

PV Fire District delays decision on contract with city, forestry

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FREEDOM — Pajaro Valley Fire District directors decided Wednesday to hold another meeting before deciding whether to contract out services to the state Department of Forestry and city of Watsonville.

"I'd like more time to digest this," Director Grant Estrada said of a 32-page report on the proposed contract, which calls for closure of Pajaro Valley's main station at Freedom and Airport boulevards.

The other four directors agreed to the delay, and set a special meeting for July 8 at 7 p.m. at the main station.

Wednesday's meeting was the second time directors delayed a decision. At their May meeting, they asked for more information. That request prompted the 32-page report prepared by Pajaro Valley Chief Ben Evans, who worked with city and Forestry officials.

The report gives detail of the contract proposal outlined in a brief report last month. It includes procedural and staffing information.

The proposal, endorsed by chiefs of all three agencies, calls for:

- Closure of the Pajaro Valley Station No. 1, at Freedom and

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Airport, with shifting of some staff to Watsonville's Station No. 2, at the airport.

- No current Pajaro Valley firefighters would lose their jobs; they would either be picked up by the city or Forestry.

- Pajaro Valley Station No. 2, on Casserly Road, would remain open, but that station would eventually close when a new station to serve the Freedom-Salsipuedes area is built.

- The chiefs are recommending a contract, rather than a consolidation or dissolution of the Pajaro Valley District. Although there would be no trucks or staff with the Pajaro Valley name, directors would still meet periodically and

have to the power to cancel the contract.

Director Eric Streig said he wants to make sure that the county or the Local Agency Formation Commission would not take steps to dissolve the Pajaro Valley district.

Watsonville Fire Chief Gary Smith said the county and LAFCO "wouldn't even want to look at it if things are going well."

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Dan Turner, division chief for the Department of Forestry, said it would take an extraordinary effort by the county to dissolve the issue.

The Local Agency Formation Commission, which oversees annexations and mergers, has urged the Pajaro District to move toward elimination of duplicative services.

Director Randy Craven asked CDF's Turner, "Why would CDF want to take on this problem child," referring to the Pajaro Valley district's history of tight budgets.

Turner said it's the mission of CDF to be amenable to contracting with other agencies. Such contracts "cannot cost us money," Turner said.