

FELTON FIRE MYTHBUSTERS

We know Felton community members care about our fire district AND care about making careful, well-informed voting choices. Please take time to read the following slides, which correct some misinformation we've heard circulating. The most important takeaway is that this assessment is *the necessary bridge* for Felton Fire to have a future. Timing is urgent, and that is supported by comments from staff of **Santa Cruz County's Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO)**, the commission that oversees our local fire districts.

WHY IS TIMING SO URGENT WITH THIS ASSESSMENT?

If the assessment passes in July, funds will be available January 2027. If it fails, the soonest any other tax-related funding could arrive would be January 2028 - a year and a half from now. That's too late. LAFCO flagged Felton's need for additional staffing and funding **nearly a year ago**. With stable funding, a full-time chief (interviews currently happening), and 3 of 5 Board positions up for election in November, Felton Fire will be well-positioned to continue its turnaround. Only this assessment gives Felton Fire the funds they need in time. As LAFCO leadership noted June 8, "There is no Plan B. I hope Felton Fire succeeds." Any reorganization would be a multi-year process.

WHY CAN'T FELTON CONTINUE WITH AN ALL-VOLUNTEER MODEL?

LAFCO, the Santa Cruz Grand Jury, and the National Fire Protection Association have all noted that demographic and economic pressures on volunteerism mean the **best staffing model** for small rural fire districts at this time and for the future is a **hybrid** combination of dedicated volunteers supported by a strong base of paid staff. This is the model recommended for Felton to remain viable in the July 2025 LAFCO report. **This is the model that the assessment would make possible.**

COULD COUNTY FIRE PROVIDE SERVICE FOR LESS THAN FELTON?

LAFCO and Felton Fire have asked County Fire (CSA 48) for details of cost and staffing in the event of a takeover. They did not provide that information, and will not until the FFPD Board votes to dissolve and signs a reorganization agreement. In that event, existing CSA 48 assessments could be applied to Felton property taxes, no vote needed. Would this be enough to cover staffing/facilities/equipment needs for Felton Fire? LAFCO's July 2025 report suggests that CSA 48 would need \$3 to \$4 million to serve Felton, requiring an assessment of **300K to 1.3M more** than the current proposal. Since it would take 2 to 3 years to finalize a takeover, this is not a solution to Felton's immediate needs. Furthermore, any excess revenue from a future CSA tax could be **spent in any area they serve - not just Felton.**

COULD ZAYANTE TAKE OVER FELTON FIRE WITHOUT ADDITIONAL FUNDING?

Felton community members requested LAFCO to ask what it would cost for Zayante to provide our fire and emergency response. LAFCO was unable to get those facts. Here's what we know: If Zayante Fire absorbed Felton, their existing parcel tax could be added to Felton tax bills **without a vote**. The 2025 LAFCO report indicates that amount would not be enough to cover overdue station repairs, outdated equipment, 3-person staffing 24/7 (required to operate a fire engine), and meet nationally recommended call response times. Zayante's annual volume is 300 calls; Felton's is 900. A reorganization without additional funding could **destabilize a smaller district**, according to consultants. And LAFCO staff said the timeline would be 2-3 years minimum - too late to address the present problem.



Prepared and paid for by FC4ER, a volunteer community advocacy group supporting the Felton Fire benefit assessment

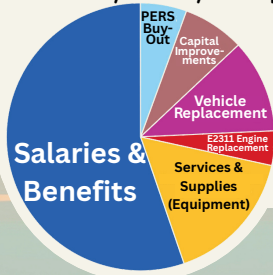
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SALARIES & EQUIPMENT

The assessment will provide just 60% of Felton Fire's total budget. Salary cost as a percentage of FFPD's total budget (55%) is well in line with industry standards (60-85%); in fact, it is at the low end. Equipment purchases will be budgeted responsibly, with costs set aside over time. Because one engine is already four years past its replacement date, that

will be paid for with a loan (only possible if the assessment passes.) At the same time, FFPD will start setting aside funds each year to save up for the next engine, due in 8 years.



ASSESSMENT COST IN CONTEXT

- 90% of households pay about \$50/month.
- The assessment could help **ISO ratings that affect insurance costs**. How? ISO ratings consider factors like a well-maintained, nearby station with paid staff and timely repair/replacement of equipment.
- For 78 years FFPD didn't ask for a tax increase, relying on fundraisers that are no longer enough.
- The cost is based on the benefit each property receives. If a business pays more than a homeowner, it's because they get a higher benefit from FFPD services than another property. One downtown business owner said it's much less than the cost of his waste bin pickup.

CAN THIS ASSESSMENT BE ADJUSTED IN THE FUTURE?

Any future elected Felton Fire Board can vote to **reduce or revoke** the assessment at any point. There are three seats on the board up for election this November; we have a voice. The assessment does have the possibility of a cost-of-living increase (tied to the Bay Area index, with a maximum set at 3%). That's responsible planning because without it, a gap could develop between the funds from the assessment and the normal cost increases Felton Fire experiences. However, the FFPD Board, whom we elect, can choose to not take the cost-of-living increase in any given year. There will be annual audits required for 218 assessments, as well as an oversight committee comprised of community members.

COULD A LOWER ASSESSMENT KEEP FELTON FIRE GOING?

The July 2025 LAFCO report on Felton's future said: "FFPD lacks adequate funding to provide an appropriate level of fire protection and emergency medical service to its respective community." The proposed assessment is on the low end of what LAFCO said Felton needs to provide 24/7 staffing and service. Tax rolls update just once a year. No other tax or assessment could be added until August 2027, with funds available by January 2028. That would be too late. As LAFCO staff said publicly 6/8/26, "**There is no Plan B**" without this assessment, and "We want Felton Fire to succeed."

WHAT DID LAFCO SAY FELTON FIRE NEEDED IN JULY 2025?

Goals for Felton

- 1 Transition to a combination or fully career staffing model
- 2 Hire a full-time fire chief for consistent leadership and oversight
- 3 Secure stable funding through special taxes or benefits assessments approved by local voters.

"These strategic changes can help ensure Felton FPD can have a long-term viability as a rural fire district."
- LAFCO, July 2025

How FFPD met LAFCO Goals

- ✓ This is exactly what FFPD proposes to fund with its assessment.
- ✓ The application deadline for a full-time fire chief was June 5; the Board is now setting up interviews. The success of this vote will be an **important demonstration of community commitment**, critical to retain a highly qualified, full-time chief.
- ✓ This is precisely what Felton Fire and our community are trying to do. **Your YES vote** is a crucial commitment to Felton Fire's successful turnaround.