

# *Aptos Fire District expansion recommended in plan*

Dissolving the La Selva Beach Fire Protection District and expanding the Aptos Fire Protection District are recommended in a plan for improving fire protection in Santa Cruz County.

The fire protection improvement program and long-range plan for Santa Cruz County, prepared by The Sierra Group of San Francisco, will be considered in a public hearing at 2 p.m. June 10 by the Board of Supervisors.

An earlier Sierra Group fire program met with strong criticism and was redrafted at the request of the board. Sierra Group hired Bryce Connick, retired Watsonville fire chief, to redraft the plan.

"I think we got a pretty good report this time," Mike Hanford of the county administrative office said.

He admitted the recommendations were quite similar to those in the previous plan, but said they were presented more logically and there was more supporting data.

Some opposition is expected, Hanford said.

"I've heard some districts are unhappy, but nothing official," he added.

The report also recommends dissolution of the Davenport, Branciforte and Zayante Fire Protection Districts. Davenport would be served by a county service area for minimum fire protection. The Branciforte district would be annexed to the Live Oak and the Scotts Valley Fire Protection Districts. Zayante would be split among neighboring districts.

These recommendations are expected to be controversial.

Several alternative solutions to fire protection problems in Santa Cruz County are presented in the report. The recommended alternative is consolidation of the 19 separate fire fighting jurisdictions into eight.

Recommending dissolution of the La Selva Beach Volunteer Fire Department, the report points out daytime response to fires is poor because of the residential nature

of the service area.

"Fire apparatus is old," the report continues. "The station, though new, is crowded and not of a good functional design."

It suggests that the La Selva District and the Day Valley area and County Service area No. 5 along with adjacent and intervening territory, should be annexed to the Aptos Fire protection district. The areas have the same kind of land use characteristics and fire problems, it is noted, and "lend themselves to the formation of a single, financially supportable fire protection jurisdiction."

Another suggestion of prime interest in the mid-county area is the merger of the Capitola, Live Oak and Soquel Fire Protection Districts. It is suggested that the Santa Cruz City Fire Department service area could be included in the same merger. However, a little later on in

the report, it is suggested that the merger of the Aptos district with Capitola, Live Oak and Soquel is "ultimately desirable."

Recommending the Capitola-Live Oak-Soquel merger, the report points out the territory is "composed of homogenous land uses and development densities." One exception is noted: the canyon and ridge top area of the Soquel Fire Protection District.

Other goals recommended in the fire protection program include:

--Establish a Fire Protection Advisory Group, representing fire administrators, local agency governing bodies and the public, to coordinate the development and implementation of the fire protection plan.

--Establish three basic levels of structural fire

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protection service in the county. Service Level III, the highest level, is recommended for Santa Cruz, Watsonville, Live Oak, Capitola, Soquel Aptos, La Selva Beach and County Service Area No. 4. It calls for five-minute fire response time by at least 15 firefighters and capacity to confine a serious fire to the building or origin.

--Arrange for response to all fire alarms by the nearest fire company, regardless of fire district boundaries. It is noted that there are several instances where the fastest possible fire response is from the station of another district.

"The most vivid example is the location of the northernly Aptos Fire Protection District station just a few hundred feet east of the Soquel Fire Protection District boundary," the Sierra Group report said. "Arrangements should be made for an Aptos response to that territory which is closer to the Aptos station than to the Soquel station."

--Consolidate all emergency communications service in Santa Cruz County into a public safety communications system which incorporates the "911" concept. The state requires all public safety agencies to respond when the number "911" is dialed. However, the requirement won't go into effect until the state makes the money available for the switchover, which is hasn't done yet.

--Plan for joint fire department operations by the various districts. This goal would be carried out by the proposed Fire Protection Advisory Group.

--Plan and develop a comprehensive practical program of training for fire fighters and fire officers in the county. The Fire Protection Advisory Group would arrange such a program in cooperation with the Cabrillo Community College District.

Fire fighting and control skills are reported to vary from satisfactory to poor in the fire agencies in the county.

--Centralize personnel services for all fire department agencies in the county under the Santa Cruz County personnel department. Develop standard job classifications, descriptions, physical standards and qualifications. All agencies would have to agree to uniform job descriptions, position classifications and employment qualifications.

--Implement recommended boundary and political organization changes necessary to assure adequate financial support for each fire department.

--Establish a method of government for each fire protection jurisdiction most suited to needs of the service area.

It is recommended that the expanded Aptos Fire Protection District should continue to be governed by an elected five-member board of directors.

However, the program calls for the Board of Supervisors, acting through an advisory appointed fire commission of seven members, to govern the single fire district consisting of the Capitola, Live Oak and Soquel Fire Pro-

tection Districts.

"The prospects of continued annexations to the cities of Capitola and Santa Cruz and the vagueness of a future boundary between the two cities indicted the advisability of this option," the report declares. "As Santa Cruz annexes to the east, the fire district can be gradually ceded to the city in an orderly system of regression."

--Draw up and apply model building, fire prevention and general fire safety codes by Santa Cruz County and its cities and fire protection districts. The County Fire Marshal would be given the job of administering the state fire marshal's regulations in fire agencies lacking full-time trained fire personnel.

--Develop of master fire station location plan for Santa Cruz County. An additional station is recommended in the Corralitos area. Relocation of the Capitola station closer to the 41st Ave. shopping district is also recommended. The consultants propose it would be designed to house at least two pumpers and one ladder truck.

"The existing station is crowded and in a dangerous vehicular traffic situation," it is alleged. "The present location overlaps the response zone of the Soquel station."

--Develop a program of centralized procurement and distribution of supplies.

--Require that buildings creating potential fire problems beyond the capacity of the local fire department provide in-building fire protection.

--Improve water supplies throughout the structurally-developed areas of the county.

The job of carrying out the organizational and boundary changes, expected to be the most controversial recommendations in the plan, is dumped in the lap of the Local Agency Formation Commission.

Fourth on a list of tasks for LAFCO is the following: "Dissolve La Selva Beach Fire Protection District and expand the Aptos Fire Protection District."

Two measures are proposed to carry out this goal: annex the area from Monterey Bay Academy north and west to the Aptos district, and annex the north end of Larkin Valley and the Day Valley territory to the Aptos district.

LAFCO would bring about other recommended changes in government and administration of fire protection agencies by attaching conditions to the formation of and annexations to local agencies.

In a discussion of each of the county's fire districts, the Aptos Fire Department is given credit for rigid physical standards and maintaining a physical fitness program mandatory for all company grade personnel. However, it is noted that there is no fire prevention program in the district.

The La Selva Beach Fire Protection District, declare the consultants, has problems because of a weak water system and the uncertain daytime response of volunteer personnel. Volunteers are alerted by an outside siren. Daytime response is said to be five and nighttime averages 18. Training is conducted on a regular basis.