

Capitola council takes step toward its own fire department

CAPITOLA — The first major step toward a city-run Fire Department has been taken by the City Council here.

Council members late last week unanimously accepted an offer by the Fire Department Board to form a joint committee, whose objective it will be to look into the merger of the two entities.

This marked the first time that Fire Board directors have committed themselves to a possible city-run department. The fire district presently is run independently of the city.

The Fire Board last week voted 3-2 to seek a merger with the city after abruptly ending merger talks with Central County Fire Department.

The first job of the new Fire Board/City Council committee will be to determine whether a citywide election will be held in November to let the voters decide on a city-run Fire Department.

City Manager Steve Burrell told council members that they are facing a six- to eight-week deadline if they want the issue on the November ballot. The committee must investigate boundary adjustments and financing aspects to go along with any election, as well.

At one point, Councilman Dennis Beltram questioned whether an election is necessary since only a simple majority is needed by both the Fire Board and City Council in order to merge. Councilman Bob Bucher, however, suggested an election would solve any doubts anyone might have since the Fire Board vote was 3-2.

It is no secret that Fire Board directors Max Kludt and Richard Mendonca favored a department merger with Central County. The board's 3-2 vote, in fact, simply called for them to ask the council to call for a special election to let the residents decide.

Fire Board director Wayne Fontes told council members, however, "Our original motion was for an election, but if there is some other way to do it, we might be able to work it out."

Fontes and fellow director Gene Warren will represent the Fire Board on the joint committee. Councilman Beltram will be joined by City Manager Burrell.