

PV fire agency receives LAFCO ultimatum

By LANE WALLACE
STAFF WRITER

The Pajaro Valley Fire Protection Agency received an ultimatum yesterday: Consolidate into a larger fire agency, or we'll do it for you.

That word came from the Local Agency Formation Commission, which oversees annexations and

Consolidate or we'll do it for you

has the power to force such mergers.

If the fire agency hasn't started things rolling toward consolidation by March, LAFCO members said, LAFCO will take steps to force the

consolidation.

Directors of the fire-protection agency have talked about contracting with the state Department of Forestry, but haven't taken action.

"We're kind of tired of progress

reports," said LAFCO member Gina Koshland.

"Especially when there's not that much progress," added Gary Patton, LAFCO's chairman.

Pat McCormick, LAFCO's ex-

ecutive director, is recommending consolidation because studies have shown that agency boundaries and fire station locations "are an illogical basis for efficient fire protection."

A key reason for the inefficiency, McCormick said, is that the Pajaro Valley Fire Protection Agency's main station, at Freedom and Airport boulevards, is less than a half-mile from the city of Watsonville's Station 2, at the airport.

The Department of Forestry said in a preliminary report that it

See MERGE / back of section ▶

MERGE

► From Page 1

could provide fire and emergency services in the PV Fire Protection Agency area for \$20,000 less a year than current costs.

The Pajaro Valley Fire Protection Agency was formed 15 months ago when the Freedom and Salsipuedes district entered into a joint powers agreement. It's essentially a merger, but gives the districts the option of canceling the agreement.

The PV Fire Protection District could turn operations over to Forestry by either of two methods — dissolve the district, and become part of a "county service area," served by the Forestry Department under contract with the county — or contract with Forestry separately.

Forestry officials have indicated they would be reluctant to contract with Pajaro Valley unless the Salsipuedes-Freedom merger is made permanent.

Pajaro Valley fire commissioners have balked at dissolving the district, saying they'd rather keep some control by contracting with Forestry. "That's a fine solution," McCormick said after yesterday's meeting.

PV fire commissioners are expected to discuss the issue at their Dec. 21 meeting.