

# LAFCO rapped by fire chiefs

The Santa Cruz Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) is using fire protection as a "political tool" to control growth and is "jeopardizing fire protection" in the county, members of the South County Fire Council charged at a meeting on Thursday.

The council, consisting of representatives of fire departments in the south county, reacted to a recent LAFCO decision to deny a La Selva Fire District annexation that would be the precursor to the merger of the Aptos and La Selva fire protection districts.

The members, citing an objective in the county general plan "to provide the highest level of fire protection service feasible," voted unanimously to send a letter to LAFCO protesting its decision to allow only a strip annexation between the two districts and to reconsider the original proposal.

Don French, assistant fire

chief in Watsonville, said a merger plan was originally developed at LAFCO's request.

"My feeling is that LAFCO has acted contrary to what we thought our original agreement was," French said.

The disputed issue is the annexation of a large area of land between La Selva and Aptos. According to the merger agreement, the La Selva fire district would annex an area east of San Andreas Road and the Seascape area, from Highway 1 to the ocean.

This area, which now receives fire protection from the nearby La Selva fire station under a contract with the County Board of Supervisors, is the responsibility of the California Department of Forestry's Corralitos station, which lies several miles away.

According to Pat McCormick, LAFCO executive officer, the LAFCO commissioners did not want to include this

land in a merger because they were worried about land use issues.

"This is the first time to my knowledge that fire control has been used as a tool to control growth in the county," McCormick said. He explained that by changing the area's fire district, a person who wants to subdivide land would get more "matrix" points which could raise the density level in the area.

So instead, the LAFCO commissioners proposed annexing a strip of land along Highway 1 so that the districts would be contiguous. This would leave two large parcels of land as "islands."

McCormick said LAFCO policy is usually to discourage strip developments and creating islands.

He also said the commissioners assumed the contract for fire protection of the "island" with the La Selva fire district

would be renewed.

However, Al Kinslow of La Selva Fire Department, said there is "a strong possibility" that La Selva would not renew the contract when it expires in January.

Jeff Tolson, volunteer chief of the Corralitos fire department, said such a move would also be detrimental to the Corralitos area also since calls in the San Andreas area would take fire equipment out of Corralitos.

"First of all, there's a longer response time for us to get out to that area," Tolson said. "And it would also mean that when we go out there, the Corralitos area will not have adequate coverage."

French said members of the fire council were not concerned with political issues regarding the merger. "Our concern," he said, "is to provide the area with the best possible fire protection service and nothing more than that."