

La Selva fire annexation: Levy reconsiders and supports fire boards

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Santa Cruz County Supervisor Robley Levy has reversed her position on a critical annexation to the La Selva Fire District.

Levy sent a letter Friday to the Local Agency Formation Commission, saying that she had reconsidered her opinion and would now vote for the annexation requested by the La Selva district.

The commission will meet at 9:30 a.m. Wednesday morning to discuss the La Selva annexation request.

The annexation of the area between the Aptos and La Selva fire districts on the ocean side of the freeway, is a key element in the plan to eventually merge the two districts.

La Selva is also asking for permission to annex the NBC ranch and surrounding property north of the freeway where rural residential subdivisions have either already been

approved or are now pending before the County Planning Commission.

Levy, who was returning from New York today after attending to family business there, had shocked local fire officials last month by backing a proposal from County Supervisor Gary Patton, who is also a member of LAFCO, to redraw the annexation boundaries.

Patton's map revision would have created a narrow strip of land along Highway 1 as the only link between the fire districts — something that the fire districts later said is unacceptable to them and would effectively kill the proposed merger. Levy supported Patton's recommendations at the time.

Since then, she said she's met with Aptos and La Selva fire board members. "The substance of those discussions has led me to support the (LAFCO) executive director's original recommendation for the La Selva annexation," she said. LAFCO executive director Pat McCormick had recommended

LAFCO approval of the La Selva annexation as proposed.

The principal reason given by Levy for supporting the Patton proposal was the perceived impact of the annexation on the agricultural land in the annexation area.

Higher fees charged by the La Selva fire district, she intimated, might prompt the development of the presently vacant land.

"Since that time, however, the county has learned that because of the state increases in cost, we will be required to consider service charges in the CDF area as well.

"It is my understanding," she added, "that the order of magnitude will not differ greatly from those currently assessed by the La Selva Fire District. Because there would not be a substantial difference in assessment either within or without the fire district, this objection to the annexation is no longer valid."

Levy said she was concerned about emergency response to incidents in the area, noting that it takes 3½ minutes for Aptos-La Selva to reach an emergency in the area, while the California Department of Forestry, operating out of the Corralitos station, takes 12 minutes.

She also reminded the other LAFCO commissioners that LAFCO has been urging the consolidation of the numerous fire districts in Santa Cruz County since it commissioned a 1973 report called the Sierra report. "Although the alternative annexation would provide the necessary legal precondition for any future consolidation . . . LAFCO should acknowledge that satisfying the legal necessity is not sufficient in itself but also must recognize that the willingness of the involved agencies to proceed in moving forward towards ever closer coordination and cooperation and possible consolidation is just as important a precondition."