

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST? WHY DO WE NEED IT?



Why is current property tax revenue insufficient for Felton Fire Protection District?

- **Since its formation as an agency in 1947, the percentage of property taxes Felton Fire receives has remained unchanged. While other local fire districts increased their tax rates before Proposition 13 passed in 1978 or voted for add-on tax measures later, Felton did not.** Felton Fire receives the second-lowest percentage of property tax in all of Santa Cruz County. While Zayante receives slightly less in base property taxes, Zayante has also voted in two tax measures to add to their property tax revenue stream. Despite our lowest revenue stream, Felton Fire has the second-highest call volume in SLV.
- The County and LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission) staff have both said FFPD's base percentage of property tax can't be changed; ballot measures or special benefit assessments like the one proposed are the only ways to increase tax revenue for this critically important service for our community.

Historically, FFPD Boards have been reluctant to raise taxes, but this is no longer realistic. Felton Fire faces significant financial needs, and the longer they are put off, the costlier some become:

- Maintenance and timely replacement of equipment - includes an engine 4 years past its replacement date. A new one costs between \$900,000 - \$1MM (twice what they were 10 years ago), with 1-2 years' lead time on orders. Used engines can be hard to find, and the savings typically don't justify the shortened lifespan. FFPD will have to scramble to find a used replacement if our engine becomes irreparable, as recently happened to another local district.
- FFPD needs to hire a chief; we have an interim, part-time chief, who has donated his time and more recently accepted a small amount of pay, but the situation is not sustainable as he has a full-time job elsewhere.
- The station is in need of repairs, maintenance, and significant updates, including adequate accommodation for firefighters sleeping at the firehouse.
- As is the case with communities throughout the country, it is more challenging now to find local, long-term volunteer firefighters. A paid crew 24/7, with volunteer firefighters adding their contributions, aligns staffing with current needs.

The Proposed Solution: Proposition 218 Special Benefits Assessment

FFPD has chosen the funding method that requires the strictest proof of need and the most rigorous oversight of funds use - a Proposition 218 special benefits assessment. The process, created in 1996, follows rules set out in the California Constitution.

Proof of Need, Division of Costs: A Prop 218 assessment requires a third-party analysis, in this case by SCI Consulting Services, a top expert in California public funding. Using strict formulas to calculate the benefit each property will receive, costs are distributed fairly based on that benefit. For example, properties near wildlands or closer to the station are weighted differently than small downtown homes or remote hillside acreage. To be as fair as possible, votes are also weighted - based on how much a property owner will pay if the assessment passes. **Each owner will know exactly what they will pay because it will appear on their ballot.**

PUTTING THE COST IN CONTEXT

Those of us here during the CZU fire saw how critical local firefighting teams were to saving our community. Fast, local emergency response can mean the difference between life and death in a medical emergency and the difference in a home that's burned or standing. A nearby fire station and swift response can also impact ISO ratings that affect home insurance availability and cost.

Hopefully, we can all agree that a dedicated, local firefighting force is worth the investment of at least what we spend on our trash and recycling. **For the vast majority of Felton homes, the fire assessment will cost less than current recycling and solid waste fees.**

HOW IS THE ASSESSMENT DIVIDED AMONG FELTON PROPERTIES?

572 homes will pay \$583.89/year
79 homes will pay \$605.37
1,133 homes will pay \$641.64 per year
61 homes will pay \$665.28

The remaining properties (10%) will pay higher or lower amounts based upon the benefit their property receives according to SCI's analysis.

In comparison, annual recycling/trash costs include: \$463.08 to Green Waste, property tax charges for "County Refuse CSA9C" (\$56.94 on a sample bill) and "Recycling/Solid Waste" (\$155 on a sample bill). Total spent on recycling/trash: \$675.02.

24/7 fire and medical emergency response based in Felton, with history dating back to 1935 when the land for our firehouse was donated, is worth at least that.