

# Foothill-Jenny Lind fire merger approved

**By Nick Baptista/ The Valley Springs News/ May 22, 2013**

Consolidation of Foothill and Jenny Lind fire protection districts into one entity should be completed by July 1 when the new fiscal year begins.

Calaveras County's Local Agency Formation Commission has adopted a resolution disbanding the two separate districts and reforming them as one called the Calaveras Consolidated Fire Protection District.

The consolidated district will cover the west Calaveras communities of Burson, Campo Seco, Jenny Lind, La Contenta, Milton, Valley Springs, and Wallace.

The vote Monday evening was 6-0 with one member absent, District 5 Supervisor Darren Spellman.

"We're shooting for the end of the fiscal year," Foothill Board President David Sant said when questioned about when he thought the overall transition would be finished.

Final maps and some other paperwork need to be completed after LAFCo's vote.

Monday's public hearing on the consolidation proposal lasted less than an hour, with the vast majority of testimony in favor of the merger.

Roger Stugelmeyer of Burson had some questions concerning the consolidation and asked whether the matter should be decided by a vote of the constituents. He asked the commission to consider the issue "very carefully before making any decisions."

Consolidation would be "the most wonderful gift you could give to the people of Calaveras County," said Alice Raine, a former Jenny Lind board member and volunteer.

The districts have had their "squabbles" in the past, she said, but she was impressed with the progress the two districts have made since embarking on the path toward consolidation.

Roy Estakhri, a fire captain and Calaveras Consolidated Firemen's Association president, spoke in favor of the merger.

Since beginning the move to consolidate by forming a joint powers authority, firefighting operations have become "more efficient," Estakhri said, "and we've accomplished more than I could have believed."

The level of training has increased and those enhance the health and safety of the firefighters, he added, and Calaveras Consolidated is gaining the reputation as one of the best agencies around so volunteers are lining up to join.

Deputy Chief Jason Robitaille said service delivery standards have improved since the joint powers authority began operation in July of last year.

Full-time firefighters have increased from one to four and response times have been reduced by 33 percent in the past 10 months.

The proposed merger was widely publicized, Sant said, with fire officials briefing service clubs and business organizations.

“We’ve insured the community knows what’s going on,” he said, with public hearings, a total of 12 newspaper articles, and the item being at the top of each district’s agenda during the process.

Consolidation and total integration removes some obstacles concerning logistics, finance and personnel, Sant said.

The merger allows the consolidated fire district to look at eventually placing a much-needed fire station in Wallace, something Foothill could not have done on its own, he added.

A consolidated district could focus on long-term planning, he said, and one of its earliest moves would be to put together a planning committee to get involved in strategic planning and look at issues such as level of service.

Some commission members expressed satisfaction with the district’s methodic approach toward consolidation.

“I think it’s a great idea,” said Commissioner Anita Paque.

“This has been a terrific accomplishment,” said Commissioner Jack Lynch.

“Facts are what they are and the commission clearly saw the benefit,” Sant said after the vote.

“When it makes sense and it’s right, it’s going to happen,” Calaveras Consolidated Fire Chief Kim Olsen said following the vote.