

Deal to enhance San Pablo fire protection near final

By Tom Lochner West County Times Article Launched: 08/29/2008 07:41:13 PM PDT

The San Pablo City Council will decide Tuesday whether to spend \$58,333 a month for enhanced fire protection and emergency medical service this year, ratifying a tentative deal between the city and Contra Costa County.

The allocation, which works out to \$700,000 a year, would allow the Contra Costa County Fire District, which covers San Pablo, to post a fourth firefighter at Station 70 near City Hall.

That is less than the county fire district and Firefighters Local 1230 originally sought.

The county wanted San Pablo to assume the entire cost of a second fire company that had operated out of Station 70 since late last year under a pilot program but with no permanent funding.

That would have permanently brought the staffing at Station 70 to six firefighters in two engine companies.

The bill would have been \$1.5 million a year, or the difference between the approximately \$2.4 million-a-year cost of a second engine company and the \$840,000 the county fire district collected last year in San Pablo property taxes.

But the city balked and proposed instead to pay American Medical Response \$700,000 a year to post an ambulance with a crew of two in San Pablo 24/7.

The county countered with a proposal to contract with the Richmond Fire Department to operate Station 70 with a single three-person engine. Three Richmond stations on San Pablo's periphery are closer to Station 70 than the nearest county station in El Sobrante; the county paid Richmond about \$180,000 last year for automatic aid, which San Pablo reimbursed.

The compromise now being considered, hammered out by Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia, San Pablo City Manager Brock Arner, county Fire Chief Keith Richter and Richmond Fire Chief Michael Banks, calls for Richmond to assume dispatch for Station 70. That would eliminate the current delay of two minutes on average to transfer 911 calls from Richmond's dispatch to the county's. All 911 calls dialed from San Pablo land lines go to Richmond, which also dispatches for El Cerrito and Kensington.

The allocation to be considered by the council Tuesday would be for fiscal 2008-09 only and would need to be renewed annually. City officials anticipate stopping the payments after fiscal 2010-11 unless a future council decides otherwise. Tax increments currently captured by the San Pablo Redevelopment Agency will start going to the county and the fire district beginning in 2011-12, according to the council resolution.