

Why Can't We Merge with Another District?

If this assessment fails, a reorganization would not be a merger of equals. It would be a dissolution of Felton Fire and a takeover by another entity, with a) loss of control of future decisions by Felton residents, b) certainty of an additional tax, but no certainty of the amount or control over where it is spent, and c) no guarantee of service level or location.

Financial Realities: A takeover by another district would not eliminate Felton's funding needs. Any agency taking over would still need to increase taxes on Felton property owners - but without the guarantee that all funds would remain in Felton and without us presently knowing the cost.

Local Control vs. Loss of Control: If FFPD's assessment passes, our elected Board of Directors, all Felton residents, along with an oversight committee of local community members, will ensure our taxes are spent on our town's direct needs. They can lower or reduce the assessment in future if the need for it lessens.

A takeover by another district would involve no immediate voting seats or guaranteed future voting seats for Felton residents on a board that would make decisions about our fire service, how our money is spent, and how much we are charged.

Guaranteed Service vs. Possible Station Closure: The proposed assessment guarantees 24/7 staffing at our Felton station. Merging provides no such security. When Scotts Valley took over Branciforte Fire in 2023, the local station was closed. The distance from the fire station to your home can affect insurance cost and availability as well as response speed, which can be critical in a medical emergency or house fire.

Known vs. Unknown Costs: With this assessment for Felton Fire, the exact cost we will pay is listed on our ballot. Future increases are capped by inflation, and it can be revoked by our Board if the need lessens in the future.

Other agencies will not disclose cost or service levels unless Felton Fire first votes to dissolve and names a specific district to take us over. Dissolving and agreeing to be taken over by another entity without knowing the cost, staffing, or future of our station is a risky decision, illustrated by the experience of Pajaro Valley Fire Protection District in the next section.

A Cautionary Tale: In 2024 Pajaro Valley Fire Protection District (PVFPD) tried and failed to pass a local assessment like the one Felton is proposing. They then faced the choice of trying to pass a different tax or being taken over by SC County Fire (CSA48). At the April 13th Felton Fire board meeting, a former fire chief and Pajaro Valley resident warned against the CSA48 path.

This Pajaro Valley resident and former fire chief said cost and service details weren't provided until *after* PVFPD dissolved and signed an agreement to be taken over. This is the same experience Felton had when asking for information. He said joining CSA48 will now result in taxes 40% higher than the local assessment was. In addition, taxes CSA48 overlaid on Pajaro Valley result in excess funds over \$735,000+ *annually* to the County, which can be spent anywhere CSA48 serves - not just Pajaro Valley.

Another consideration is that CSA48 contracts for staffing with CalFire, whose main commitment is to the State of California. During the CZU fire, CalFire's resources were spread thin by events throughout the state; without the dedication of SLV firefighters, our losses would have been far greater. This is not meant to denigrate the important contributions of CalFire, but to highlight the essential value of locally-staffed, locally-controlled fire districts.

What about a neighboring district like Zayante or Ben Lomond?

Felton Fire's financial challenges would not go away with a takeover by a local district; there would still need to be a tax increase. The Western Confluence consultant analyzing the options facing FFPD stated to the board in April, "Moving your existing tax revenue over to another district would not guarantee any type of coverage in the station, and it may overburden and overtax several of the agencies."

Felton averages about 900 calls a year, while Zayante averages closer to 300, so they would be quadrupling call volume in a district that already extends nearly to Los Gatos. There's no guarantee Felton's station would be fully staffed in addition to the partially staffed stations in Lompico, Zayante and the Summit. Zayante just had to raise a tax in 2024 to pay for daytime staffing since they were experiencing similar challenges recruiting volunteers. When Ben Lomond briefly contracted to respond to Felton's calls at a time when volunteer levels had plummeted and we'd lost a chief, Ben Lomond chose to end their contract with FFPD early.

Notably, in February 2026 Santa Cruz LAFCO staff publicly praised improvements FFPD had made since their July 2025 report.