

Fire boards considering joint administration plan

Soquel and Live Oak fire directors will go ahead next month with a study on setting up a joint powers agreement to merge their departmental administrations, with or without the participation of the Capitola Fire Protection District.

Directors from the Live Oak and Soquel fire boards met in a joint meeting Wednesday night at the Soquel fire station with Capitola fire board chairman Robert Cooke to discuss going ahead with the joint powers study.

According to Soquel Fire Chief Ray Negro, the two boards decided they would pursue the idea of hiring one chief to oversee the operations of the two departments, with several assistant chiefs responsible for specialties, including training and fire protection.

Live Oak Chief Richard Pounds and Negro have both announced their plans to retire by next July 1, and Capitola chief Harold Jarvis will retire by the end of this year.

Negro said each of the four Soquel directors and the five Live Oak directors had no problems with the joint powers concept, and all wanted to go ahead with the study.

Two members of each board were appointed to a joint committee, Negro said, and will meet Oct. 15.

Negro said Cook was asked to find out from the other Capitola directors at the district's regular Oct. 13 if they want to participate in the study and formation of the joint powers agency.

"At that point," said Negro, "they're either in or out."

Negro stressed that the Live Oak and Soquel directors are now considering only an agreement on the administrative functions, and there is no consideration of merger or consolidation of the operations in the study.

An initial report prepared by Live Oak Board Chairman Eldon Nagel, who is also Santa Cruz City fire marshal, and Soquel director Mel Angel, the county's fire marshal, outlined some of the organizational step and the benefits to come from joint administration.

"The most important aspect of the new organization is the management system," the two directors wrote.

"The new management system would be a blending of the existing chief officers from both Live Oak and Soquel. The exception would be the elimination of one chief officer's position during the early stages of the Joint Power Agreement.

"The management staff would then be composed of the fire chief (hired by both districts) and three assistant chiefs whose primary responsibilities and overlapping responsibilities will be determined by the chief and the new agency board.

"Aside from the cost savings of eliminating one chief officer's position, the advantage of blending the management system is improved operating efficiency," the report adds.

"It is anticipated that this would be most noticeable in

the areas of administration, training, fire prevention, and master fire protection planning."

There would be no immediate changes in the staffing and manning patterns at the three fire stations (two in Live Oak and one in Soquel) in the early days of an agreement, but there could be changes once a detailed study of the area's fire delivery system is completed.

Existing equipment and assets would remain the property of the existing boards of directors, but future purchases would, generally speaking, be the responsibility of the new Agency Board, comprised of representatives from both boards.

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