County of Santa Cruz

GENERAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT
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NANCY GORDON, DIRECTOR

APPROVED AND FILED
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
DATE: 5/4/10
COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ
SUSAN A. MAURIELLO
EX-OFFICIO CLERK OF THE BOARD
BY _____ DEPUTY

April 26, 2010

Regular Agenda: May 4, 2010

Board of Supervisors
701 Ocean Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Report on County Fire Public Opinion Survey

Dear Members of the Board:

On January 26, 2010, your Board authorized staff to hire a contractor to conduct a public opinion survey regarding County Fire funding issues, and on April 13, 2010, directed staff to return today with the results of that survey and a survey-based recommendation for funding County Fire in the future. Gene Bregman of Gene Bregman and Associates (the contractor) will give a presentation on the survey results to your Board at today's meeting.

After further staff research and to save money, Mr. Bregman was directed to survey 400 likely voters within Santa Cruz County Service Area 48 (CSA 48) instead of the split sample survey of 300 voters and 300 property owners. These survey results have a margin of error plus or minus 2.9% to 4.9%. While the survey revealed that seven out of eight respondents gave a highly favorable job rating to fire fighting services provided by Santa Cruz County, the survey results also demonstrated that there is significant confusion over the agency perceived to be responsible for responding to emergencies. More than half of those surveyed stated that CAL Fire is responsible for providing firefighting and emergency medical services in their area, with the remainder of surveyed voters split evenly between Santa Cruz County or the local volunteer fire department.

In addition, more than three-fourths of the likely voters surveyed agreed that, in concept, it is at least "somewhat important" (51 percent said "very important") that five fire stations remain open all year, and more than two-thirds said that there is at least "some need" for additional money to improve and properly maintain adequate local firefighting services in their areas of the County. Although the survey revealed that at present it is unlikely voters will approve the amount necessary to fully fund County Fire as described in the January 26, 2010 letter to your Board, the results also suggest voters may approve an amount sufficient to enable County Fire to, at a minimum, continue with current staffing levels and number of stations until more complete funding can be attained.

While these results are favorable overall, and the contractor believes "prospects for Santa Cruz County Fire to obtain voter approval for a tax for fire protection and emergency medical services are very positive," in light of voter confusion regarding Santa Cruz County Fire, particularly its

EXHIBIT A

makeup and role, the current state of the economy and the two-thirds vote required for passage in a special election, it is clear that a concerted, intensive public education effort will be critical to voters understanding what is being proposed.

As you will recall in the January 26, 2010 letter to your Board, staff estimated that with careful fiscal management, funding for County Fire should be adequate through fiscal year 2011-12 with some specific actions: postponement of as many expenditures as is practical in view of operational efficacy; suspension of the vehicle replacement plan commencing in fiscal year 2010-11; and continued staffing at the five stations with two firefighting personnel. Since the Fire Fund balance provides some latitude regarding the timing of a special election, and because public education is strongly indicated, staff recommends that the soonest a special election be considered for County Fire is May 3, 2011. The intervening months will provide an opportunity for a coordinated public education effort; because this component is essential, staff recommends retaining a firm to assist with the pubic education effort.

It is therefore RECOMMENDED that your Board accept this report on the County Fire public opinion survey, and direct staff to return with a cost estimate for conducting a May 3, 2011 election, including a public education component, at your Board's June 15, 2010 meeting.

Very truly yours,

Nancy Gordon
Director

RECOMMENDED:

SUSAN A. MAURIELLO
County Administrative Officer

NCG/DM

Attachment: Bregman survey results

cc: County Fire Department
Fire Department Advisory Commission
Gene Bregman and Associates

GENE BREGMAN & ASSOC. March 19, 2010 0387

N =400 Time Began_____
Time Ended_____

Santa Cruz County Fire Study 2010
(FINAL) Minutes_____

Hello, I'm _____ from GBA, an opinion research firm. We're conducting a survey about issues that concern the residents of Santa Cruz County. May I speak with _____. (MUST SPEAK WITH PERSON LISTED - OTHERWISE MAKE APPOINTMENT OR TERMINATE.) We are not selling anything and all your answers will be kept confidential.

1. First, would you say that the quality of life over the past 2 or 3 years in your area of Santa Cruz County has gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same? (IF BETTER/WORSE, ASK): Is that much (better/worse) or somewhat (better/worse)?

Much better	4%
Somewhat better	9%
Somewhat worse	21%
Much worse	14%
Stayed about the same	50%
DK/NA	2%

2. Next, please tell me how you would rate the job being done by Santa Cruz County government in providing each of the following services to local residents: as excellent, good, only fair or poor? (ROTATE)

	EXC	GOOD	ONLY FAIR	POOR	DON'T KNOW
a. Local law enforcement services	12%	51%	23%	9%	6%
b. Firefighting	40%	47%	10%	2%	2%
c. Emergency medical services	20%	43%	17%	3%	18%
d. Maintaining local streets and roads	4%	21%	35%	38%	3%
e. Providing services for seniors	6%	26%	20%	7%	41%
f. Providing health care services for the uninsured and under-insured	4%	24%	16%	16%	41%
g. Providing programs that fight childhood obesity	4%	12%	20%	14%	52%

3. From what you know, who is responsible for providing firefighting and emergency medical services in your local area of Santa Cruz County? (DO NOT READ LIST) (MORE THAN ONE ANSWER IS ACCEPTABLE)

State of California/CALFIRE/Calif. Dept. of Forestry & Fire	53%
Santa Cruz County	24%
Local volunteers/Volunteer fire department	25%
Other (LIST)_____	4%
DK/NA	9%

4. Next, please tell me how you would rate the job each of the following did handling last year's wildfires: as excellent, good, only fair or poor? (ROTATE)

	EXC	GOOD	ONLY FAIR	POOR	DON'T KNOW
a. CAL-FIRE, also known as the State of California Department of Forestry and Fire	57%	34%	7%	1%	2%
b. Santa Cruz County Fire	41%	34%	8%	1%	16%
c. Local volunteer fire departments	53%	28%	7%	1%	11%

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5. Generally speaking, how much need is there for additional money to improve and properly maintain adequate local firefighting services in your area of Santa Cruz County: a great need, some need, a little need, or no real need?

Great need	30%
Some need	41%
Little need	10%
No need	12%
(DON'T READ) DK/NA	8%

6. And generally speaking, how much need is there for additional money to improve and properly maintain adequate local emergency medical services in your area of Santa Cruz County: a great need, some need, a little need, or no real need?

Great need	24%
Some need	41%
Little need	12%
No need	11%
(DON'T READ) DK/NA	13%

7. Currently, during the high fire danger season of June through October, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, also now known as CALFIRE, is responsible for fully staffing 7 fire stations in part of the unincorporated areas of Santa Cruz County, including the area where you live. During the rest of the year, two of the stations are closed and the County has a contract with CalFire to keep the other five stations open. How important do you feel it is for these 5 fire stations to remain operational outside of the 5 months of fire season: very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?

Very important	51%
Somewhat important	31%
Not too important	11%
Not at all important	4%
DK/NA	4%

8. Currently, property owners are paying a fee for fire protection services that amounts to about $125 per year for most residences in your community. Please tell me, in general, how acceptable it would be to pay increased fees for local fire protection services if you knew the money was going to be used for each of the following purposes. Would each one be a very acceptable, somewhat acceptable, somewhat unacceptable or very unacceptable reason to pay an increased fire protection fee? (ROTATE)

		VERY ACC.	S.W. ACC.	S.W. UNACC.	VERY UNACC.	DON'T KNOW
a.	To prevent a reduction in the number of firefighters on duty on any time	30%	41%	11%	15%	4%
b.	To replace old and outdated fire engines and other firefighting vehicles	32%	37%	15%	13%	4%
c.	To repair and maintain current local fire station facilities	33%	43%	10%	11%	3%
d.	To provide more effective emergency medical services	38%	38%	8%	12%	4%
e.	To provide more effective firefighting services	44%	30%	12%	9%	6%
f.	To meet increased costs so there is no decrease in local fire protection and emergency medical services for the community	36%	39%	11%	10%	5%
g.	To provide the safety clothing and equipment that firefighters are required to have	47%	32%	10%	10%	2%
h.	To provide for improved recruitment, training and retention of our local volunteer firefighters	39%	37%	12%	10%	3%
i.	To maintain rapid response times for medical emergencies, accidents, and fires	52%	31%	6%	9%	2%

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9a. In an upcoming election there may be a ballot measure affecting Santa Cruz County Fire. Let me read you the language of a possible ballot measure:

"To maintain current local fire protection and emergency medical services, including response times for fire and medical emergencies, maintain the number of on-duty firefighters, provide firefighters with modern, up-to-date equipment, repair and maintain local fire stations, and ensure that all County fire stations are open all year, shall Santa Cruz County be authorized to levy a tax of $120 per year on each parcel of property in the County Fire Service Area for a period of 6 years?"

If the election were held today on this measure, would you vote "yes," in favor of it or "no," to oppose it? **(IF YES/NO ASK:)** "Is that definitely (yes/no) or probably (yes/no)?" **(RECORD UNDER Q.9a, BELOW)**

9b. (ASK ONLY IF "NO" OR "DON'T KNOW" IN Q.9A): How about if the tax were $96 for each parcel of property, would you vote "yes" or "no" on this measure? **(IF YES/NO ASK:)** "Is that definitely (yes/no) or probably?" **(RECORD UNDER Q.9b, BELOW)**

9c. (ASK ONLY IF "NO" OR "DON'T KNOW" IN Q.9B): How about if the tax were $60 for each parcel of property, would you vote "yes" or "no" on this measure? **(IF YES/NO ASK:)** "Is that definitely (yes/no) or probably?" **(RECORD UNDER Q.9c, BELOW)**

	Q.9A	Q.9B	Q.9C
Definitely yes	43%	44%	47%
Probably yes	22%	25%	30%
Probably no	10%	9%	6%
Definitely no	20%	18%	15%
(DON'T READ) DK/NA	5%	4%	3%

10. Next, I would like to read you some statements that may be made by people who favor a tax measure for local fire protection services. Please tell me whether each statement would make you much more likely to favor the measure, somewhat more likely to favor the measure, or whether the statement makes no difference to you one way or the other. **(ROTATE)**

		MUCH MORE LIKELY TO FAVOR	SMWT MORE LIKELY TO FAVOR	MAKES NO DIFF	DK/NA
a.	All the money raised by this measure will be used here for fire protection in our local community	47%	28%	23%	3%
b.	If local stations are forced to close, response times in case of a fire or medical emergency will increase for some people by anywhere from 15 minutes to over an hour, depending on where you live	43%	33%	22%	2%
c.	If the measure passes, we can maintain the current recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters	41%	32%	25%	3%
d.	Without this funding, fire insurance premiums for many residents are likely to increase, most likely by an amount greater than the proposed tax increase	39%	30%	24%	7%
e.	For victims of heart attacks, strokes accidents and other emergencies, minutes can be the difference between life and death; this measure will maintain rapid emergency responses for the safety of our families and community	49%	29%	20%	3%
f.	Currently, the clothing, equipment and facilities used by our professional and volunteer firefighters are reaching state and national safety standards recommended for replacement; this measure will help us meet those important safety standards	39%	35%	24%	2%
g.	We need this measure if we want to have firefighting services that are similar to the rest of Santa Cruz County	35%	33%	29%	4%
h.	Without this money the County will likely be forced to reduce the level of service, including reducing the number of firefighters at local fire stations	42%	32%	25%	2%
i.	The national standard for firefighting vehicles usually puts them into reserve status after 15 years; most of County Fire's vehicles are more than 15 years old, with some more than 30 years old	35%	37%	26%	2%
j.	Because our fire engines are old, they need more frequent repairs, are more likely to be out of service, and cost more to repair as replacement parts become harder to find	37%	34%	27%	3%
k.	Many of the people living in the County Fire Response Area are located in rural communities, where response times are already slower than in urban areas; any reduction in service could literally be a matter of life or death	44%	31%	23%	3%
l.	When compared to residents throughout the rest of Santa Cruz County, even with this tax increase, fewer of our tax dollars will be going for firefighting and emergency medical services	34%	33%	27%	7%
m.	We never know when a fire or medical emergency will occur; this measure will ensure that firefighters are standing by 24 hours a day when you or a loved one needs them the most	47%	29%	22%	2%

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11a. Now that you know more about a possible ballot measure, if the election were held today would you vote "yes," in favor of or "no," to oppose a measure:

"To maintain current local fire protection and emergency medical services, including response times for fire and medical emergencies, replacing old and out-of-date firefighting equipment, repairing and maintaining local fire stations, and ensuring that all County fire stations are open all year, shall Santa Cruz County be authorized to levy a tax of $120 per year on each parcel of property in the County Fire Service Area for a period of 6 years?"

If the election were held today on this measure, would you vote "yes," in favor of it or "no," to oppose it? **(IF YES/NO ASK:)** "Is that definitely (yes/no) or probably (yes/no)?" **(RECORD UNDER Q.11a, BELOW)**

11b. (ASK ONLY IF "NO" OR "DON'T KNOW" IN Q.11A): How about if the tax were $96 for each parcel of property, would you vote "yes" or "no" on this measure? **(IF YES/NO ASK:)** "Is that definitely (yes/no) or probably?" **(RECORD UNDER Q.11b, BELOW)**

11c. (ASK ONLY IF "NO" OR "DON'T KNOW" IN Q.11B): How about if the tax were $60 for each parcel of property, would you vote "yes" or "no" on this measure? **(IF YES/NO ASK:)** "Is that definitely (yes/no) or probably?" **(RECORD UNDER Q.11c, BELOW)**

	Q.11A	Q.11B	Q.11C
Definitely yes	49%	49%	52%
Probably yes	18%	21%	24%
Probably no	12%	9%	6%
Definitely no	21%	19%	15%
(DON'T READ) DK/NA	2%	2%	3%

12. Next, I am going to read two statements that summarize the opinions of those people who favor or oppose a parcel tax for firefighting and emergency medical services. (READ STATEMENTS; ALTERNATE ORDER)

A. Those people in favor of the parcel tax say that the disastrous fires of the last few years show how much we need the best firefighting services possible in this area, with properly maintained equipment that is the best we can afford, keeping all fire stations open, and maintaining response times that are as rapid as possible since even a matter of a few minutes can be the difference between life and death when emergency medical services are needed. We also need this money because local equipment, staffing and training already fall short of national and state standards, and are not equal to the level of service provided in the rest of Santa Cruz County.

B. Those people who are opposed to the parcel tax say that this is another empty threat since two years ago, before voters defeated another measure to raise our taxes, Santa Cruz County Fire threatened to close fire stations but no stations were closed. County Fire needs more money because they have mismanaged and wasted much of what they already have. They do not really need this money because they have a reserve of about one million dollars and should spend that before asking us to increase our taxes, especially during this recession, with people losing jobs and savings. And they are hiding the true cost of this measure since we already pay $125 a year for fire protection services and this measure would mean we will be paying more than $200 a year.

Now that you have heard a summary of the main reasons for supporting or opposing this parcel tax measure, if the election were held today, would you vote "yes" or "no" for a measure for a new parcel tax of [INTERVIEWER: READ LAST AMOUNT ASKED OF RESPONDENT IN Q.11A-C]? **(IF YES/NO ASK:)** "Is that definitely (yes/no) or probably?"

Definitely Yes	47%
Probably Yes	19%
Probably No	9%
Definitely No	19%
(DON'T READ)Undecided/DK/NA	7%

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13. Next, I'm going to read a list of people and organizations who might take a stand on a parcel tax measure for Santa Cruz County Fire. Please tell me if you feel each one's opinion on this issue would be very believable, somewhat believable, not too believable, or not at all believable. If you have never heard of the person or organization, or have no opinion about them, please tell me that too. (ROTATE)

	VERY BEL.	S.W. BEL.	N.T. BELV.	N.A.A. BELV.	NEVER HEARD/ NO OP.
a. Local volunteer firefighters	55%	30%	7%	4%	4%
b. CalFire firefighters	53%	35%	7%	4%	2%
c. Santa Cruz County Fire Chief	40%	33%	12%	8%	8%
d. Local doctors	28%	43%	12%	10%	7%
e. Local nurses	30%	43%	12%	8%	8%
f. Local public school teachers	23%	36%	320%	14%	8%
g. Local police, sheriffs or other law enforcement officers	33%	40%	14%	10%	4%
h. Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors	12%	34%	24%	22%	9%
i. Your member of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors	15%	34%	19%	20%	12%
j. Local business owners	17%	42%	18%	15%	8%
k. Leaders of senior citizens groups	21%	41%	17%	12%	10%
l. Local community organizations in your area	17%	44%	17%	11%	11%
m. Santa Cruz Sentinel newspaper	13%	34%	23%	20%	11%
n. Your local community newspaper or newsletter	18%	37%	18%	17%	10%
o. Homeowners whose homes were saved during recent fires	52%	28%	9%	8%	5%

Now for a few background questions:

14. Do you own or rent your home?

Own home	85%
Rent	14%
(DON'T READ) Refused	2%

15. For about how long now have you lived in Santa Cruz County? (DO NOT READ LIST)

Five years or less	8%
Six to ten years	13%
Eleven to fifteen years	12%
Sixteen to twenty	8%
More than 20 years	56%
Refused	3%

16. In what year were you born?

1992-1986 (18-24)	2%
1985-1981 (25-29)	3%
1980-1976 (30-34)	4%
1975-1971 (35-39)	5%
1970-1966 (40-44)	6%
1965-1961 (45-49)	10%
1960-1956 (50-54)	13%
1955-1951 (55-59)	17%
1950-1946 (60-64)	13%
1945 or earlier (65 & over)	24%
Refused	4%

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Gender: By observation

Male ---------- 50%
Female ---------- 50%

Name_____ Phone #_____

Address_____ Date_____

City_____ Precinct #_____

Interviewer_____ Zip Code (FROM SAMPLE)_____

Party Registration:

Democrat (D) ---------- 52%
Republican (R) ---------- 26%
Independents/Others ---------- 23%

Voting History:

5/09 ---------- 64%
11/08 ---------- 99%
6/08 ---------- 59%
2/08 ---------- 87%
11/06 ---------- 86%
6/06 ---------- 64%

Permanent Absentee:

Yes ---------- 38%
No ---------- 62%

Ever Voted Absentee:

Yes ---------- 65%
No ---------- 35%

Precinct #: _____

CBD BOSMAIL

From: CBD BOSMAIL
Sent: Friday, April 30, 2010 6:41 AM
To: CBD BOSMAIL
Subject: Agenda Comments

Meeting Date : 5/4/2010

Item Number : 53

Name : Glen Haimovitz

Email : glen@cyrun.com

Address : 435 Pineridge Rd
Bonny Doon, CA 95060

Phone : 831-458-1819

Comments :
I received the survey phone call and found it to be an extremely biased and unprofessional survey. I recorded the survey and even the surveyer agreed that the questions were biased and misleading. This survey should be thrown out as it will not serve a useful purpose.

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CBD BOSMAIL

From: CBD BOSMAIL
Sent: Monday, May 03, 2010 2:19 PM
To: CBD BOSMAIL
Subject: Agenda Comments

Meeting Date : 5/4/2010 **Item Number :** 53

Name : Russ Mackey **Email :** RMACKEY411@COMCAST.NET

Address : Bonny Doon **Phone :** Not Supplied

Comments :
Agenda Date May 4, 2010, Item #53

In re: Report on County Fire Public Opinion survey

Dear Members of the Board:

On January 26, 2010, at minute item 37.1, your Board accepted a report titled "County Fire Funding". That report stated that the amount of additional annual revenue required to "fully fund" County Fire was approximately $1,840,000.

The "fully funded" cost to individual taxpayers was calculated under the assumption that the increase would be based on a "benefit assessment", as is the case for the present CSA-48 fire fees. Under that scheme, a parcel with a residence would pay an additional $235 per year, based on 2 Fire-Flow Units.

The January 26 report quantified the number of Amador period fire stations that would be CLOSED if a less than "fully funding" increase of revenue were obtained:
$ 1,550,000 - CLOSE ONE STATION
$ 1,240,000 - CLOSE TWO STATIONS
$ 980,000 - CLOSE THREE STATIONS

Today you will receive a report on the survey conducted by Bregman & Associates. That survey DID NOT ask if residents would be willing to accept an increase of $ 235 per year on parcels with a residence. The greatest amount of increase queried was $120 and was described as applying to "each parcel of property in the County Fire Service Area for a period of 6 years."

It appears that a "parcel tax", rather than a "benefit assessment", is now being considered.

The amount of revenue that would be raised from a $120 "parcel tax" is NOT STATED in either the January 26 report or the current report. It is made clear that this level of tax increase will NOT "fully fund" County Fire.

The current report states, "..voters may approve an amount sufficient to enable County Fire to, at a minimum, continue with current staffing levels and number of stations UNTIL MORE COMPLETE FUNDING CAN BE ATTAINED." (emphasis added)

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It is noteworthy that the current $120 per parcel proposal addresses ONLY the staffing of Amador period stations by Cal Fire personnel. Ignored are issues raised in the January report: replacement of volunteer equipment, volunteer recruitment and retention, training, facilities, safety, medical and environmental expenses.

Applying a parcel count for CSA-48 that may be slightly out of date, and a $120 fee, I estimate that a "parcel tax" would raise about $1,393,000 and fall $447,000 per year short of "full funding". The exact amount needs to be disclosed.
Neither the current proposal, nor the January 26 report has been discussed by the Fire Department Advisory Commission at any publically announced and scheduled meeting. Both documents are attributable to "staff", which includes Cal Fire personnel. I remind your Board of a conclusion reached by the 2007/2008 Grand Jury,

"Because Cal Fire officers concurrently manage both state resources and those of County Fire, conflicts may arise when decisions are made to prioritize issues involving the state and county fire protection resources."

I ask that today's proposal be sent back for further development.

A series of public hearings must be conducted in order to determine if REAL residents, given REAL facts and REAL options are willing to fully fund County Fire. The REAL level of funding to be provided for both paid and volunteer programs, and disclosure of the level of service to be provided, must be included in every fire funding discussion.

The current proposal to seek a fee increase that requests less than "full funding" is not a good bargain for the residents of CSA-48. We deserve better.

Thank you for your consideration,

Russ Mackey
Bonny Doon

RMACKEY411@COMCAST.NET

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5/3/2010

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CBD BOSMAIL

From: cbdbosmail@co.santa-cruz.ca.us
Sent: Monday, May 03, 2010 10:12 PM
To: CBD BOSMAIL
Subject: Agenda Comments

Meeting Date : 5/4/2010 **Item Number :** 53

Name : Donita Springmeyer **Email :** donitaspringmeyer@comcast.net

Address : Not Supplied **Phone :** Not Supplied

Comments :
Board of Supervisors, Santa Cruz County

Re: Report on County Fire Public Opinion Survey
May 4, 2010 Agenda Item 53

Members of the Board of Supervisors:

I strongly support the importance of locally elected governing bodies providing the best fire and emergency medical service that a community can afford. As a senior citizen living in a remote rural area, I highly value consistent, local, and immediate emergency services. I also understand and support the importance of protecting the safety of the firefighters at all times.

I was telephoned during the subject public opinion survey conducted by Bregman and Associates. The survey offered inaccurate and misleading information and was designed to frighten voters into deciding to pay more tax to County Fire CSA 48. I have many criticisms of the survey, and I believe the results would have been even more negative, had truthful questions been utilized.

I urge you to DENY the staff recommendation offered today, which is ". to accept this report . and direct staff to return with a cost estimate for conducting a May 3, 2011 election, including a public education component, at your Board's June 15, 2010 meeting.".

I believe approval of that recommendation will initiate a repeat of the expensive actions (mistakes) leading up to the failed 2007 CSA 48 ballot. Repeating the same actions and using the same scare tactics can only be expected to produce the same results. Your Board spent between $75,000 and $100,000 of County Fire taxes for the 2007 failure ($25,000 to Bregman and Associates, and up to $50,000 for "public education" election flyers, plus the cost of the election).

On January 26, 2010 you again authorized contracting with Gene Bregman and Associates . in an amount not to exceed $30,000. Again, this is County Fire tax money that your Board is expending. It has come to my attention that the County process of obtaining the Bregman proposal is questionable. The proposal is addressed to Ms. Denise Muir, a Cal Fire employee. Did the County Purchasing Agent (General Services) request proposals for this service? Were there any other proposals? Did the contract specify who had authority to approve the survey questions, or was that just left up to sub-contractor Bregman after he was hired by CSA 48 contractor Cal Fire?

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I am compelled to criticize the public opinion survey tactics because I am now observing the same strategy in draft County Fire CSA 48 attempts at public education. The end result of dishonesty in 'public opinion surveys' and 'public education' flyers will be loss of credibility with taxpayers and/or voters. Hopefully, the Bonny Doon Fire District will be detached from County Fire before you hold another County Fire election, but I am concerned that residents of the other areas of County Fire also deserve both honest and accurate information, not threats and purposely disseminated misinformation.

A few of my criticisms of the public opinion survey are:

. Item 12.A. attempts to relate "the disastrous [wild land] fires of the last few years" to all suggested reasons to increase County Fire taxes. The truth is that those wild land fires occurred in State Responsibility Areas (SRA), all costs were therefore paid by the State Cal Fire, and this resulted in REVENUE to County Fire because the State paid rental on County equipment used on the fires. This question has no place in this questionnaire.

. Item 10.i states that some County Fire vehicles are more than 30 years old. The truth is that the oldest County Fire fire engine in service is 23 years old. It is a 1987 model assigned to the Bonny Doon Volunteer Fire Company. This is a repeat of inaccurate information from the previous attempted election.

. Item 10.a. states "All of the money raised by this measure will be used here for fire protection in our local community." The truth is that each year County Fire pays a Cal Fire "Administrative Charge" added to the Cal Fire contract amount. For 2009-2010 the 11% "Administrative Charge" is $242,501. That amount of money would equip about 50 volunteer firefighters, but instead of being used in Santa Cruz County Fire it goes directly to Cal Fire in Sacramento.

. Item 10.d. states "Without this funding, fire insurance premiums for many residents are likely to increase, most likely by an amount greater than the proposed tax increase." This is untrue. The truth is that insurance rates in rural areas are based on Insurance Services Office (ISO) ratings, and without a public water system and fire hydrants, the best rating possible is "8". Bonny Doon has an ISO "8" rate based on our Volunteer Fire capabilities. A tax increase is not a factor in ISO ratings.

. Item 11.a. states "To maintain current local fire protection and emergency medical services, including response times for fire and medical emergencies, replacing old and out-of-date firefighting equipment, repairing and maintaining local fire stations, and ensuring that all County fire stations are open all year, shall Santa Cruz County be authorized to levy a tax of $120 per year on each parcel of property in the County Fire Service Area for a period of 6 years?" If voter does not respond "yes", Item 11.b. asks if they would vote "yes" to $96. If voter does not respond "yes", Item 11.c. asks if they would vote "yes" to $60.

o One criticism of Item 11.a is that I doubt that the County can justify the above questions inquiring how much a voter will pay in view of the fact that a California State Supreme Court decision (Case S136468, Silicon Valley Taxpayers Association, Inc., vs. Santa Clara County Open Space Authority) concludes:

". an assessment calculation that works backward by starting with an amount taxpayers are likely to pay, and then determines an annual spending budget based thereon, does not comply with the law governing assessments, either before or after Proposition 218".

Taxes proposed in this questionnaire should have been related to specific levels of service, rather than offer a smorgasboard of charges with no specific service levels compared.

o A second criticism of Item 11.a is the claim that a parcel tax would result in ".ensuring that all County fire stations are open all year.". The truth is that the primary mission of Cal Fire staff under Amador contract to counties remains "wild land fire protection" anywhere in the State any time of year and that primary mission "shall receive priority over [Amador] agreements with counties" and "shall not be impaired".

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The State can assure staffing levels on "fire vehicles" assigned to Amador contract fire stations, but cannot assure the fire vehicles will be assigned to all Amador contract fire stations "all year". When a State fire vehicle is dispatched to another part of the State, Cal Fire can dispatch another engine crew to "move up and cover" the "closed" station. However, doing so leaves another area of County Fire uncovered.

Therefore, I ask your Board to not accept this questionnaire due to its faulty questions, faulty assumptions, and its bias toward Cal Fire interests.

Donita Springmeyer
Bonny Doon

May 2, 2010

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EXHIBIT A