

SANTA CRUZ SENTINAL
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Aptos Fire Directors Hear Scary Options, Pass Budget

The Aptos Fire District Board of Directors approved a preliminary 1978-79 budget in record time and without debate Tuesday night following a presentation on the possible effects of the Jarvis-Gann (Proposition 13) property tax measure set for the June 6 ballot.

"We might as well approve it, but there's no use talking about it," Chairman Dick Duchscher commented as the board unanimously approved the million dollar budget prepared by Chief Richard Chinn.

The action followed a presentation by county Auditor Art Merrill and Tax Collector William Murphy as to what the district could expect if either Jarvis-Gann or the Behr Amendment (Proposition 8) are approved by the voters.

Merrill, making his annual budget-time appearance before the fire board, said fire districts such as Aptos would be hit hardest by passage of Jarvis-Gann because they are 100 percent funded by property tax.

Passage of that measure, he said, would roll back property assessments to the 1975-76 level and limit the tax rate to 1 percent of the market value.

In terms of revenue, Merrill said, that would mean a 65 percent cut for the Aptos Fire Department, the same amount by which the entire levy collected will be reduced.

The big question, he explained, is how the revenue collected by the county will be distributed to the cities, school districts and fire protection areas.

He outlined three possible

alternatives: The state legislature could determine that the share percentage will be as usual, it could set priorities for funding with fire and police departments at the top of the list, or the legislature "may feel it's too hot to handle and pass the decision down to the county boards of supervisors."

Whatever the implementation if Jarvis-Gann passes, Merrill said, it is likely to be tied up in courts. "Riverside County is ready to file suit immediately if it passes."

In that event, Merrill explained, the courts might have to rule on some kind of interim funding share. The other ballot measure, Proposition 8, he said, would reduce the property tax on owner-occupied homes by 30 percent.

And, whereas that would cut into the amount of tax collected, a provision for a tax rate on new construction would aid fire districts in recouping some of the loss.

"Under the Behr Amendment you could be reasonably sure you'd have money to operate with because of the new construction in your area," Murphy added.

The real problem now, Merrill said, is figuring out what to do next because of the variety of situations that could arise from both, or neither, of the ballot measures passing.

If both pass, he said, Jarvis-

Gann will take precedence. If neither passes, it will be business as usual, he said.

Chinn presented the fire board with an outline of measures that could be taken if Jarvis-Gann passes.

Included in the steps would be closing one of the two stations and paring staff down to a part-time chief and six firemen — two per shift. Expected

revenue, Chinn reported, would be some \$300,000, one-third of the amount included in the preliminary budget approved by the board.

Chinn also told the board that the district's paramedic service began Monday (see story on Page 1), but directors noted that service probably would be curtailed with passage of Jarvis-Gann.