

Capitola fire commissioners mull another plan

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CAPITOLA — Fire commissioners here are looking at one more plan, perhaps a final one, before facing up to whether the district must merge to stay in business.

The plan has been presented by Commissioner Eugene Warren and has added heat the past month to what Warren calls "a fiery situation."

As Warren officially presented his ideas at Monday's commission meeting, City Councilman Michael Routh repeated his published statement "I think it is pie in the sky" and said the fire commission appears unable to make up its mind.

Warren complained that press accounts of his plan were "about one half truth," and that they never mentioned item two, which states:

"Keep the door open with the city of Capitola, making it clear that we are still

willing to meet with them for discussion on an eventual city fire department."

Routh bluntly told him, "The state (financially) is slowly closing the door in your face. I think economics will prevent (the plan from working)."

Former city Councilman Bob Garcia said, "I think the bottom line is money and it's time the public became aware fire districts are going broke.

"The property tax is not capable of supporting fire districts and there is no more state bailout. You can leave the door open and maybe no one will come through."

He and others said the town was "satisfied with the fire service and people want the district to stay here."

Warren proposes a bootstrap effort by the district to slightly increase the force and add five-inch hoses to first-strike units.

He wants a second fire house to be on Jade Street if it's at all possible.

He said the plan could take a year or two to complete and that given the city has the will, the job could be done.

Commissioner Lane Lawson said, "It's a good proposal if we had an unlimited supply of money. I don't think it's affordable."

Other than one volunteer, those testifying said they didn't want the district to contract with Central Fire District (Live Oak and Soquel) for fear the city would lose its firehouse.

Commissioner Richard Mendonca said the problem with negotiations with the city was that "they were playing poker with us, playing chess with us."

He said that years back, the district opened talks with a city administrator and he told commissioner, "And he told us 'you're too rich for our blood.'"

Of recent negotiations, Mendonca said, "We put our cards on the table, but when we looked across the table there were no cards. I'm not going to give away a multi-million dollar corporation for nothing."

Chairman Wayne Fontes quietly disagreed, saying the city "did make us a specific offer."

Warren wants to re-establish the assistant chief's position, appoint a new captain and fill one position at the bottom with either an employee or a volunteer.

A volunteer informed him it would be unfair to ask that of a volunteer since the district had been too broke to increase its volunteers on-duty pay from \$3.50 an hour to \$5.

With Lawson opposed, the commission referred Warren's plan to the acting fire chief for a feasibility study.

The item is due back in February and Warren says if it won't work, he'll "bow out."