

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

ContraCostaTimes.com

East Contra Costa fire officials ready to close two stations

By Rowena Coetsee
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 06/08/2010 08:39:31 AM PDT

Updated: 06/08/2010 08:29:31 PM PDT

OAKLEY — Local fire officials are poised to close two stations while they ponder whether a tax measure could stabilize the cash-strapped agency.

Despite residents' pleas to reconsider, East Contra Costa Fire District directors decided Monday that next year's budget should be based on six fire stations instead of the eight that now exist and reflect 48 firefighting positions rather than 54.

The loss of positions doesn't mean layoffs but rather cuts in overtime pay.

The fire district currently has 43 full-time firefighters who fill the equivalent of 54 positions by working extra hours.

Although the board hasn't yet decided which facilities would close, the most likely targets are on Bethel Island, in Discovery Bay or Byron's site, said acting fire Chief Hugh Henderson after the meeting.

Looking to close a nearly \$3 million deficit, directors will reconvene at 6:30 p.m. June 29 to adopt the 2010-11 spending plan. The special meeting will be in Oakley City Hall's council

chamber at 3231 Main St.

Expenses for 2010-11 are projected to be \$11 million, with income of just over \$8 million.

The proposed budget also doesn't include money the fire district has been paying the state to operate a station in the Marsh Creek and Morgan Territory areas on its behalf from Nov. 15 to May 15. During that period, the station would be closed.

Directors also plan to discuss in more detail the possibility of putting a parcel

tax measure on the ballot as early as November to ease the fire district's financial crunch.

As property values have plummeted, so has that source of tax revenue, which comprises nearly all the fire district's income.

Residents repeatedly exhorted board members to consider every other option and spend down reserves before closing any stations.

The longer response times could have disastrous consequences, particularly right now on the cusp of fire season, they argued.

People will die and homes and businesses will burn, said one woman.

Bethel Island residents wondered how quickly the many seniors there would receive medical aid for a heart attack or stroke if the station there closed.

What's more, a natural disaster could damage the only road to and from the island, blocking access by fire engines from other parts of East County, they

Advertisement



SAVE up to 64%

Plus, get
3 FREE Gifts



Special Code: 45069ZWN

To Order: www.OmahaSteaks.com/print71 or call 1-877-586-4455

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

ContraCostaTimes.com

said.

Do not set us afloat without a station, said resident Olga Jones.

But fire officials reluctantly told the near-capacity crowd at City Hall that they don't have the luxury of time: If they do nothing, the agency will run out of money toward the end of 2012-13, they said.

Director Kevin Romick added that he and his colleagues must be prepared to make unpopular decisions if they're going to ask residents to pay more for fire protection.

Reach Rowena Coetsee at 925-779-7141.

Advertisement

Own a new computer for just \$29.99* per week!

And improve your credit score at the same time!

Give us a call today!

1-877-294-3988

*Prices start at
\$29.99 but
may vary by model.



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™