

Fire department takeover studied again

By CANDACE ATKINS

Capitola City Manager Steve Burrell will once again study the practicality of a city takeover of Capitola Fire Department.

Burrell, at last Thursday's city council meeting, requested that councilmen instruct him to investigate alternatives to the present fire district, which is run by an elected commission. He said finances are the biggest problem, and a city take-over of the fire department would be a "long and complicated" process.

Councilman Bob Garcia, before joining other council members in a unanimous vote to look into the matter, said he feels Burrell's request was "quite appropriate."

Burrell's suggestion was prompted in part by the recent county Grand Jury interim report that described the present fire department as "a threat to the lives and property" of Capitola residents. Disorganization, lack of leadership and low morale of the personnel were cited as reasons for the Grand Jury's scathing evaluation of the fire department.

One year ago, city officials hired a

private consultant to evaluate the fire department, and received another highly critical report which was concerned in large part with the management of the fire department. One recommendation in the report was for a possible city take-over of the department. The city will check with other fire departments in the county, including the new Central County District, formed by Soquel and Live Oak fire departments. Alternatives will be presented to the city council in the coming weeks.

In other business:

—Council members accepted the environmental impact report on the Wharf Road Village development, a proposed 160-unit townhouse and professional office complex to be located on 8½ acres south of Highway One, between 41st Avenue and Wharf Road.

The applicant, Irish Properties, will have to wait until the April 22 council meeting for a decision on the general plan amendment for medium density residential designation, which would allow 10 to 15 units per

acre. The city Planning Commission has recommended the change.

—The city's proposed historical preservation ordinance received a setback when council members voted 3-1 to direct City Planner Dick Steele to eliminate the "historic combining" district clause, which would designate all buildings within the district as part of the historic zone, regardless of the building's age.

"I'm having difficulty with the (definition of) district," said Councilman Ron Graves. "What about some of those village buildings that really aren't historic?"

Mayor Jerry Clarke agreed, saying, "I was curious about the same thing. A historic district is more applicable for larger towns. With the mix we enjoy, it's hard to define a district."

Councilman Bob Garcia disagreed with Graves and Clarke, suggesting making it a "convoluted district that would go around newer structures."

Garcia was outnumbered, though, as Graves, Clarke and Councilwoman Carin Mudgett voted to have the "combining district" section eliminated.