

Aptos-La Selva fire merger in jeopardy

By BOB SMITH
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Aptos fire district directors are seeking a meeting with County Supervisors Gary Patton and Robley Levy to discuss the future of the Aptos-La Selva Fire Department joint powers agreement.

The Aptos fire board held a special meeting last night primarily to discuss the Santa Cruz County Local Agency Formation Commission's (LAFCO) refusal to approve a proposed annexation by the La Selva Fire District of several hundred acres of agricultural land between the two districts, and also to annex the sites of several approved and pending residential subdivisions on and around the NBC Ranch east of Highway 1, and west of Larkin Valley Road.

Levy and Patton are the county representatives on the five-member LAFCO board.

La Selva fire board chairman Frances "Burly" Burlison said last night that he planned to call a special meeting of the La Selva directors for 7 p.m. next Tuesday to discuss that district's response to the LAFCO refusal.

Burlison and La Selva director Joann Dlott attended the Aptos meeting.

Aptos fire directors made it clear that they felt LAFCO had jeopardized the pending consolidation of the Aptos and La Selva fire districts.

"If this (Patton's plan) goes through," Aptos board chairman Richard Duchscher said, "then the JPA and the consolidation goes down the tubes.

"This is a real sticky problem that could blow us out of the water," Duchscher said.

Aptos board members also said they could not understand the rationale behind the LAFCO decision which, if it becomes final next month, would create an "island" between the Aptos and La Selva fire districts — something they thought was contrary to LAFCO policy.

When the JPA and possible consolidation was proposed, the Aptos directors suggested that La Selva take over the annexation of in-between property since La Selva is able to

charge up to \$60 per residence, and that would equalize the tax support paid to the fire districts.

Levy backed a Patton proposal at the LAFCO meeting last Wednesday, directing La Selva to annex a strip of land along Highway 1 connecting the two districts, and providing a tenuous but legal connection between the two districts, making a future consolidation possible.

The move would leave the NBC Ranch area outside the fire district and create an island of the coastal farm land owned by the Xanthus family north of San Andreas Road.

Aptos-La Selva Fire Chief Al Forbes told the Aptos directors last night that Levy explained her vote to him after the meeting by saying she didn't want to approve an annexation that would put agricultural land into the county's urban services area.

"She seemed completely unaware that the urban services line does not follow the fire district boundaries," Forbes said.

(The Midcounty urban services line, as a practical matter, is determined by the availability of sewer service.)

Aptos fire director Walt Jordan said, "Gary Patton is not particularly interested in agriculture. He's just using it to stop growth."

Other directors argued that inclusion of the land in a fire district isn't going to prompt development. "Even farmers need fire protection," director Stewart Davis said.

The fire directors unanimously voted to ask Levy and Patton to meet with fire district representatives in a last-ditch attempt to persuade them to support the original annexation proposals and, indirectly, the planned consolidation of the two fire districts.

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