

Rio fire station 'expendable'

By BOB SMITH

Aptos fire chief Nick Baumgartner opened his department's campaign to get voter approval on a new service fee.

On Monday, Baumgartner told the Rio del Mar Improvement Association directors that if state cuts off the bailout funds that now comprise one-half of the department's income, and the district's residents turn down a service fee, the department would be forced to close one of its two fire stations and possibly cancel its paramedic program.

Directors made no formal commitments of support following Baumgartner's presentation, but Association president Ray Garcia indicated that the board might help raise funds for a campaign later this spring.

Baumgartner said he and the district directors believe it possible that the state, now in severe financial straits with its own budget, will cut some or all of its special district aid next fiscal year.

In light of that possibility, the district plans to ask for voter approval of a service fee this June.

"If we lose half of our budget, we would have to cut back 50 percent in our services which means we would have to close one fire station,"

Baumgartner told the district's treasury. RDM directors.

The station to be closed, Baumgartner said, would most likely be the Rio del Mar station, which was opened in 1973 after voters approved a property tax override by a 73 percent "yes" vote.

"If we were to curtail our operations," he added, "we would probably move all our operations to Station 1 (in front of Mar Vista School on Soquel Drive) and close the Rio del Mar station."

Baumgartner has said that the district can't wait until the legislature makes its decision on future bailout because of the timing of elections and the collection of property taxes.

If an election is postponed past June, the fire chief said earlier, then the service fees couldn't be collected until the fall of 1984 — leaving the fire district with 1½ years of reduced revenue.

Service fees were authorized by the state legislature in the wake of Prop. 13's cuts in property tax revenues to special districts like fire protection districts. Typically, homeowners are assessed a flat rate per dwelling for fire protection in addition to the portion of their property taxes that already go into the dis-

trict's treasury. Vacant land and commercial buildings are also assessed the fees, but on a different scale.

Voters would be asked to approve a maximum fee schedule but property owners would only

be assessed an amount needed each year to balance the district's budget.

The next step will occur next Tuesday night, Baumgartner said, when fire direc-

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

tors are expected to name a citizen's committee to work out the details of the service charge, including how much to charge various sized businesses.

That, he indicated, may be the most difficult part of the task.

State law doesn't allow fees to be based on property values or similar guidelines, he said, so a formula must be devised that takes into consideration the relative values and size of businesses like "Safeway and Tom's Barber Shop."

In other business, the Association directors:

—Praised County Supervisor Robley Levy's announcement that she would not support County Administrative Officer George Newell's recommendation that eight Sheriff's patrol deputies be cut from the county payroll as a economy move.

They told Garcia to send Mrs. Levy a letter supporting her position in time for the mid-year budget hearings sched-

uled for today and Thursday.

—Continued action on an offer from Spring Valley Landscaping to take over maintenance of the large traffic island at Rio del Mar Boulevard and Clubhouse Drive until landscaping plans are submitted. Once the association has a detailed proposal from the landscaping company, director George Truckell will be working with Dean Wise of Aptos Seascape and county officials on possibilities for the weed-covered traffic island.

—Nicki Pecchinino, Supervisor Levy's administrative assistant, told the directors that the beach access stairways at Via Novella and Sumner Avenue in Seascape should be repaired this spring.

The county has let a contract with the Bowman and Williams engineering firm to redesign the stairways and Ms. Pecchinino said construction should be underway this spring.

REFERENCE