

Fire districts take big step toward merger

By BOB SMITH

It took only a couple of minutes and almost no discussion last week for the La Selva Beach Fire Protection Board directors to decide they were interested in merging their fire department with the Aptos district.

The directors listened to a

presentation by La Selva Chief Al Kinslow and Aptos Fire Chief Al Forbes on their study of the feasibility of either merging the two departments entirely or forming a joint powers agency that would operate a combined fire department.

A meeting between the Aptos

and La Selva boards was set for last night.

The difference in the two approaches is that a consolidation is almost irreversible — the result is the legal formation of a new district and the dissolution of the two old districts.

A joint powers agency (JPA) is created by a contract between two governmental agencies and can be dissolved whenever the two parent agencies agree to do so.

A JPA was tried by the Live Oak and Soquel fire districts before they finally merged into the Central Santa Cruz County Fire Protection District.

The results in either case, if the two boards follow the recommendations of their chief officers, would be the same: The combined fire departments would operate three fire stations — the two Aptos stations and the La Selva station — and man them 24 hours a day.

The plan worked out by the fire chiefs calls for the hiring of seven new firefighters to help man the La Selva Beach station.

The move will give La Selva residents faster response to emergencies in their community, and the paramedic-level emergency medical service that has been available to Aptos residents for a decade.

The La Selva Beach surf rescue team will continue in existence and will provide coverage to both districts.

Forbes and Kinslow are proposing that the areas between the two present districts on the ocean side of the freeway be annexed to the La Selva Beach district. Firefighters from the La Selva station would have the primary responsibility for fires in all of the present La Selva district, the annexed area between the two districts and the eastern portion of the Aptos Seascapes area.

The chiefs are recommending that La Selva cancel its contract to provide fire protection in the northern portion Larkin Valley and drop its proposed annexation of the area.

Aptos would also suspend its plans to annex the Day Valley area to its district.

Kinslow told the La Selva board members "a consolidation or joint powers agency does not necessarily save money but it certainly uses the available money to the utmost value.

"Aptos is now financially able to hire three new firefighters.

"La Selva Beach is now able to hire one firefighter.

"But the JPA will be able to hire seven new employees.

"That is using our money the way it was intended," Kinslow added.

"I can't say that I'm all for a consolidation," the La Selva Beach chief said at the Feb. 19 meeting. "If you go into a JPA, it is like living together to see if you want to get married.

"You can always consolidate later, and with a JPA, if you want to get out of it, you can."

La Selva board members said that they had had no negative reaction to the proposal.

"I canvassed my neighborhood and spoke to the Board of

Directors of the Las Barrancas (subdivision)," Joanne Dlott, La Selva director, said.

"All were really positive," she said.

"I can't find anyone opposed," director Roy Johnston added.

The board unanimously adopted a motion by director Bill Connell that "we inform Aptos that we approve of the JPA concept and that we sit down with them to work out the details."

"I just hope it works out as beautifully as it is presented to us," he added.

REFERENCE

Aptos, California 95022

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