



NEWS



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San Bernardino County supervisors start process to expand tax for fire services

Sandra Emerson, SBSun

Posted: June 14, 2018, 6:13 p.m.



San Bernardino County firefighter Jeremy Lindsay uses a drip torch during a training fire along Sierra Avenue north of Summit Avenue in North Fontana May 23, 2013. (Gabriel Luis Acosta/Staff Photographer.)

An annual tax levied on property owners in Upland and San Antonio Heights residents last year to pay for fire services could make its way to other unincorporated communities in San Bernardino County.

On Tuesday, June 12, the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors voted 3-2 to initiate the process to expand a special tax zone, which comes with a \$157 annual parcel tax, to include all unincorporated communities.

If approved, the tax would generate nearly \$27 million for the **San Bernardino County Fire** Protection District to help cover the cost to provide services and address a budget gap anticipated in fiscal year 2019-20 and beyond.

“The important thing is that we begin to move in the right direction and the right direction is for us to work to creating a solvency within county fire,” said Supervisor Josie Gonzales, who voted to move forward in the process with Supervisors James Ramos and Curt Hagman. Supervisors Janice Rutherford and Robert Lovingood opposed the move.

The process, which could start in August, calls for public meetings and for property owners opposed to the tax to submit written protests.

If 25 percent of property owners submit written protests, the proposal would go to a vote. It would take a majority of property owners to submit written protests to stop it entirely.

If implemented, the tax could start generating revenue for the district in August 2019.

Rutherford opposed expanding the tax zone through the protest vote process, pointing to the controversial annexation of Upland and San Antonio Heights in July 2017 as an example of how residents react when they are not given an opportunity to vote on a tax.

The city of Upland initiated the process to dissolve its fire department and contract with the county to save money. The Local Agency Formation Commission decided to include the unincorporated community in the district as well, enraging residents.

It passed after the number of written protests failed to meet the threshold needed to defeat the annexation.

“The LAFCO action to include San Antonio Heights in (the district) by solely a protest vote has had absolutely horrific reaction and reverberations in the community,” Rutherford said.

“Our unincorporated residents want to have a voice and vote in what taxes they are paying,” she added. “I believe they deserve to have this information presented to them in very realistic terms.”

Separately, the board unanimously directed city staff to hire a consultant to explore placing a special tax on the March 2020 ballot, which would require a two-thirds vote.

Alternatively, the district could cut services or expand its agreement with the county to help fund services.

Rutherford said the county should get buy-in from the public, and a vote on the proposed tax would address potential issues should voters approve a November ballot initiative that seeks to abolish the process for annexation through protest votes.

“It is hard to go out and explain to people why they should pay more taxes, but if they’re not willing to do that then the consequences are the different services level here,” she said. “We need to have that honest conversation with our residents and allow them to make the decision.”

The county Fire Protection District anticipates a \$29.3 million financial gap in fire, a \$7.7 million gap in ambulance services and has identified additional needs of \$30.2 million and \$6.7 million for fire/rescue and ambulance, respectively, to provide adequate levels of services, according to a presentation by Fire Chief Mark Hartwig Tuesday.

The county currently contributes about \$27.5 million in general funds toward the Office of Emergency Services, Ambulance Service System and service zone enhancements.

The district, which is funded mostly from property taxes in the communities that receive its services, anticipates pulling nearly \$12 million from its reserves during the fiscal year starting July 1, which is not sustainable moving forward, Hartwig said.

“I would recommend we do something, that we don’t continue to rely on reserves or one-time money essentially annually from the county Board of Supervisors,” Hartwig told the board.

Gonzales said the board has reached a point where it can no longer allow residents in certain areas to subsidize services for residents in other areas.

“We have districts that are unable to pay and are not paying to receive the current high-end, high-quality response and fire services that they are receiving,” Gonzales said.

<https://www.sbsun.com/2018/06/13/san-bernardino-county-supervisors-start-process-to-expand-tax-for-fire-services/>

County Fire, Victorville solidify 9-month transitional deal

Shea Johnson, Daily Press

Posted: June 13, 2018, 3:38 p.m.



A San Bernardino County firefighter carries a pair of chainsaws to the roof of the former Coco's restaurant off Palmdale Road in Victorville in May. County Fire and the city have solidified a nine-month holdover contract as the city transitions to its own fire department. [James Quiqq, Daily Press]

VICTORVILLE — San Bernardino County Fire and the city have agreed to a nine-month contract extension to avoid a lapse in service until the Victorville Fire Department is activated March 31.

The deal, a compromise between the year-long contract initially sought by the county and six months wanted by the city, is for \$11.37 million. It will be paid in monthly installments of \$1.26 million.

On Tuesday, the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors approved the holdover agreement, a week after the City Council did the same.

Under terms of the deal, County Fire will continue to provide normal fire protection services excluding only aircraft rescue firefighting services at Southern California Logistics Airport, which is being handled through privatized services.

The agreement, technically an amendment to an existing contract, officially puts to bed city concerns over a stalled transition plan and potentially helps to undo much of the documented tension between the two sides stirred in the process.

In announcing the deal, County Fire described it as the two sides having “joined forces” and Mayor Pro Tem Jim Cox a week prior suggested putting the past behind them.

“There were a lot of bumps in the road, there was a lot of discussions, a lot of emotions — we don’t need to rehash what occurred with Measure K and a lot of things,” Cox said, “but a lot of emotions on both sides and it appeared that this was going to be contentious all the way.”

Yet he credited County Supervisors Chairman Robert Lovingood’s entrance into negotiations as a boon that led to a meeting of the minds.

Mayor Gloria Garcia and City Manager Keith Metzler took it one step further, traveling to Tuesday’s Supervisors meeting to personally thank officials — including Lovingood, CEO Gary McBride and County Fire Chief Mark Hartwig — for their roles in smoothing out the transition.

In February 2017, the Council, eyeing a dramatic cost-savings measure, first opened up the possibility of pivoting away from County Fire after a 10-year contract ended June 30.

But the re-activation of the city's own fire department, dormant since 2008, did not appear to be the front-running option until after the County Fire union fought against Measure K, the city's proposed sales tax meant to boost public safety spending.

Rejecting the potential loss of local control with a permanent County Fire contract, city officials have also batted away concerns over pensions, maintaining same level of service and recruitment along the road to re-establishing the Victorville Fire Department.

City officials have already secured top-level officials to staff its 63-employee department and have disclosed no shortage of applicants seeking to join.

The once-rocky transition from County Fire to a city fire department, meanwhile, seemed somewhat surprising considering the reported otherwise strong relationship between the two. City officials have only given the highest praise to County Fire's quality of service.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20180613/county-fire-victorville-solidify-9-month-transition-deal>

UPDATE: SigAlert lifted after crash blocks northbound I-15 lanes in Cajon Pass

Paola Baker, Daily Press

Posted: June 13, 12:34 p.m.



CAJON PASS — Authorities issued a SigAlert on northbound Interstate 15 after a crash blocked three lanes Wednesday afternoon.

Reported just before noon, California Highway Patrol logs show the No. 3, 4, and 5 northbound lanes were closed for about an hour due to the crash, which occurred between Highway 138 and Oak Hill Road. The SigAlert was issued at 12:06 p.m.

CHP logs show a white Audi sedan and a tractor-trailer were involved in the crash, but specifics aren't yet available. The Audi caught fire in the No. 3 lane after the crash, the logs show, prompting the closure.

San Bernardino County Fire officials said their fire engine was canceled after the blaze was quickly doused. One minor injury has been reported, but other details are not yet available.

All lanes were reported to be open by 1:06 p.m., CHP logs show.

This story is developing and more information will be updated as it is received.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20180613/update-sigalert-lifted-after-crash-blocks-northbound-i-15-lanes-in-cajon-pass>

Leave fireworks to the pros

James, Folmer, Highland News

Posted: June 13, 2018

We're proud that Highland bans so-called Safe and Sane fireworks, and disappointed in neighboring cities that allow them.

We know charitable organizations benefit from the sale of sparklers, which seem fun and harmless. But they burn as hot as 1,800 degrees, according to the **San Bernardino County Fire** Department.

Highland is one of 25 cities in the county that forbids fireworks. They are allowed in six county cities, Chino, Colton, Fontana, Rialto and parts of Grand Terrace and San Bernardino.

On Wednesday, July 4, Immanuel Baptist Church will again host a professional fireworks display. Last year, 5,000 people watched the 20-minute show on Zinn Field, southeast of the church.

Gates open at 6 p.m. and will include three fun zones — for toddlers, kids and teens. There will be a car show hosted by the Highland Kiwanis Club, plus food vendors.

Another way to celebrate our 242nd Independence Day will be a parade sponsored by the Highland Area Chamber of Commerce. The parade steps off at 9 a.m. on the north side of Base Line at Palm Avenue, ending at Highland Community Park east of Central Avenue.

There's still time to join the parade. Entries are \$10 and \$5 for each additional vehicle or \$50 for a group. The deadline to enter is 4 p.m. Saturday, June 30. Call the chamber at (909) 865-4073 for more information.

The fire department says it is illegal to give fireworks to anyone younger than 18. The fine for possession of illegal fireworks can be as high \$5,000.

Remember, we're at the base of a magnificent national forest. Don't run the risk of injury or a fine. Go to the show and watch how the pros do it.

https://www.highlandnews.net/opinion/editorials/leave-fireworks-to-the-pros/article_467c7d58-6f59-11e8-a342-27482c413d36.html