



NEWS



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Head-on crash stops Morongo Grade traffic

Jene Estrada, Hi-Desert Star

Posted: February 25, 2020

MORONGO VALLEY — A crash on Twentynine Palms Highway stopped all traffic on the Morongo grade around 7:30 a.m. Tuesday. Two vehicles collided head-on east of Indian Canyon Drive.

Officers from the Morongo Basin and Indio CHP stations, the **San Bernardino County fire** department and the Morongo Basin Ambulance Association all responded to the scene.

One person was hurt and was transported to the Desert Regional Medical Center, according to the CHP Indio station. The extent of that person's injuries is unknown.

The crash occurred in an area of the highway where road work has reduced the lanes from four to two. The collision stopped all traffic for about half an hour. Around 8 a.m., CHP officers began escorting vehicles down the grade and traffic was slowed for about another hour; officers began clearing the scene at 8:45 a.m.

Construction on the Morongo grade is scheduled to continue until Friday from Indian Canyon Drive to Hess Boulevard.

Drivers are advised to slow to 25 mph through the work zone.

http://www.hidesertstar.com/news/article_1e441346-5828-11ea-b439-ebbb8ded8897.html

Measure I is in the voters' hands

Judi Bowers, Big Bear Grizzly News

Posted: February 26, 2020

With less than a week until the March 3 primary election, those on both sides of Measure I in Big Bear are working to get their message out to voters.

Measure I, if approved by voters, would form a community facilities district within Big Bear Valley. Each improved property would be assessed 6 cents per square foot for habitable structures. Unimproved properties pay \$35 per year. The ski resorts would pay \$375,000 each per year.

Commercial properties would pay the 6 cents per square foot. Lodging facilities and homes used for private home rental sites, including those rented by Airbnb and VRBO, would pay the 6 cents per square foot and a \$78 per bedroom. All assessments are annual.

For the past couple of years, Big Bear Fire Department personnel have looked at ways to maintain and improve service with the growing demand for that service in the Valley. Every option was explored, according to Big Bear Fire Chief Jeff Willis. Based on input from the Big Bear community, Measure I was developed.

Big Bear's residents and property owners said they were willing to pay their fair share, Willis said. But with the demand on the fire service by the growing visitor population, Big Bear's residents said the visitors needed to also pay.

Due to half of the department being within the city of Big Bear Lake and the other half in the unincorporated Big Bear City Community Services District, a sales tax or an increase in transient occupancy tax wouldn't cover the entire Valley. The Fire Department doesn't have the ability to increase sales or TOT tax. The formation of the community facilities district is allowed under the Mello Roos tax law, Willis said. This is not a developer generated Mello Roos and does not require bond sales, he said. This is voted on by registered voters in Big Bear. Approval requires a two-thirds majority of votes cast.

Those opposed to Measure I have voiced support for annexation to **San Bernardino County Fire** District. The opponents claim County Fire can provide fire service to Big Bear cheaper than what is proposed by Measure I.

Kathleen Oplinger, San Bernardino County Fire deputy chief of operations, said she believes service to Big Bear under County Fire would be less expensive. But she was clear, Big Bear Fire, the board and the chief, would need to submit a request for proposal. County Fire is not courting the Big Bear Fire Department or attempting a take over of any kind, she said.

Willis said the cost to provide service must be a true comparison of apples to apples, which he said those opposed to Measure I aren't doing. Big Bear has five stations. The ambulance service includes firefighter-paramedics. Oplinger said County Fire ambulances are manned with an ambulance operator and a firefighter-EMT or firefighter-paramedic.

San Bernardino County Fire Service Zone FP-5 funding assesses improved and unimproved properties \$157.26 per year for those communities served by County Fire. Oplinger said the annexation of Big Bear could be done with or without FP-5. The community would decide on the service level it wants. If that service level is achievable with the available funding collected via property taxes, then FP-5 would not be necessary.

Willis contends that if the current service level were possible now in Big Bear with the existing funding collected via the property tax revenue, there wouldn't be a need for Measure I.

He doesn't see the Big Bear community wanting a decrease in service levels. Measure I is FP-5, but Measure I asks for voter approval, he said.

Big Bear Fire is operating at a \$1.7 million deficit. County Fire expanded Service Zone FP-5 to offset a \$29 million deficit. Measure I also addresses the impact of the visitor population via a pass through revenue collection. San Bernardino County's FP-5 does not address the visitor population, nor does the county have the ability to collect additional funding from the ski resorts or lodging facilities, Oplinger said. The cost of fire service would be on the shoulders of the property owners entirely.

Personnel are the biggest part of any organization's budget, Willis said. This is true for any business. A business model allocates personnel funding based on sales. Personnel numbers are increased when sales increase.

For a fire department, the sales are calls for service. Personnel numbers have not increased even though calls for service have increased by 23.4 percent in the past five years.

Oplinger said County Fire resources include a large fleet management program to provide for reduced costs in purchases of new equipment, for example. It's buying in bulk, so to speak. Willis said Big Bear Fire, while a small department, will tag on to other departments for large purchases to take

advantage of the same buying power as a large department such as the county.

March 3 is election day. Monitor the results online at www.bigbeargrizzly.net.

http://www.bigbeargrizzly.net/news/measure-i-is-in-the-voters-hands/article_b7b6b582-5833-11ea-bcae-6bbba8715a9d.html

Big Bear Fire with and without Measure I funding

Judi Bowers, Big Bear Grizzly News

Posted: February 26, 2020

What are the affects of Measure I passing or not passing? We made a list for voters to look at and consider as they ponder whether to vote for or against the measure.

Measure I is the tax measure before voters in Big Bear that will create a community facilities district to augment funding for Big Bear Fire Authority. The measure is proposed to add approximately \$3.5 million annually, assessing property owners, ski resorts and lodging facilities.

The measure is possible under the Mello Roos Tax Law, which is the only law available to the Big Bear Fire Authority to create an assessment that covers the entire coverage area of the Fire Department.

If Measure I passes:

- Keeps all stations open and staffed correctly. Big Bear Fire has five stations: Big Bear Lake, Big Bear City, Sugarloaf, Baldwin Lake and the Airport/Airship station.
- Correctly staff all engines at 3 person staffing model.
- Increase daily staffing to 17 personnel per shift/per day.
- Adds an additional ambulance to serve Big Bear Valley.
- Allows for enhanced ability to expand or contract ambulance operations based on visitor impacts.
- Visitor market pays fair share of fire department operations via pass through revenue collection.
- Provides for repair and replacement of aging Fire Department equipment and stations.
- Maintain and reduce response times.
- Strengthen Fire Department emergency service to save lives and property in Big Bear Valley.
- Strengthen Fire Department capacity and capability. Capacity is the ability to expand and contract operations based on need. Capability is the ability to provide the adequate number of personnel to respond to larger incidents.

If Measure I fails:

- Fire Authority board direction for station closure. At least one station, Sugarloaf, is slated for closure.
- Reduce staffing from 13 to 11 per shift/per day.
- Increased response times by 2.5 minutes systemwide. Current average response time is 9 minutes,20 seconds.
- Level Zero occasions will increase above 2019 incidents of 138. Currently at approximately 100 more than expected; Level Zeros are not predictable nor isolated to certain seasons.
- Lose ability to add additional ambulances(expand or contract) based on visitor need.
- Recruitment and retention of personnel becomes problematic.

- Capacity and capability are reduced and impacted.
- Funding for repair and replacement of aging infrastructure and equipment is reduced.
- Limit ability to respond to mutual aid requests for large incidents due to limited personnel availability
- Administrative staffing for operations reduced.

Big Bear Fire Authority board decisions to consider if Measure I fails:

- Close at least one fire station immediately or by end of fiscal year (June 30).
- Wait for one year and go before voters again.
- Draft a request for proposal for bids from alternate service provider.

Which agency would draft RFP? The Big Bear Fire Authority, Big Bear Lake Fire Protection District or the Big Bear City Community Services District.

- Balance budget with no use of subsidized funds from dwindling reserves, reducing personnel/service levels and operations.

http://www.bigbeargrizzly.net/news/big-bear-fire-with-and-without-measure-i-funding/article_e5d2e986-5833-11ea-bc67-9f0da1c1e2c6.html

County Fire donates to firefighters in Mexico

Staff Writer, Big Bear Grizzly News

Posted: February 26, 2020



Ready for the donation. Pictured are, from left, San Felipe Fire Chief Ruben Osuna Beltran, County Fire Chief Dan Munsey and San Felipe Battalion Chief Juan Cortez. Photo courtesy of San Bernardino County Fire.

For the second time in three years, the **San Bernardino County Fire** Protection District was able to donate lifesaving fire apparatus to the San Felipe Fire Department in Baja California, Mexico. The San Bernardino County department donated a 1990 Pierce heavy rescue fire engine and a 1980 Mack water tender to the San Felipe department.

San Bernardino County Fire Captain Jay Dimoff brokered the relationship between the two departments and has served as the liaison. In April 2018, this relationship led to the donation of two fire engines deemed too old to remain in service in San Bernardino County.

Before being permanently decommissioned due to age, mileage and maintenance costs, the heavy rescue unit served the city of Grand Terrace, while the water tender served the community of Crest Forest. In a ceremony at Sierra Lakes Golf Club in Fontana, County Fire Chief Dan Munsey presented San Felipe Fire Chief Ruben Osuna Beltran and Battalion Chief Juan Cortez with the keys to both units.

“It’s a tremendous honor to be able to help our brothers and sisters in San Felipe with these donations,” Munsey said. “We are humbled by the opportunity to see these units that have faithfully served our residents

continue to serve and protect the residents of our friends in San Felipe. It is a great example of the type of cooperation and partnership that unites us as people beyond geographic borders.”

Dimoff worked alongside fire mechanic Tom Pitts and fleet supervisor Dale Sandoval to coordinate the donations. This included planning with the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors, as well as the Fontana and San Felipe Rotaries. San Bernardino County Fire donated the engines to the Fontana Rotary, which then donated them to the San Felipe Rotary to be put into service by the San Felipe Fire Department.

For the past several decades, Dimoff has been able to assist the San Felipe Fire Department with their overwhelming need for equipment through the donation of items like turnouts and other necessary equipment.

For more information on the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District, visit SBCFire.org.

http://www.bigbeargrizzly.net/news/county-fire-donates-to-firefighters-in-mexico/article_7cb903ea-5833-11ea-ba36-ab48f78d9dbf.html