

Fire district assessment narrowly passes

July 2, 2021



After initially failing due to a miscount, the Crescent City Fire Protection District's benefit assessment vote has narrowly passed in a recount.

The preliminary results show 50.01% of voters were in favor of the assessment and 49.99% opposed. Results go to the CCFPD Board of Directors to be certified July 12.

Fire Chief Bill Gillespie said the passed assessment will allow the fire department to continue operating without reducing services.

"When the original count came out not in favor of the fire district, we began the process of working to determine where we would have to start making cuts in order to stretch the funding we had," he said.

Gillespie said they were looking into selling response vehicles, even entire fire stations, to supplement cashflow. He said the fire district had about two years of operations left before their reserve funds dried up.

The assessment will generate more than \$420,000 per year for the fire district, beginning in fiscal year 2022. The district currently collects \$42 per single-family residence, however, with a 2006 assessment ending this

year, that number would have dropped to \$24. The assessment will increase cost per single-family residence to \$98, according to a CCFPD report.

Gillespie said the department plans to use these funds for developments such as a 24-hour volunteer staffing program, meaning, firefighters would live-in at the station on a rotating basis, in order to provide a more rapid response to emergency calls. Additionally, the department is looking to add more paid positions. Currently, the fire chief and one administrative position are the only paid positions at the department.

Not everyone is celebrating the result though.

Last Thursday, about 20 people gathered outside the Crescent City Fire Station on Washington Street to protest the assessment and the recount.

The protestors also called for the resignations of the CCFPD Board of Directors, who ordered the recount on June 17 after learning one “yes” vote was accidentally placed in the “no” pile.

Roger Gitlin, co-organizer and former Del Norte County Supervisor, said the weighted voting system, which gave voters with greater property value more say, was unfair.

“I think [it should be] one man, one vote,” said Gitlin.

If the ballots were not weighted, the benefit assessment would have failed by 18 votes — 876 to 858.

Gitlin said he is opposed to the assessment because he believes Del Norte residents are already over-taxed.

“The public cannot be absorbing all these taxes and fees...you keep doing that, and the public is beleaguered,” said Gitlin.