

## Local news

# SV asks county board to back annexation

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SCOTTS VALLEY — Talk about not taking no for an answer.

Going over the heads of Santa Cruz school trustees, the Scotts Valley school district has asked the county Board of Education for a recommendation on its proposed annexation of the Cowell property on Graham Hill Road.

The property — which Scotts Valley doesn't own yet but wants to use for a school complex — is now in the Santa Cruz district. But so far Santa Cruz has not indicated a willingness to turn it over.

In a Sept. 19 letter, Scotts Valley Superintendent Andre LaCouture asked the county Board of Education to respond in 60 days with a report and its recommendation. That is the deadline set by the state Education Code.

"A timely response is critical," LaCouture wrote.

This is the first time the county board has been asked to issue a recommendation on a school district annexation, according to Diane Siri, county school superintendent.

## LaCouture said he was meeting with consultants today to talk about the feasibility of the fast-track timeline.

Santa Cruz school trustees said they wanted to wait until an environmental impact report is ready — a preliminary one is due Oct. 14 and the final one Jan. 17 — and see if plans for the building project become more firm.

The county Board of Education has dealt with issues of school district unification and secession, where a detailed feasibility study is required, but this is different, she said.

"We don't have to do a feasibility study," Siri said, but the board makes recommendations, which are not binding. The deadline would be Nov. 21, based on when the letter arrived, she said.

Siri called the state Education Department for guidance, but officials offered little help.

"They didn't have any (similar) reports," Siri said.

Jeff Almquist, a lawyer who is a member of the county Board of Education, said LaCouture's letter would be discussed when the board meets Oct. 14.

He said it appeared to him that, according to the Education Code, when a district buys land contiguous to its boundaries, it automatically becomes part of the district. But the county board must issue a report with recommendations first.

"To do a report, we have to do fact-finding," he said, suggesting that a public hearing could be held to gather information.

Almquist expressed concern about the way Scotts Valley trustees have

fast-tracked the building proposal, with a high school to open in September 1998, despite their consultant's request for more time and "an incredible array of opposition." In addition to the high school, the complex is to include a middle school, an elementary school and administrative offices.

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Local water agencies are worried about contamination of their supplies by the development of a site that is part of their watershed. Residents in the San Lorenzo Valley and Santa Cruz also are opposed to the school project at that site, although it is supported by many Scotts Valley residents.

Almquist, a Felton resident who practices law in Scotts Valley, was elected to the county Board of Supervisors in March and will take that seat in January, succeeding Fred Keeley.

Almquist's wife, Julie, teaches in the San Lorenzo Valley school district, where trustees have expressed concern about losing students to the new Scotts Valley complex.