

# Capitola, Central merger of fire service approved

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Consolidation of the Capitola and Central Fire protection districts was approved by the Santa Cruz Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) this morning.

Both fire district boards, both fire chiefs, and the LAFCO consultant who studied the issue, recommended consolidation.

The only governmental body opposed was the Capitola City Council; some council members feared Capitola would lose local control.

However, in a recent letter to

LAFCO, Capitola city officials said they will be cooperative.

Under the consolidation, the Capitola Village fire station will be kept active, operating under the direction of the Central Fire Protection District, which now operates three other fire stations.

Ron Pederson, a director of the Central Fire Protection District board, said he was "ecstatic" about the consolidation which has been debated since the 1970s.

"This is going to be good for the citizens of Capitola, good for the firefighters — good for fire protection in Santa Cruz County," he said.

Patrick McCormick, executive director of LAFCO, has said previously there may even be a decrease in fire insurance premiums for Capitola property owners because the Central Fire Protection District has a better fire-insurance rating than the Capitola district.

McCormick predicts an annual saving of five to 10 percent for homeowners, with some businesses benefitting from an even larger saving.

Among other things, Central Fire will expand the junior fire marshal program in elementary schools into the Capitola area.