

Fire protection is too expensive in south county, said LAFC official

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SANTA CRUZ — South county fire protection could be delivered cheaper and better, according to Pat McCormick, Local Agency Formation Commission executive director.

At a LAFC meeting at 9:30 Wednesday morning in the Board of Supervisors chamber, McCormick will unveil three different proposals, any one of which, he said, would provide better fire service at better prices.

The meeting is to consider "spheres of influence" studies for five South county fire protection districts. Spheres of influence are defined as the plans for the probable physical boundaries and service areas of any local government agency.

Also on the agenda are two annexations in the Larkin Valley Road area to La Selva Fire Protection District and Freedom Fire Protection District.

In doing the studies, McCormick looked at a number of issues, including a May 1983 report by six south county fire districts on long-range planning to consolidate fire suppression. In the short

term, the report said fire protection could be improved and made more cost-effective by integrating service.

The area covered in that report is approximately 118 square miles, extending from the eastern boundary of Nisene Marks State Park to the Pajaro River. The area is currently served by Watsonville Fire Department, the California Department of Forestry, Aptos, Freedom, La Selva and Salsipuedes fire protection districts.

Officials for Aptos Fire District have said it wants to be considered "mid-county," and is not included in the south-county planning.

Under one proposal, McCormick said \$12,034 could be saved and four additional professional firefighters hired by:

- closing the Freedom Station of the Watsonville Fire Department;
- adding a full-time firefighter to the Airport Boulevard Company;
- staffing and operating a two-person company from a new station near East Lake Avenue and College Road;
- maintaining the Freedom and Salsipuedes volunteers;
- and maintaining one full-time fire-

fighter in Salsipuedes.

Under a second proposal, McCormick said \$168,084 could be saved by:

- closing the Freedom Fire Station or Watsonville Station No. 2 (which are two-thirds of a mile apart on Airport Boulevard);
- staffing and operating a three-person station at Salsipuedes;

- and maintaining Freedom and Salsipuedes volunteers. This would also increase the number of professional firefighters by one.

The third proposal would result in \$130,809 in savings and increase the number of staff at an Airport Boulevard station by four, by:

- closing Freedom or Watsonville Station 2;
- augmenting the Airport Boulevard company by four and maintaining Freedom volunteers.

"These are not necessarily the best alternatives," said McCormick of his proposals. "But all I'm trying to do is to get the fire agencies to work more closely together."