

Fire districts ready to take another step to consolidate

By Nick Baptista, The Valley Springs News, Friday, March 1, 2013

Foothill and Jenny Lind fire protection districts are close to taking another step in their consolidation process.

The districts early next week will send the necessary consolidation paperwork to the Local Agency Formation Commission for consideration, Calaveras Consolidated Fire Chief Kim Olson told members of the Rotary Club of West Calaveras during the organization's weekly meeting on Thursday.

The club met at the Jenny Lind Fire Station to receive an update on local fire operations and present a \$1200 donation for the purchase of new firefighting and safety equipment.

The proposed merger calls for Foothill and Jenny Lind fire districts to be dissolved and the formation of the consolidated district covering 163 square miles. The proposed new district would encompass nearly a quarter of the county's landmass and a third of its population, approximately 15,000 residents.

The two boards of directors, with five members each, would be merged into a board of 10 members, but ultimately the consolidated district would settle with an odd number of board members.

Olson said he hopes the consolidation process will be complete by July to run in line with the new fiscal year.

LAFCO is an independent agency created by state legislation to ensure changes in governmental organizations occur in a manner that facilitates efficient and quality delivery of services and preserves agricultural land resources.

The consolidation process includes public hearings before LAFCO determines whether to grant the request.

The chief said the insurance industry is re-calculating home insurance rates based on mileage from the nearest fire station and water supply.

The Wallace area could see substantial rate increases due to these factors, he said, but Calaveras Consolidated is looking at the need for a station in the area.

He said a local landowner has indicated an interest in providing property and building a station the district could lease.

"That would be a great option, but we need to determine how we can pay for it," he added.

The controversial state fire “fee” or tax was also discussed. Olson said the state receives an estimated \$1.3 million from homeowners in the Foothill and Jenny Lind areas and none of the money comes back to the two districts.

With consolidation moving forward, the fire districts have established a committee to develop long-term planning, Olson said. Eventually establishing ambulance and advance life support service is an area for consideration.

He mentioned a recent incident where firefighters were performing CPR for 25 minutes before an ambulance arrived.

When asked whether the \$1.3 million new going to the state would be enough to cover EMS operations within the consolidated district, he said “yes.”