted governance policies and procedures. The manual should include policies for nepotism, credit card control, and check signing.* The Westport Fire board of directors agrees with the findings. The district will have a manual in place by December 2018.

*R2. All fire districts should establish a training requirement for board members in addition to that required by law. The curriculum shall include at least good governance, parliamentary procedure, Brown Act, nepotism, and conflict of interest.* The Westport Fire board of directors agrees with finding. It would be beneficial if the SCBOS could provide this training to all special districts within the county. Westport Fire board of director's manual will cover much of this material.

*R3. Certificates of ethics training and Financial disclosure from 700 must be on file in each fire district office for five years and at the Stanislaus County Elections office.* The Westport Fire board of directors agrees with the finding. Form 700 are currently kept on file at the Westport Fire station. The board of directors will complete Ethics training by December 2018. Documentation will be kept at the station and available at all times.

*R4. Fire districts are to ensure that meetings times and locations are posted consistently and accurately on district websites and with LAFCO.* The Westport Fire board of directors partially agrees. While the Westport Fire District does not have a web page, all meetings are posted 72 hours in advance with accurate information. Meeting time and place has been provided to LAFCO.

*R5. The fire district and the community at large would benefit if the SCBOS would exert oversight of governance training.* The Westport Fire board of directors agrees with the findings. A training provided by the SCBOS for new board members would be a good start.

*R6. The SCBOS should advise the forty-two specials districts in Stanislaus County to obtain a copy of this report from the SCCGJ website for informational purposes.* The Westport Fire board of directors partially agrees with the finding. The board of directors respects the input from the SCCGJ and will work on the suggestions provided. The board is always open to ways to improve and keep the trust of the community.

*R7. All fire district boards must comply immediately with the requirements for meeting notices, posting of meeting agendas, publishing of minutes and financial statements as required by California law.* The Westport Fire board of directors agree with the finding.

*R8. Website should be effectively maintained to abide by California law. The priority of websites should be to provide information and transparency about governance and finances. Current and prior agendas, minutes, financial statements, and audits should be posted.* The Westport Fire board of directors agree with the finding. If the board of directors moves to start a web page, all information will be kept current.

*R9. Board meeting locations and times should be boldly identified. Signage visible from the street should announce meeting dates and times. Signage should be in place to direct citizens to the meeting room. Meeting rooms should be well-lighted, provide adequate seating, and free of exhaust fumes.* The Westport Fire board of agrees with the finding. As of June a sign has been placed out front of the fire station listing board meeting date and time. This sign is placed 24 hours in advance of the board meeting. Seats will be provided. The meeting does take place inside the fire station and from time to time exhaust fumes maybe present.

*R10. Board meeting structure should routinely reflect the basic elements of accepted rules of order while conducting the people's business. They should start on time with a gavel or announcement. Board members and officers should be identified by roll call. Names of board members should be visible. Topics and guest speakers should be clearly identified, and sidebars eliminated.* The Westport Fire board of directors agree with the finding.

*R11. The district should utilize local print media to seek candidates for the boards of directors.* The Westport Fire board of directors partially agrees with the finding. The use of print media has a cost and may not be the most effective way to reach our community. More time is needed to study this topic.

The Westport Fire board of Directors appreciates the work done by SCCGJ. As a board we are always open to ways we can improve our service to our community. If there are any further needs please ask.

Sincerely,  
Ed Amador

President, Westport Fire Board of Directors

