

Supervisors look for fire-protection funds

4/17/91
p. 9

By LANE WALLACE
STAFF WRITER

Some county spending may have to be cut to pay for fire-protection services, Santa Cruz County supervisors said yesterday.

Faced with having to raise revenue to continue fire protection and emergency medical services in populated areas not covered by cities or fire districts, supervisors asked for a report on what could be cut from the general fund to help pay for the services.

A lone dissenting vote was cast by Supervisor Gary Patton, who said he didn't want to pit fire protection against other services financed by the general fund.

The state Department of Forestry contracts with the county for fire protection services in areas outside fire districts and cities. Part of the funding for such service comes from a county service area fee on all property.

For a single-family home, the current fee is \$66. To maintain the status quo of fire service would mean raising the fee to \$70, said County Fire Chief Dean Lucke.

Lucke presented a master plan for future costs, which includes replacement of older fire engines. The critical needs of the master

plan could be met by raising the fee to \$86, he said, and fully funding the master plan would cost \$112 per home.

The county Fire Department will look at several areas of raising funds, including reducing service in the Larkin Valley-Buena Vista area.

The Freedom Fire District now contracts with the county to provide protection for the area for \$24,000 a year. The county will consider dropping that contract, which would mean the area would be served by the Department of Forestry station in Corralitos.

If that happens, the Freedom Fire District would have to decrease its staff from five to four firefighters, Freedom Chief Ben Evans said after the meeting.

Freedom has an average five-minute response time to the Larkin Valley-Buena Vista area, Evans said, seven minutes faster than the Forestry station.

Other money-saving methods that will be investigated include billing drunk drivers for the cost of tending to their accidents, charging fees to out-of-county residents who get emergency service, and fees for new development.