

Firefighting contract proposed

The Santa Cruz County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) staff has recommended that the county attempt to contract with the city of Watsonville for fire service in a 1,070-acre area north and east of the city limits. The area, now served by the California Division of Forestry station in Corralitos, lies between the city and the Freedom and Salsipuedes fire districts, which are both seeking to annex portions of it.

A LAFCO staff report, which was forwarded to commission members today, recommends that the commission give the county and the city 55 days to negotiate a contract. The report recommends that if the county and the city are unable to reach an agreement in that time, the area should be split between the Freedom and Salsipuedes districts.

The LAFCO board is scheduled to hold a hearing on the joint Freedom-Salsipuedes annexation proposal next Wednesday.

The Watsonville Fire Department offered to contract for fire services in the area, which includes the Franich property, two weeks ago. In a letter to County Fire Marshal Mel Angel, Fire Chief Vern Hamilton proposed that the city provide fire protection for virtually the entire area, which includes 130 residences and 17 commercial buildings. (Excluded from the city's contract bid was an area north of Corralitos Creek, which, Hamilton stated, "should be included in the Freedom Fire District because it is outside the city's urban service line as well as our proposed sphere of influence.")

In his letter to Angel, who subsequently urged consideration of the proposal by LAFCO, Hamilton suggested the county pay the city \$9,600 in the first year of the proposed contract. Property tax revenues accruing to fire protection services in the area are estimated at slightly over \$5,000 annually.