



# NEWS



## News Headlines 10/14/2020

- Measure U Repeals Fire Tax

## Measure U Repeals Fire Tax

Angela Yap, Mountain News

Posted: October 14, 2020



Fire Chief Daniel R. Munsey

San Bernardino County Measure U, a fire protection district parcel tax repeal measure, is on the ballot as an initiative in San Bernardino County on November 3, 2020.

Measure U, if approved by a majority of those voting, would repeal the special fire tax associated with Fire Protection Service Zone Five (FP-5).

The tax was imposed following the Board's 3-2 vote to expand a fire protection zone, known as FP-5, under the **San Bernardino County Fire** Protection District in 2019.

FP-5, which had already included several cities, was broadened to take in all of the county's unincorporated communities including Lake Arrowhead, Blue Jay, Crestline, Running Springs and other surrounding mountain communities, with a \$157.26 tax on each parcel.

Regardless of income each property owner will pay the same rate, from Amazon warehouses to seniors on fixed incomes.

Supervisors Janice Rutherford and Robert Lovingood voted against the expansion, and said they believe it should have been decided by a majority of voters in the first place.

"I voted against it last year. It was a 3-2 vote. I voted against imposing the FP5 fee, not against the Measure U," said County Supervisor Janice Rutherford. "I believe it is a tax so it should have been taken to the public to vote on," Rutherford stated. "Most of anything government budget is salary and that's true for our Fire and Emergency services budget too."

Local resident David Caine is one of those residents charged \$157.26 on top of the property tax allocation to County Fire.

"Measure U is long overdue and must be approved to repeal an unjust tax," said Caine. "This fire fee was never correctly submitted to the people. It was a tax disguised as a 'fee', a clever trick to avoid a 2/3rds vote. In addition to a yes vote on measure U, should be a refund from the Board of Equalization."

This Measure is placed on the ballot by initiative petition from the Red Brennon Group with over 30,000 signatures.

“The constitution is clear that you need a 2/3 vote of the people to put a special tax on them and this should be done by telling them why the funds are needed and asking for their vote,” said Eric Steinmann, a millionaire who supported this Measure as part of the Red Brennon Group. “Instead the Board of Supervisors and county employee unions who finance their reelections stuck just the unincorporated or poorest areas with this tax without their vote then when our organization stood up and got the signatures to repeal this they personally attack us.”

“The tell a bunch of lies saying cell towers starting fires and such, and they go around getting false statements in Uniform in Fire Engines and tell everyone their house is going to burn down. How does that even relate to a constitutional provision that says don’t tax us without getting the citizens vote first,” Steinmann added. “They resemble an organized crime syndicate running a protection racket much more than heros and public servants which is what people expect of them.”

A yes vote on this Measure will repeal the special tax associated with Fire Protection Service Zone Five and reduce annual revenue to the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District by approximately \$41.5 million annually. A simple majority is required for the approval of Measure U.

“We hope that people see through this and vote Yes on Measure U to repeal this tax and in that way we will help save the people in this county 41 million dollars a year,” said Steinmann.

A No vote on this Measure will keep in effect the special tax associated with Fire Protection Zone Five and the annual revenue to the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District of approximately \$41.5 million annually.

If less than a majority of the voters vote yes on this Measure, the special tax will stay in effect.

Those oppose to Measure U argued that Measure U will slash Emergency Medical and Fire Protection Services by over \$40 million and will delay response times in medical emergencies by nearly 9 minutes, stated in the Voter Information Guide.

Fire Chief Dan Munsey said he gave a presentation to the District’s Fire Board describing the repeal of Service Zone FP-5 would have on the District and the citizen they serve back in May. “If Service Zone FP-5 is repealed, it would result in a \$41.5 million loss of revenue to SBCFPD,” said Munsey. “The District may be forced to close 15 fire stations, decrease firefighter lifesaving care by over 200; ultimately increasing response times. Secondary impacts would include the elimination and/or reduction of several crucial programs.”

When asked how much of the \$41.5 million is allocated for salary, Munsey said, “In general, we do not allocate specific revenue sources to specific expenditures. However, in FY19/20, 46% of SBCFPD’s overall budget was allocated to salaries and benefits.”

Some of the First Responders indicated that Measure U will jeopardize the safety of our communities by closing fire stations, reducing front-line fire protection, and delaying emergency medical response.

Others believe that Measure U is about the people's right to choose when and for what purpose they should be taxed. The Constitution requires a two-thirds approval from the people.

One of the arguments states, "The real beneficiaries are wealthy out-of-state land owners who will avoid paying their fair share of local taxes for fire protection". Steinmann responded by saying he has spent more money on Measure U than the property taxes he has to pay on the 8 parcels he owns in the San Bernardino County is just a small fraction of the money he has contributed for the campaign this year.

According to the San Bernardino County Voter Information Guide, County Service Area (CSA) 70, Improvement Zone FP-5 was formed on April 18, 2006. On August 1, 2006, a special tax was authorized following a two-thirds vote of registered voters in CSA 70, Improvement Zone FP-5 for fire and emergency medical services. On June 20, 2008, the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District was reorganized and included the reorganization of CSA 70, Improvement Zone FP-5 into San Bernardino County Fire Protection District Service Zone FP-5. The previously authorized special tax per parcel remained in effect in the reorganized FP-5. Over time, FP-5 has been expanded to include some cities and unincorporated territory in the County of San Bernardino. As of September 14, 2018, the boundary of FP-5 included the unincorporated communities of Helendale and San Antonio Heights and the cities of San Bernardino, Needles, Twentynine Palms and Upland. On October 16, 2018, the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District Board of Directors expanded FP-5 to include all territory within the jurisdiction of the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District that was not currently included in FP-5. The expanded boundaries are currently subject to the previously authorized special tax in the annual amount of \$157.26 per parcel, with a maximum 3% annual cost of living increase. On April 4, 2019 and October 31, 2019, the San Bernardino Superior Court ruled that California's Constitution does not require a vote before expanding the boundary covered by this special tax. The valid special tax provides revenues to maintain current fire and emergency medical services. The repeal of the special tax will result in a reduction of revenue in the estimated amount of \$41.5 million annually.

For complete arguments from both sides regarding Measure U, please refer to the SBC Voter Information Guide, and do your own research.

<https://mountain-news.com/news/40013/measure-u-repeals-fire-tax/>