

Aptos fire board considers Day Valley annexation plan

Renewed attempts to annex the Day Valley area may be made shortly by the Aptos Fire Protection District.

Following a presentation Tuesday night by Duane Smith, executive director of the county Local Agency Formation Commission, Fire Chief Richard Chinn was ordered to prepare a plan for expanding the district's fire service into the rapidly developing areas in Day Valley, and also along Redwood Drive, north of Cathedral Drive.

Smith told the fire board that the areas should be annexed to the fire district.

The Day Valley area, Smith said, now has \$17 million in assessed valuation, and the upper Redwood Drive area, \$480,000.

Right now, the area is being served by the California Division of Forestry under a county contract. But in reality, Aptos firemen routinely respond to fire alarms in the outlying areas, arriving long before trucks from the forestry station in Corralitos.

Chinn said the district could eventually build a new fire station and man it with one pumper in the Day Valley area. Volunteers

could be recruited in the remote Redwood Drive area, with the fire department building a garage there and stationing a small pumper on top of the hill.

Volunteers would respond to fires in the Redwood Drive area first, backed up by paid firemen from Aptos as soon as possible.

Residents in those areas now receive service from the district without paying taxes to the district. Why should they join the district and pay the higher property taxes that go with it? commissioners asked Smith and Chinn.

"It seems appropriate to me to try to annex the area," said Smith. "If residents refuse, they would be on notice that you would not respond to fires there until the California Division of Forestry gets there."

Now, Chinn said, the forestry unit routinely requests the department to respond at the same time as forestry trucks are being dispatched from Corralitos.

The district plan would benefit Redwood Drive residents. At present, it takes an Aptos fire truck 20 minutes to reach the end of Redwood Drive — and far longer for a

Division of Forestry truck. Volunteers could be on the scene in five minutes or less.

"You'll have a holding action until the balance of the department arrives," said Chinn.

Commission Chairman Richard Duchscher said the division of forestry is concerned that its tax base for the structural fire protection it offers the county is being eroded by district annexations.

"CDF says they won't be able to offer Class A service," said Duchscher.

"I don't think they are now," retorted Smith.

Director Melvin Fields was worried that the annexation would impose additional financial burdens on property owners in existing districts.

"If it will cost more to people in the district, you'll have a battle."

Duchscher said the opposite was the case. "It is costing us money now. CDF is not equipped to fight structure fires so they call us."

Chinn said the assessed valuation in the Day Valley area will support a third station and additional manpower and equipment.

And the district could accumulate several years' revenue before building a station there.

"Okay," said Fields, "but the people here are fed up with paying new taxes."

Smith said that if the district pursues the annexation idea, LAFCO would have to grant permission. Public hearings would have to be held by the fire district. If 50 per cent of the registered voters protest, the annexation is dead.

If either 25 per cent of the registered voters or 25 per cent of the landowners protest, the issue goes to an election.

Smith urged a publicity campaign to sell the district's program and avoid an election.