

# Capitola Council moves closer to taking over fire protection

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The Capitola City Council took another step last night in the direction of a city-controlled fire department.

After hearing public testimony both for and against consolidating fire service with the Central Fire District, council members directed City Manager Steve Burrell to devise a plan that would improve the Capitola Fire District while bringing it under city control.

Councilwoman Stephanie Harlan was alone in voting against the plan.

"Why should we pay for something that we could get by joining Central?" she asked.

Harlan urged council members to "listen to the experts," referring to testimony favoring consolidation from firefighters and people familiar with fire protection.

Other council members charged that Capitola firefighters want consolidation because it would mean fatter pay-

checks. They questioned whether the level of fire-protection services would keep pace with growth expected in the Live Oak and Soquel areas, covered by the Central Fire District.

Discussed off and on for more than 10 years, the idea of consolidation has become a heated issue in Capitola as a result of the city's application to form a subsidiary fire district governed by the city, rather than by the current board of directors.

Unlike a municipal district, a subsidiary district could serve areas outside the city limits, as the Capitola fire district does now, while retaining Capitola's share of special-district funding from the county.

A consultant's study commissioned by the county's Local Agency Formation Commission found that Capitola residents would get the most fire protection for their money through consolidation.

After much debate, Capitola

fire directors voted 3-2 to go along with consolidation. Directors Wayne Fontes and Gene Warren, however, have continued to urge formation of a city-controlled fire district.

Along with Capitola Fire Capt. Charles Howard, the two dissenting directors printed fliers supporting their viewpoint and distributed them at last night's council meeting.

The fliers contend that consolidation would lengthen firefighters' emergency response time because Capitola's two fire engines and four men on duty would be spread over a larger area. They now cover 2½ square miles, as opposed to the Central Fire District's 23½ square miles.

However, Capitola Firefighters Association president Dave Martone said last night consolidation would improve fire services for the city. Two manned fire engines would be available at all times, he said, rather than Capitola's one manned engine.