

Council votes to support proposed property assessment hike

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Update:

The print version of this story in The Triuplicate incorrectly stated the proposed rate would be on top of \$98 annually assessed to single-family homes in 1987. The correct amount, as stated below, is \$24.

Already hoping voters approve its own proposed sale tax increase, the Crescent City Council unanimously voted Sept. 7 to support the Crescent Fire Protection District's proposed increase on property assessments.

The Crescent Fire Protection District (CFPD) Board of Directors mailed ballots to its constituents the first week of September, seeking to replace a 2006 property assessment that sunsets in 2021.

The CFPD is seeking the rate hike to help it implement a hybrid fire department using paid staff and volunteers.

According to the CFPD, an annual rate of \$74 would be assigned to single-family homes within the fire protection district for services. The proposed rate would be on top of \$24 annually assessed to single-family homes in 1987.

The measure would also establish a seven-member citizens oversight committee comprised of property owners within the fire protection district.

City Manager Eric Wier explained four properties associated with the city's water system, but are located outside its boundaries, would also fall under the proposed property assessment hike.

Wier said if property owners within the fire protection district approve the proposed assessment in October, the city would pay \$325.60 annually for the four water system properties.

These properties include Wonder Stump Road and Railroad Avenue booster stations, a 1.5 million gallon water storage tank on Amador Street and a 4 million gallon water storage tank on Washington Boulevard.

Wier said the proposed assessment would cost the city \$81.40 per property per year.

The proposed property tax assessment comes to Crescent City voters a month before they consider Measure S — a proposed 1 percent sales tax increase to help the city pay for its portion of the hybrid fire department plan, address Police Department staffing issues, pay for road repairs and pay to keep the Fred Endert Municipal Pool open.

The CFPD's master plan to install a hybrid fire department would cost a total of \$662,000 — a \$307,000 cost to Crescent City and \$355,000 for the Fire Protection District's portion.

Fire Chief Bill Gillespie told the City Council the hybrid department would create a "sleeper program" where three paid captains would oversee a crew of volunteers on call for 24-hour shifts. He added that if the 2006 assessment isn't replaced, when it expires the district would be left with just two to three years of operational capital.

"Right now, we're just in the month of September and we're at well over 60 calls for service and it's only the eighth," Gillespie said. "In August we responded to 209 calls for service and 219 calls in July between the city and the district. We're well on the path to eclipse 2,000 calls for service again this year."

Gillespie said government properties hadn't been assessed for property taxes in the past, adding the Board of Directors decided to include government entities in the proposed assessment reasoning that they receive the same benefits as other property owners.

"They realized there was a whole host of properties you would think fell under an assessment — restaurants on the waterfront, industrial locations along the waterfront, a number of businesses that were exempted because they were owned by a government agency," he said. "In the past, we have had responses to a number of previously or currently exempted facilities along the waterfront, in the harbor district and including some of the properties that are listed tonight for consideration."

The voting period for the CFPD's proposed property tax assessment ends Oct. 12.

The district will hold a public hearing that evening and use a third party to tally the votes and report the results to the Board of Directors, Gillespie said.