

Sponsored Commentary

SFPUC Bureaucrats Think the City's Supply of Drinking Water Should Be Used To Fight Post-Earthquake Firestorms on San Francisco's West Side. ...

Open letter to:

- San Francisco Mayor London Breed;
- Hon. Garrett L. Wong, Presiding Judge, San Francisco Superior Court;
- Members of the San Francisco Fire Commission;
- Members of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission;
- Members of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors;
- Members of the Citizens' General Obligation Bond Oversight Committee;
- Editor, the Richmond Review and the Sunset Beacon;
- Editor, the San Francisco Chronicle

Editor, the San Francisco Examiner

In July 2019 the San Francisco Civil Grand Jury issued a report, "Act Now Before It Is Too Late: Ag-

gressively Expand and Enhance Our High-Pressure Emergency Firefighting Water Supply System."

The two most important conclusions of that report were that in order to avoid the destruction of major areas of the City by firestorms following the next great Bay Area earthquake: (1) the high-pressure hydrant system, first put into service in 1913, must be expanded to cover all San Francisco neighborhoods; and (2) time is of the essence.

The current guardian of the high-pressure hydrant system, the SF Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC), has published plans to build a system in the outer Richmond and outer Sunset districts that would use drinking water from the north basin of Sunset Reservoir as a primary source of water for this system, which would not be connected to the existing high-pressure hydrant system. Further,

it has been indicated that subsequent expansions into other currently unprotected neighborhoods, which might take place in the future, would also use drinking water from municipal reservoirs. This plan is in stark contrast to the long established use of the City's inexhaustible supply of seawater as the primary water source in the existing high-pressure hydrant system.

The SFPUC's own expert engineering consultant, Dr. Charles Scawthorn, the world's leading scholar of the modeling of the spread of fire following earthquakes in modern urban settings, has predicted that between 70 and 120 fires will occur citywide following a M7.9 earthquake, the same magnitude that struck in 1906, causing firestorms that destroyed the City.

Inasmuch as the SFFD has only 43 staffed fire engines stationed within the city limits, it is obvious that some of the predicted fires will burn

unchecked for an indeterminate period of time, and therefore form into conflagrations, particularly in our numerous wood-frame residential neighborhoods, before the SFFD can respond. The result will be that the volume of water that will eventually be required in order to bring these firestorms under control will be incalculably large, and only an inexhaustible water source, such as the Pacific Ocean, will suffice.

In recognition of these facts, 67 retired San Francisco Fire Department Chief Officers, Captains, Lieutenants and Firefighters, whose combined experience represents more than 2,000 years of SFFD service, have jointly issued a public statement (below) relative to the current plans of the SFPUC to use drinking water in an expanded high-pressure hydrant system.

.... But How Many SFPUC Bureaucrats Have Ever Fought a Fire? Here is What Common Sense and Firefighting Experts Tell Us:

As retired San Francisco Fire Department Chief Officers, Captains, Lieutenants, and Firefighters, we believe that it is our responsibility to emphatically state the following in the interest of public safety:

It is completely irrational to assume that drinking water from municipal reservoirs will be adequate to reliably supply a high-pressure, high-volume citywide hydrant system, like the Auxiliary Water Supply System, for fighting multiple simultaneous fires following a major Bay Area earthquake.

The Hetch-Hetchy drinking water system traverses 167 miles from the Sierras, crosses three major Bay Area earthquake faults, and then closely parallels the San Andreas Fault for 25 miles along the Peninsula, before reaching the City's three terminal reservoirs. To assume that it will remain completely intact following a M7.9 earthquake of unknowable epicenter or duration is a matter of mere conjecture. The reliability of the water supplied to the SFFD to fight post-earthquake fires cannot be left to chance. Given the realities of fighting urban conflagrations, implementation of the SFPUC's misguided "PEFWS" (drinking water) plan may very well lead to the destruction by fire of entire San Francisco neighborhoods.

Based on our combined 2,000 years of professional firefighting experience, we must clearly state that the only practical solution for supplying a citywide high-pressure hydrant system, when a multitude of post earthquake fires must be fought, is to use the inexhaustible supply of saltwater that is readily available on three sides of the City. This will require the construction of new high-pressure saltwater pump stations at the northern end of Ocean Beach and at Hunters Point. Following a major earthquake it will be essential to have independent and unlimited water sources for firefighting available in all four quadrants of the City. Therefore, an additional high-pressure pump station at Lake Merced, which contains over one billion gallons of non-potable water, will complete the water supply requirements for an interconnected citywide expansion of the existing high-pressure hydrant system into all San Francisco neighborhoods.

These new pump stations are the only means by which an inexhaustible water supply can be provided to the expanded hydrant system called for by the Civil Grand

Jury's 2019 report. Moreover, this will leave the municipal water supply in the City's reservoirs, where it must be maintained, available for the critically important drinking and sanitation needs of the City's residents following a major earthquake.

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Harold Gamble, Deputy Chief, SFFD, retired

Frank Cardinale, Assistant Deputy Chief, SFFD, retired

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Thomas W. Doudiet, Assistant Deputy Chief, SFFD, retired

Mark Kearney, Assistant Deputy Chief, SFFD, retired

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John S. Peoples, Division Chief, SFFD, retired

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Ted Corporandy, Battalion Chief, SFFD, retired

Paul Crawford, Battalion Chief, SFFD, retired

Michael Cunnie, Battalion Chief, SFFD, retired

Franklin H. Dunn, Battalion Chief, SFFD, retired

Lawrence Giovacchini, Battalion Chief, SFFD, retired

Elliott Kamler, Battalion Chief, SFFD, retired

James Lambrechts, Battalion Chief, SFFD, retired

Michael McKinley, Battalion Chief, SFFD, retired

Gary Leal, Battalion Chief, SFFD, retired
John A. Murphy, Battalion Chief, SFFD, retired

Jack Norton, Battalion Chief, SFFD, retired

Michael Ryan, Battalion Chief, SFFD, retired

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Mario Ballard, Captain, SFFD, retired

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James Connors, Captain, SFFD, retired

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Al Markel, Firefighter, SFFD, retired

Dennis Martino, Firefighter, SFFD, retired

Steve O'Neill, Firefighter, SFFD, retired

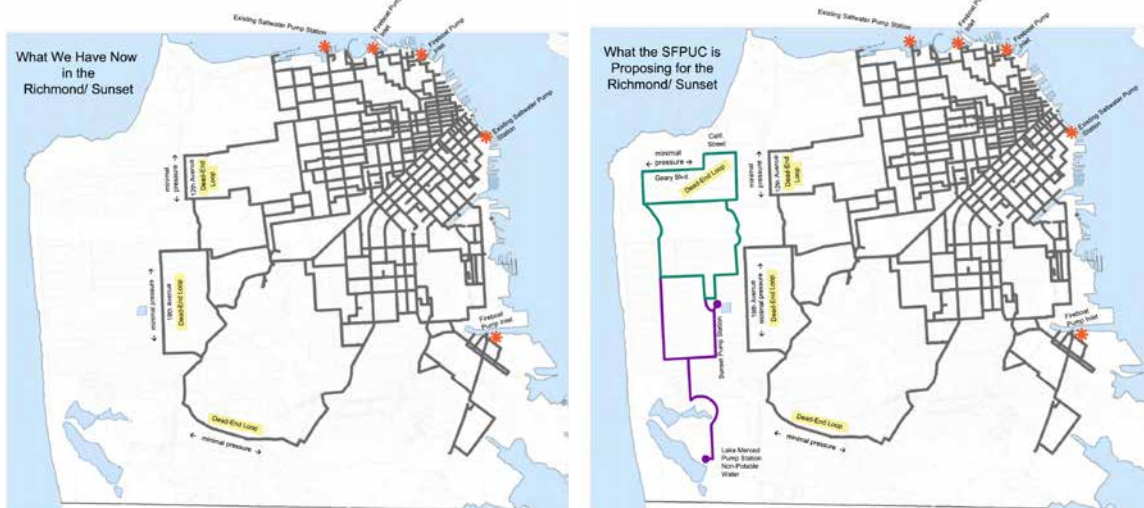
John B. Skance, Firefighter, SFFD, retired

W. Urie Walsh, Firefighter, SFFD, retired.

Paid for by retired firefighters.

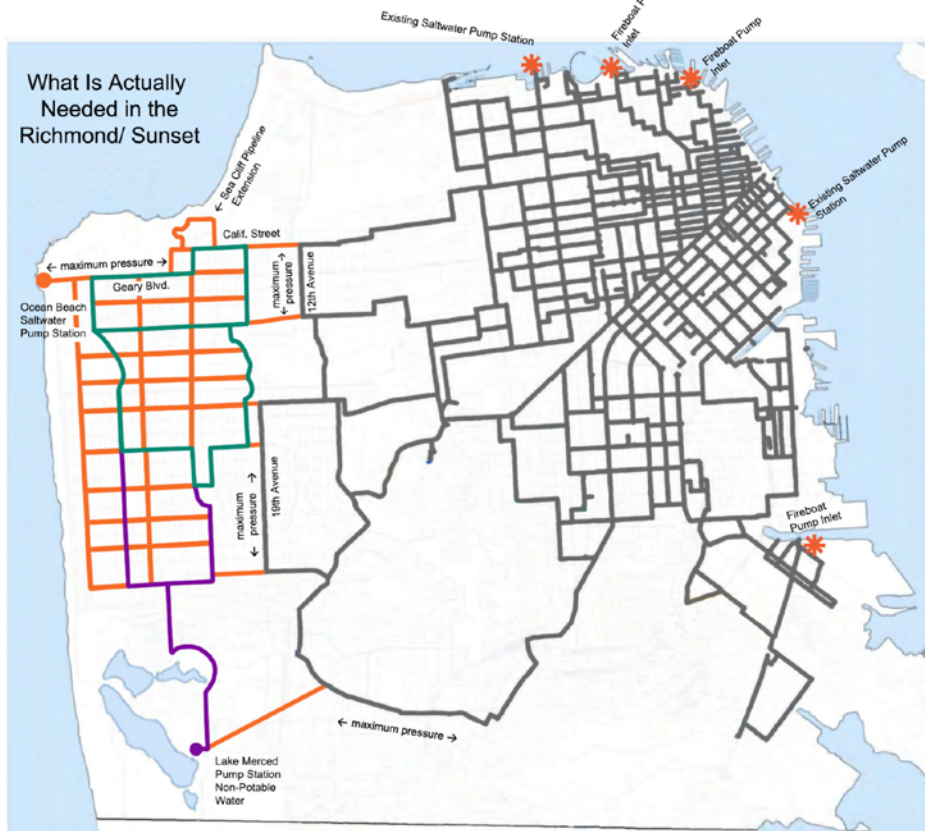
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Supervisors Connie Chan (Richmond District) and Catherine Stefani (Sea Cliff): 'We Deserve Adequate Fire Protection!'



Currently the high pressure hydrant system terminates in "dead-end loops" at 12th Avenue in the Richmond and 19th Avenue in the Sunset, approximately five miles from the pump stations on the Eastern waterfront. A "dead-end loop" is a firefighting parlance for a terminal line of hydrants farthest from the source of water. Following an earthquake, with dozens of hydrants opened to fight fires in the eastern half of the City, there will be no usable pressure left in the mains to fight fires in the extreme western portion of the City.

The SFPUC's present proposal for a high-pressure hydrant system in the outer Richmond and outer Sunset leaves the existing "dead-end" loops at 12th Avenue and 19th Avenue unaddressed and creates an additional "dead-end loop" at the northern end of the Richmond, along Geary Blvd. and California Street. Further, there are no plans to put hydrants in Sea Cliff. The number of hydrants that will be opened to fight post-earthquake fires in the Sunset, between the pump stations and the northern Richmond, will further reduce the pressure available to fight fires in the northern Richmond and Sea Cliff, making post-earthquake firefighting in these areas nearly impossible.



The Civil Grand Jury has concluded that the high-pressure hydrant system must be expanded into all San Francisco neighborhoods, and this has been endorsed by a Board of Supervisors' "resolution of urgency". Common sense dictates that any further expansion of the system must be based on a comprehensive and integrated plan that eliminates "dead-end loops", establishes pump stations accessing unlimited water sources of non-potable water for each hydrant in the City, and interconnects the new mains and hydrants with the existing system. The orange lines denote necessary additional lines of hydrants (not currently in the SFPUC's plan) as well as required links between new and existing high-pressure hydrant pipelines. Isolated neighborhood-by-neighborhood mini-projects, as proposed by the SFPUC, are not a rational approach when the need for a high-pressure hydrant system has clearly been recognized as City policy. Sixty-eight retired SFPD Chiefs, Captains, Lieutenants and Firefighters, representing a combined 2,000 years of firefighting experience, have jointly stated that each quadrant of the City must have an independent unlimited source of water to fight post-earthquake fires. This is why Richmond and Sea Cliff residents must insist that a saltwater pump station be built at the north end of Ocean Beach, to ensure these neighborhoods have adequate protection from post-earthquake fires.

Paid for by concerned western neighborhood residents. Graphics by Rona Hung.