



County of Santa Cruz

FIRE DEPARTMENT ADVISORY COMMISSION

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ALEXANDER LEMAN, CHAIRMAN

Date

Board of Supervisors
701 Ocean Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Dear Members of the Board,

The Fire Department Advisory Commission (FDAC) is tasked with advising the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors and the County Fire Department Chief in matters affecting the department's current and long-term viability. We are, by definition, limited to advising both entities and neither of them have the obligation to act on advice offered by the seven commission members, comprised of representatives from all five supervisorial districts, the County Office of Emergency Services, and a representative of the volunteer firefighters. County Fire's mission is to keep all residents and visitors of Santa Cruz County safe and secure when an emergency occurs. Each commissioner takes their charged responsibility very seriously and all are committed to seeing County Fire succeed in its mission as effectively and efficiently as possible.

The FDAC determined, as far back as seven years ago, that County Fire financing could fall short of providing an optimal emergency response within the foreseeable future. In 2007, after losing a critical ballot measure to increase CSA 48 fees, the commission advised that staffing of County Fire's fully staffed Amador contract stations could be reduced from a three-person per engine to a two person per engine model, based on budget shortfall considerations. Shortly thereafter, the commission reluctantly advised deferment of scheduled major fire engine purchases, again due to budget shortfall considerations. A few years later, personnel was further reduced by the elimination of street addressing services and a Fire Marshal position, as well as reduction of the total number of CAL FIRE Firefighter Is from 20 to 18 in the contract.

In August of 2013 the commission sent a letter to the Supervisors, detailing the financial situation of County Fire and offered five solutions including one preferred solution. On June 16, 2014, commission members addressed the board during budget hearings, asking that Supervisors address these long-term and on-going budget shortfalls by acting on FDAC past recommendations to put a special tax on the ballot for voter consideration.

The FDAC has been vigilant in its pursuit of a County Fire Department that is capable of providing effective, efficient, economical, safe, and most importantly, readily available emergency protection services to the communities it serves. We advise the board to allocate the necessary funding to support an educational effort, coupled with polling, in order to place a resolution calling for a special tax election by June 2015 at the earliest, or November 2016 at the latest. We further advise the board to appoint one supervisor and three members of the FDAC to jointly oversee this process, including the selection of any associated outside contractors.

The FDAC has completed its task and provided the best and most practical advice for County Fire. Now it is up to the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors to take the next step and make the decisions that will correct the situation that threatens to affect the life, health, property and insurance rates of the residents that elected them.

Sincerely,

Alex Leman, First District Representative/FDAC Chairman

John Willett, Second District Representative

Tom Scully, Third District Representative

John Walker, Fourth District Representative

Arnie Wernick, Fifth District Representative

Doug Aumack, Volunteer Firefighters Representative/Co-Chairman