

Central fire station won't close

By MAY WONG

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CAPITOLA — Bowing to opposition from residents and firefighters, board members of the Central Fire Protection District voted Tuesday keep the Thurber Lane fire station in operation while firefighters attend paramedic training during the next seven months.

In a 5-2 vote, the board authorized \$11,200 in overtime expenses needed to staff the fire station while the firefighters normally on duty attend training at a facility near Dominican Hospital.

The board — with the exceptions of Board Chair Tony Carreira and member Bob Allen — rejected a controversial proposal that the station be closed during 17 11-hour shifts between this month and Feb-

ruary.

Opponents of that proposal said the issue was not so much whether the district could afford to staff the station, but whether it could afford *not to*.

"We have \$2 million (reserved for overtime expenses) sitting in the bank, and we want to shut down 25 percent of our services? That ludicrous!" said board member Ron Pederson. "That's what we're here for — fire protection."

The Thurber Lane station, one of four stations in the Central fire district, serves approximately 10,000 people in a 6 square-mile area, including the Santa Cruz Gardens neighborhood and Dominican Hospital. The station, which is normally staffed by a captain and two firefighters around the clock, is also called upon frequently to serve

as backup for other stations.

A dozen people spoke Tuesday against the part-time closure.

"It could be the difference between my life and my death, or my neighbors'," said Jeffrey Ellis, a resident of the Santa Cruz Gardens neighborhood.

"I can't believe we're willy-nillying over \$11,000 for the backup of my husband," said Karen Achen, wife of a Central firefighter. "If anything happened to my husband, then you're going to have a lot more than \$11,000 to worry about."

Central Fire Chief Mark Tranchina earlier told board members there was no other way to staff the station without the overtime expenditures or overhauling employees' working schedules. After the board's vote, he said he was pleased with the decision.