

# Fire districts move ahead with consolidation plans

By Nick Baptista/ The Valley Springs News/ December 7, 2012

Foothill and Jenny Lind fire protection districts in the next two weeks are poised to take another step in their consolidation process.

The first of two public hearings moving the consolidation process forward is scheduled for 7 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 12, at the Burson fire station, 3255 Helisma Road.

Wednesday's public hearing before the Foothill Fire Protection District Board of Directors is on a resolution requesting the Local Agency Formation Commission to begin proceedings to re-organize the two districts into one- the Calaveras Consolidated Fire Protection District.

A similar public hearing is scheduled for 7 p.m. Wed., Dec. 19, in front of the Jenny Lind Fire Protection District Board of Directors at the Jenny Lind station, 6501 Jenny Lind Road.

If all goes according to plan, the two districts could be consolidated by mid-2013, said Consolidated Fire Chief Kim Olson.

Earlier this year, the two districts merged their operations into what is now called the Calaveras Consolidated Fire Protection Joint Powers Authority.

The merger process has been in the works for nearly two years and the first substantial change took place May 1 when Foothill Chief Michael Siligo retired and Foothill contracted with Jenny Lind for administrative services.

The joint powers authority was the second step in the process with each district retaining its board of directors, but all 10 directors meeting once a month as a separate board overseeing the Joint Powers Authority. The first meeting of the Calaveras Consolidated Joint Powers Authority board took place on July 2.

The joint powers authority has not been idle as the move toward consolidation progresses. The authority recently purchased two used fire engines and entered into an agreement with the Valley Springs Public Utility District to buy the site of the Valley Springs fire station.

Purchase of the property at 126 Highway 12 is an amicable ending to what at times had been a heated subject between fire officials and the utility district.

The community many years ago built the fire station on PUD land and Foothill Fire Protection District was leasing the site for \$1 a year.

Due to the arrangement, plans to improve the station were in limbo and back in 2008, the utility district had an offer of \$220,000 by a private party to purchase the property.

Foothill officials at the time contended the utility district had to honor the \$1 lease and could not sell the property to a private party.

The deal is \$50,000 for the property and recognizes the fire station as an asset belonging to the fire district.

The utility district will receive a down payment of \$10,000 and carry paper for the remaining \$40,000 payable over the next ten years, Olsen said.

The price for the land was arrived through an appraisal looking at comparable sales, Olsen said, and sale of the property allows Calaveras Consolidated to move forward with some much-needed modifications to the station.

The first project is to raise the openings to the Valley Springs station's bays so taller apparatus can be parked inside and it eventually will be remodeled to provide living accommodations for firefighters.

The Burson station was improved earlier this year to house firefighters around the clock.

However, the majority of night calls are within the Valley Springs portion of the district, Olsen said, so it makes sense to have living accommodations there as well.

The two slightly used Type III engines were purchased for \$158,800 total from the San Ramon Fire District and replace two much-older and less reliable Type IIIs.

The two new Type 3s have 18,000 and 20,000 miles between them and were well maintained, Olsen said.

Type IIIs are high-profile, 4-wheel drive engines designed to fight wildland fires and cost in the neighborhood of \$300,000 new, the chief said.

The Type IIIs are also used for mutual aid and statewide strike teams when requested.

The two older engines had mechanical problems when sent out on strike teams, the chief added, and eventually will be sold.

The two San Ramon engines were purchased through an eBay-like website devoted to surplus public equipment.

The purchase price was well below a board-approved spending cap, Olsen added.

"It's used stuff in good condition and that's the way to do it and save money," he said.

The two new Type IIIs were featured in last week's Valley Springs Area Business Association Christmas Parade.