



NEWS



News Headlines 10/10/2018

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Why property owners in Upland and San Antonio Heights got notices about county fire's tax zone expansion

SANDRA EMERSON, Daily Bulletin

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A City of Upland decal is placed next to a County of San Bernardino decal on a fire engine parked at Fire Station 163 in Upland on Monday, July 23, 2018. It has been one year since the city of Upland changed to San Bernardino County Fire services. (Photo by Stan Lim, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)

The **San Bernardino County Fire** Protection District is including Upland and San Antonio Heights in its proposal to expand a special tax zone.

In September, county fire mailed notices to 368,385 property owners outlining its plan to expand the fire protection zone, known as FP-5, across all unincorporated county areas. The expansion comes with a \$157 annual parcel tax that could go up 3 percent every year.

Those notices included about 35,000 property owners in Upland and the unincorporated community of San Antonio Heights to the north, who were annexed into the zone in July 2017.

San Antonio Heights residents are suing to undo the annexation, which is why county fire decided to include them, said Tracey Martinez, public information officer for county fire.

“In an abundance of caution, County Fire included the residents of Upland and San Antonio Heights in the current proposed expansion of Service Zone FP-5, which entitles the residents an opportunity to express their protest of FP-5,” Martinez said via email.

This means property owners in Upland and San Antonio Heights can officially oppose the expansion.

Ken Petschow, a San Antonio Heights resident who has been strongly opposed to the annexation, said this also means the county could get sued again.

“I believe this is their attempt to be able to reinstate the tax again should they lose this,” Petschow said.

In 2016, Upland officials agreed to start the process of dissolving its fire department and annexing into county fire to save the city money.

After the city filed its application, the Local Agency Formation Commission, the agency that oversees annexations in San Bernardino County, voted to include San Antonio Heights. The heights was already receiving county fire services, but was not paying the additional fee.

The annexation was approved in July 2017, when there were not enough written protests submitted to defeat it.

In response, members of the San Antonio Heights Association sued the county, county fire, LAFCO and city of Upland challenging the annexation and imposition of the fee without a traditional vote.

A hearing is set for Dec. 18 in San Bernardino County Superior Court.

Petschow, who said he received four notices this time around, believes the county's effort to expand the zone will hurt them in court.

"I think once (the court) sees this is going on again and that they're trying to circumvent the law and the right of the people, it's going to cause the court to look unfavorably upon the county," Petschow said.

In June, the board of supervisors voted 3-2 to initiate the process to expand the zone based on a recommendation by County Fire Chief Mark Hartwig to address a \$29 million budget shortfall.

Revenue from property taxes, contracts and fire protection service zones have not been enough to cover the district's rising costs and the agency increasingly has relied more on county general funds and its own reserves.

Also, the county's more populous communities, and those already paying a fee for services, are subsidizing communities that are less populated and more remote.

If approved, property owners in all communities brought into the zone would pay the \$157, which fire officials say will create a steady revenue stream for the cash strapped district.

Taxpayer groups, however, say the move to include Upland and San Antonio Heights in the current expansion proposal could dilute the vote, which also must be done through a written protest process.

In order to trigger an election, 25 percent of property owners who control at least 25 percent of the assessed land value would need to file written protests by Oct. 16, when the San Bernardino County Supervisors are expected to vote on the issue.

To stop the tax, more than 50 percent would have to oppose it in writing.

"This would seem to dilute the vote and reduce the likelihood of a successful protest or triggering of an election," said Laura Murray, staff attorney with the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association.

"Those in Upland and San Antonio Heights could be motivated to refrain from protesting in order to increase revenue."

Property owners against the expansion must mail in their written opposition by the close of business Oct. 15, or submit a written form, in person, by the end of the public hearing Oct. 16.

The public hearing is scheduled for 10 a.m. Oct. 16 at the government center, 385 N. Arrowhead Ave., San Bernardino.

The expansion, if approved as proposed, would generate an additional \$26.9 million in revenue for the fire district starting in 2019.

For more information on the expansion and protest process visit county fire's website at <https://www.sbcfire.org/ServiceZoneFP-5.aspx>.

<https://www.dailybulletin.com/2018/10/09/why-property-owners-in-upland-and-san-antonio-heights-got-notices-about-county-fires-tax-zone-expansion/>

River bottom blaze in Victorville likely 'human-caused'

Paola Baker, Daily Press

Posted: October 9, 2018, 4:13 pm



A San Bernardino County Fire Department firefighter douses a blaze in a section of the Mojave River bottom off Air Expressway in Victorville on Monday. The fire is believed to be "human-caused" and involved a homeless encampment. [Photo courtesy of the San Bernardino County Fire Department]

VICTORVILLE — Firefighters made quick work of a blaze in the Mojave River bottom on Monday afternoon, dousing the flames before they could spread further.

Reported just after 12:30 p.m. in the river bottom area just off Air Expressway and D Street, **San Bernardino County Fire** Department officials said the fire burned through about a half-acre before they could contain it.

"It does look like it involved a homeless encampment," County Fire spokesman Eric Sherwin said.

Crews were initially hampered by the heavy brush and trees in the difficult-to-access area, but Sherwin said firefighters were able to knock down the flames in about 30 minutes.

"Because of the heavy fuels and the deep-seated nature of those fuels, it took our hand crews another hour and a half to complete overhaul and mop-up," Sherwin said.

No injuries were reported. The cause remains under investigation, but Sherwin said it's believed to have been "human-caused."

As temperatures in the High Desert begin to dip, Sherwin said it's likely warming fires from the local transient population may also begin to increase. Coupled with winds, a small fire can then quickly spread, facilitated by dry vegetation.

"It's just one more caution, one more hazard we are looking out for," Sherwin said.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20181009/river-bottom-blaze-in-victorville-likely-human-caused>

Fire guts garage in Phelan

Paola Baker, Daily Press

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San Bernardino County Fire Department firefighters knock down a fire at a garage in Phelan late Monday night. [Photo courtesy of the San Bernardino County Fire Department]

PHELAN — Fire crews fought a blaze that tore through a local home’s garage Monday night, keeping the flames from spreading to nearby brush and homes.

San Bernardino County Fire Department officials said they rushed to the scene after “quite a few people” called 911 to report a blaze at a home in the 6500 block of Fox Court.

“Medic Engine 10 arrived on scene and found a large garage, fully involved, with exposure to a trailer in the front,” County Fires spokesman Eric Sherwin said.

Sherwin said crews “went into defensive mode” as they fought the flames, with the express goals of confining the fire to the area of origin and keeping it from further spread.

“We were successful in that,” Sherwin said. “It took just about 15 minutes to knock down the fire.”

With the assistance of three engines, an ambulance truck and a battalion chief, Sherwin said crews remained on scene for another hour and a half to complete overhaul. CalFire also responded for any potential threat to vegetation.

No injuries were reported due to the blaze. The cause remains under investigation.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20181009/fire-guts-garage-in-phelan>