



NEWS



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SUV BURNS AFTER CAUSING VEGETATION FIRE IN TWENTYNINE PALMS

Staff Writer, Z107.7 News

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A man who was driving his SUV in the desert in Twentynine started a vegetation fire which then burned his vehicle.

According to **County Fire** Battalion Chief Scott Tuttle, Twentynine Palms and Wonder Valley firefighters were called to Mesquite Springs Road and Sunny Sands just after 7 p.m. Tuesday.

Tuttle said the fire engines couldn't drive into the desert without getting stuck, so they had to lay about 300 feet of hose to get to the fire, which was in a sand dune northwest of Sunny Sands.

The driver had gotten his small SUV stuck in the sand and while trying to get out, the vehicle started vegetation on fire, which spread to and completely burned his SUV.

The Sheriff's Department is investigating.

<http://z1077fm.com/suv-burns-after-causing-vegetation-fire-in-twentynine-palms/>

Lucerne Valley/Johnson Valley MAC opposes approved fire parcel tax

Martin Estacio / For the Leader, Daily Press

Posted: October 24, 2018, 12:01 am

The Lucerne Valley/Johnson Valley Municipal Advisory Committee (MAC) voted unanimously last Thursday to formally oppose an approved parcel tax and send a letter of disapproval to the Board of Supervisors.

The Supervisors voted 3-2 to expand Fire Protection Zone 5 only two days earlier at a public hearing.

Supervisors Robert Lovingood and Janice Rutherford cast the dissenting votes. The expansion will levy an annual tax of \$157.26 on all parcels, vacant or not, in the county's unincorporated areas.

The revenue generated will help address a \$29 million budget deficit and will fund existing fire services and capital improvements, according to **County Fire** Chief Mark Hartwig.

The hearing concluded a 30-day protest period in which mailers were sent in September to all of the affected property owners with instructions on how to download a protest form online, but which included no physical copy.

Over 60 people spoke at the Board of Supervisors' hearing with several who condemned the process. An attendee at the MAC meeting also expressed his ire.

"I'm so mad I could spit nails," said local resident David Smith. He related how since he doesn't really use a computer, it was difficult to locate a form. He tried calling fire officials for advice but said they weren't very helpful.

Smith finally found one at Lucerne Valley Market and picked up four more copies for neighbors whom he said never heard about it. He called it an "illegal tax" due to perceived deceitfulness in the way it was passed.

The written process required at least 25 percent of property owners with 25 percent of the assessed land value to send in forms to the county before the hearing concluded on Oct. 16. This would have subjected the proposed expansion to a popular vote.

Ultimately, the county received only 11,472 verified forms out of the more than 368,000 property owners it sent mailers to, making up only 3.18 percent, much less than required.

Attendees at the MAC meeting took umbrage at the fact that James Ramos, the supervisor who represents the Third District of which Lucerne Valley is a part, was in the majority.

Ramos is running for State Assembly District 40, a move that some at the meeting hinted explained a casualness in approving the expansion.

The Lucerne Valley Economic Development Association, along with the Red Brennan Group and property owners, filed a lawsuit Oct. 11 against the Board of Supervisors. They sought a preliminary injunction to stop the public hearing, but it was denied by a Superior Court judge.

The case is still pending and a trial conference is scheduled for next year.

If Supervisor Ramos is elected to the Assembly, MAC Chair Roger Peterson said the council might temporarily be dissolved until someone takes Ramos' seat.

Betty Munson, MAC secretary and representative for Johnson Valley, wished to say a few words near the end of the meeting praising the council just in case she never "(comes) back to this table."

"I want to take this chance right now to tell you guys what these people do for you," Munson said, referring to the MAC members. "These people are fighting for your communities, and they volunteer their time."

She expressed what she thought Joanna Wright would have said to stress the importance of local involvement and activism.

Wright, who died in June, was also a member of the MAC and served as president of the Johnson Valley Improvement Association and the Homestead Valley Community Council.

"I know that if Joanna was here, she'd be saying: 'don't let your communities go,'" Munson said. "They're our communities. They should not be taken away from us."

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20181024/lucerne-valleyjohnson-valley-mac-opposes-approved-fire-parcel-tax>

Group vows to press on with legal challenge after San Bernardino County fire tax expansion

Shea Johnson, Daily Press

Posted: October 23, 2018, 3:38 pm

A nonprofit has pledged to press its legal challenge against last week's expansion of a **San Bernardino County fire** tax to property owners in unincorporated communities, contending the levy is unconstitutional and the process biased and political.

Red Brennan Group, an organization established last year that casts itself as dedicated to good governance, had sued San Bernardino County on Oct. 11 in an effort to block the then-forthcoming expansion of County Fire's FP-5 Service Zone.

Joined as plaintiffs by local civic groups and county residents, the lawsuit argued the tax violated the Equal Protection clause of the U.S. Constitution because it would be imposed only on landowners and that it should require a two-thirds vote of the electorate to pass.

The request for an injunction was denied in county court and, five days after the suit was filed, County Supervisors voted 3-2 to expand the zone by more than 19,000 square miles after a protest vote, allowing property owners to submit forms opposing the move, fell well short of the threshold needed to jettison the expansion or force it to an election.

The Red Brennan Group said in a statement late last week that it plans to continue its legal challenge to the expansion, calling upon any interested civic organizations to also join.

During the marathon Supervisors meeting on Oct. 16, the county's legal counsel, Michelle Blakemore, had assured elected officials that the expansion was legal and that "the board had gone above and beyond what is required" by enabling a protest process at all.

The property tax's expansion to unincorporated communities and incorporated cities that don't already pay — with some exemptions — is expected to generate \$27 million yearly for County Fire and significantly thin a current funding gap of \$29 million.

The \$157.26 annual tax can rise up to 3 percent annually with approval by the Board of Supervisors. Fire Chief Mark Hartwig said that without the infusion of new revenue, the department would experience "painful" cutbacks.

The next court date in the Red Brennan lawsuit seeking injunctive relief is scheduled for April 10, court records show.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20181023/group-vows-to-press-on-with-legal-challenge-after-san-bernardino-county-fire-tax-expansion>