

7.0 FIRE SERVICE ALTERNATIVES

Fire service alternatives should be evaluated based on the following criteria: 1) long-term goals and objectives which are appropriate for the service area, 2) the number of objectives an alternative will achieve, and 3) financial feasibility. The greatest long-term benefit to the South County will occur through fire service which is consistent across jurisdictions, allows for flexibility in assigning resources, and provides for the appropriate location of resources and acceptable response times. The following discussion is focused on Pajaro Valley, Corralitos, Watsonville, and Pajaro Dunes. No service change is anticipated for the Mount Madonna station due to the service area characteristics and remote location. The following goals and objectives were used for this study:

Goals

- Provide the highest level of customer service reasonably attainable within funding acceptable to the taxpayers
- Provide standardized levels of service and standards of cover in South County, dependent upon local risks
- Provide seamless, timely, response to all areas in the South County (foothills, valley and coast)
- Maintain coverage for South County fire stations 24 hours per day, 365 days/year
- Provide standardized apparatus in all stations
- Provide the appropriate concentration of response resources in South County
- Provide optimum standardized, OSHA mandated training in South County
- Strive to improve ISO ratings in areas other than Watsonville
- Improve code enforcement, fire prevention and regulation of new development

Objectives

- Provide 3-person ALS engine companies as follows:
 - Three companies in, or committed to, Watsonville 24 hours per day, 365 days per year
 - One company in Corralitos station 24 hours per day, 365 days per year
 - One company in Pajaro Dunes station 24 hours per day, 365 days per year
 - One company in Pajaro Valley 24 hours per day, 365 days per year
- Provide an initial response of 2 engines and one truck company (aerial or service ladder truck) or three engines, with 3-person company plus Chief officer, to a residential structure fire in the South County within 8 minutes driving time to 90% of all calls
- Provide a 3-person ALS engine first due on scene of 90% of all structure fires within 8 minutes driving time and within 4 minutes 70% of the time
- Provide four 3-person engine companies, on scene within 10 minutes driving time, to 90% of all vegetation fires over 1 acre or with structures exposed
- Provide 3-person ALS engine on scene of an EMS call in 8 minutes driving time to 90% of all calls in study area
- Provide four engine companies and two truck companies (one may be automatic aid) to any commercial or industrial fire, within 10 minutes driving time to 90% of all calls

7.0 FIRE SERVICE ALTERNATIVES

- Provide one dispatch center to handle all calls for South County
- Provide full time Fire Prevention staff in South County
- Provide full time training officer(s) in South County
- Provide an efficient move up and backfill system to provide coverage to all stations within South County

Although some of the objectives may not be attainable at this time, future changes in the fire protection delivery system should be consistent with shared goals that have been agreed upon by the service providers. Based on the results of the Countywide Service Review and input from the agencies, the following alternatives were identified for consideration.

1. Form one new Fire Protection District to serve the South County
 - a. With service provided through a CAL FIRE contract
 - b. With service provided through a Watsonville Fire Department contract
2. Expand the boundaries of the PVFPD to include all unincorporated area (or form a new Fire Protection District) and form a new subsidiary Fire Protection District to serve Watsonville
3. Maintain the status quo, with service improvements through 3-person engine companies and ALS service, and efficiency improvements through a functional consolidation for response, training, fire prevention, joint purchasing, and management.

Increasing the service level to ALS is an important criterion for South County. Under the County's contract with AMR for ambulance service, one ambulance is assigned to the south county area. When that ambulance is on a call, the response time for the second ambulance is lengthy (if it is available). The Watsonville Fire Department provides ALS services on one engine in each station, but the other areas do not. Having paramedics on first response fire engines would significantly improve life safety services in this portion of the county.

Maintaining the status quo with no service level changes is always an option for agencies, and it will be each agency's decision whether to proceed with additional analysis on an alternative level of service or organizational structure.

Each alternative is summarized below, including the benefits and potential impacts. The summaries are followed by a comparative financial analysis included in *Table 7.4, Comparative Financial Analysis*.

7.0 FIRE SERVICE ALTERNATIVES

7.1 Alternative 1: One Independent Fire Protection District

Under Alternative 1, area would be detached from CSA 48 and CSA 4 would be dissolved. The PVFPD could annex all of the remaining lands within the Study Area that are outside the District's boundary, or the PVFPD could be dissolved and a new fire protection district formed.

Two service approaches were considered: the first is through a CAL FIRE contract and the second is through a Watsonville Fire Department contract.

Table 7.1

Alternative 1A: Form One Independent Fire Protection District to serve entire South County	
Governance	Independent special district with 5 Directors, elected by region
Service Level	3-person medic engines (except Mt. Madonna) Advanced Life Support
Management / Staffing	CAL FIRE contract or Watsonville contract
Revenue Sources	Share of 1% property tax (to be negotiated with County/City) Property Assessment (requires landowner approval) Fees
Estimated Cost – 5 stations, 24/7 coverage, 5 engine companies plus 1 truck company; includes facility and equipment capital funding	CAL FIRE Contract: \$9.9 million Watsonville Fire Department Contract: \$12.3 million
Benefits	Potential Impacts / Limiting Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standardizes service levels and coverage in South County Provides 24/7 coverage in Corralitos Improves ALS response times Seamless operation as one response system Provides for common fire service management Allows for area-wide flexibility in resource assignments Improves concentration of resources Allows for true "boundary drop" and efficient engine company move-up Establishes assessment parity for South County property owners Uses one dispatch center Ensures comprehensive training/fire prevention services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detachment from CSA 48 negatively impacts funding for County Fire in remainder of CSA 2 unions represented in area; work schedule, compensation and benefits would need to be equalized with no loss in seniority, compensation or benefits Watsonville has new and nearly new fire apparatus; property owners within the City would have to share in the cost of fire apparatus replacements in other areas Reduces benefits of economies of scale offered through County Fire

The estimates used for the analysis are based on a CAL FIRE Schedule A agreement and a Watsonville-based approach. The primary difference between the two is labor costs. CAL FIRE's benefit rate for safety personnel is 52.1% versus 58% for Watsonville. For example, the annual cost for a Fire Captain is \$116,000 for CAL FIRE and \$142,500 for Watsonville. Because of the 56-hour work week, Watsonville staffs for three shifts whereas CAL FIRE's 72-hour schedule allows staffing for two shifts. It would be up to the District's Board of Directors to determine the level of service and the service provider. The Board could choose a different service provider or provide service by in-house staffing.

7.0 FIRE SERVICE ALTERNATIVES

This alternative offers the greatest level of benefits for resource management, seamless operations, and standardized coverage. The six stations would be under the same management structure. Response would be provided through a move-up protocol within the district rather than automatic aid. There would be one assessment structure across South County, with resources shared equally. All areas would participate in capital costs for new equipment and station upgrades, as well as the new station that will be needed in the future.

The formation of one independent fire protection district raises several issues related to funding, economies of scale and equipment status. A portion of the 1% property tax from properties within the unincorporated area is currently used to partially fund fire service. County Fire, Pajaro Dunes, and the Pajaro Valley Fire Protection District each receive a portion of the property tax from within their service area. Watsonville Fire is funded through the City's General Fund; upon the recommendation of the City's Blue Ribbon Committee, the City is considering options where fire service would be funded through fees and property assessments. However, Government Code §56810 includes provisions for the transfer of property tax to a new district based on property tax revenues and the net cost to provide the service; so, it is anticipated that a portion of the property tax revenue for properties within the city boundaries would be directed to the new fire protection district. Assessments for a new fire protection district would be based on cost less revenues from property taxes and fees.

A second issue is a loss of some economies of scale available through County Fire. Currently, Corralitos, Pajaro Dunes, and the PVFPD benefit from the ability to share management and fire prevention services provided through the County's contract with CAL FIRE. These include Fire Prevention Officers and Specialists, Training Officer, and an equipment mechanic. With the formation of an independent district, these positions would become the sole responsibility of the District, which may increase costs. For example, the new district would have its own Paramedic Coordinator, one Fire Prevention Officer, and one Fire Prevention Specialist. The Division Chief serves as the Fire Chief within the local unit and is fully funded by the State. Under a Watsonville-based model, these costs, including the Fire Chief, would be borne by the District.

The status of fire apparatus is also a consideration. The City of Watsonville has invested capital resources over the past few years so that the City's first response fire engines will be new or nearly new by the end of 2007. On the other hand, the County has deferred purchase of replacement vehicles as a cost saving measure.¹³ The County's equipment is aging and replacements are needed. Under this alternative, property owners within the City of Watsonville would share in the cost for equipment replacements or increased maintenance costs on older equipment.

¹³ Office of Emergency Services report to the County Board of Supervisors, February 27, 2007

7.0 FIRE SERVICE ALTERNATIVES

7.2 Alternative 2: One Independent Fire Protection District plus One Subsidiary District

Alternative 2 is similar to Alternative 1 in that area would be detached from CSA 48, CSA 4 would be dissolved, and either the PVFPD would annex all unincorporated area within the Study Area or the PVFPD would be dissolved and a new fire protection would be formed. Watsonville would form a new subsidiary fire protection district to serve the City rather than become part of an independent fire protection district.

Table 7.2

Alternative 2: Two Fire Protection Districts to serve entire South County	
Governance	PVFPD: 5 Directors Watsonville City Council governs subsidiary district
Service Level	3-person engine companies (except Mt. Madonna) ALS in both districts
Management / Staffing	PVFPD: CAL FIRE contract or District employees Watsonville: District employees
Revenue Sources	PVFPD: Share of 1% property tax (to be negotiated with County for annexing area), fees, property assessment (requires landowner approval) Watsonville: Share of 1% property tax (to be negotiated with City), fees and property assessment (requires landowner approval) Watsonville to serve Freedom community by annual contract with PVFPD (eliminate per-call fee)
Estimated Cost – FPD: 3 stations, 3 engine companies Watsonville: 2 stations, 2 engine companies plus 1 truck company	Combined Cost: \$12.6 million, includes facility and equipment capital funding FPD: \$6.7 million (CAL FIRE management) Watsonville: \$5.9 million
Benefits	Potential Impacts / Limiting Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves service levels in unincorporated area Improves ALS response times Provides 24/7 coverage in Corralitos Allows for flexibility in resource assignments in unincorporated area Establishes contract fee for Watsonville to serve PVFPD, replacing per-call fee Establishes assessment parity for South County property owners in unincorporated area Provides sustainable funding source for Watsonville Fire Avoids issue with 2 unions and contract differences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detachment from CSA 48 negatively impacts funding for County Fire in remainder of CSA Does not fully integrate the resources within South County Requires staff duplication between 2 districts for Fire Chief, Fire Marshal, Training Officer, Fire Inspector, Battalion Chiefs Does not improve personnel training Does not resolve dispatch issue Reduces benefits of economies of scale offered through County Fire

The estimates used for the analysis for this alternative are based on a Schedule A agreement with CAL FIRE and Watsonville's FY 2006/07 Fire Department budget. It would be up to the Fire Protection District's Board of Directors and the Watsonville City Council to determine the levels of service. CAL FIRE, a different service provider or in-house staffing could be used for either district.

7.0 FIRE SERVICE ALTERNATIVES

This alternative addresses the goal of standardizing service in South County. It unifies the unincorporated area within one district, and is consistent with Watsonville's direction to form a subsidiary district. It also avoids the potential issue of one area subsidizing the capital needs of another.

However, this alternative does not provide the same economies that would be available through one district serving South County or the current governmental structure. The Corralitos area, Pajaro Dunes, and the PVFPD benefit from sharing resources with County Fire and CAL FIRE. Two districts would require duplication in command, fire prevention, and support staff, with no benefit from resources within County Fire. South County would have two Fire Chiefs, two Fire Prevention Officers, and duplication in administrative support and equipment mechanics. The two-district structure ensures efficiency within each district, but does not necessarily achieve regional efficiencies that could be available through another service approach. This could be partially resolved through an agreement to share staff resources such as a mechanic and Fire Prevention staff.

This alternative proposes an increase in service levels to 3-person engine companies and Advanced Life Support emergency medical service for the PVFPD, CSA 48 (Corralitos) and CSA 4. The consolidation would reduce the cost for property owners in Pajaro Dunes, but increase the cost for those in Corralitos and the PVFPD service area. County Fire and the PVFPD are managed efficiently and resources are shared across the county through the CAL FIRE agreements. Therefore, without offering an improved service level, consolidation offers no significant benefit over the current structure.

7.3 Alternative 3: Maintain Status Quo with Service Improvements

Under Alternative 3, the organization of fire service providers in South County would not change. Watsonville could proceed with forming a subsidiary district, but this would be for financial purposes and would not affect service levels area-wide. The analysis for this alternative includes service improvements of 3-person engine staffing and ALS service throughout the South County. Efficiency improvements could be achieved through a functional consolidation for response, training, fire prevention, joint purchasing, and management. This functional consolidation could occur through formation of a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Table 7.3

Alternative 3: Maintain Status Quo with Service Improvements	
Governance	No change
Service Level	Upgrade to 3-person ALS companies in PVFPD, Corralitos, Pajaro Dunes Maintain 3-person ALS companies in Watsonville
Management / Staffing	County and PVFPD: CAL FIRE contract Watsonville: City employees
Revenue Sources	Property tax, assessments, fees (see (Table 6.1))
Estimated Cost	\$9.6 million
Benefits	Potential Impacts / Limiting Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ALS service added at PVFPD, Corralitos, and Pajaro Dunes Companies increased from 2 to 3 people at PVFPD, Pajaro Dunes Avoids issue with 2 unions and contract differences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not fully integrate the resources within South County Does not improve personnel training Does not improve dispatch Requires staff duplication between districts/City for Fire Chief, Fire Marshal, Training Officer, Fire Inspector, Battalion Chiefs Does not allow for flexibility in resource assignments in unincorporated area Continues \$157,000 annual expense for Watsonville to serve PVFPD (@ \$695 per call) No assessment parity for South County property owners Does not provide sustainable funding source for Watsonville Fire

It was noted in the preparation of this study that Watsonville will need a third station to provide adequate resources to serve future growth. One option would be for Watsonville to serve Pajaro Dunes by contract. Watsonville could fund a third person/paramedic for Pajaro Dunes in exchange for that station becoming Watsonville’s third station. This location is not optimal; ideally a new station would be shared with the PVFPD and be located in the East Lake Avenue/Holohan Road area. Per Government Code Section 56133(e) CSA 4 could contract with another public agency for services (continue with CAL FIRE, or new contract with City of Watsonville or a fire protection district). LAFCO approval is not required if the level of service will remain the same.

7.0 FIRE SERVICE ALTERNATIVES

Table 7.4
Comparative Financial Analysis

	Alternative 1			Alternative 2			Alternative 3			
	One Fire Protection District			One Fire Protection District + One Subsidiary District			Status Quo w/ Increase to 3-person/ALS standard			
	1A. CAL FIRE Contract	1B. Watsonville-based	Fire Protection District	Watsonville Subsidiary District	Fire Protection District	Watsonville Subsidiary District	Combined Cost Est.	County Fire CSA 48 - Corralitos	County Fire CSA 4 - Pajaro Dunes	Watsonville City Department
FIRE SERVICE CONFIGURATION										
# of Stations	5	5	3	2	1	1	5	1	1	2
Engine Company Size	3-person	3-person	3-person	3-person	3-person	3-person	3-person	3-person	3-person	3-person
No. of Engine Companies on duty	5	5	3	2	1	1	5	1	1	2
No. of Truck Companies on duty	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Emergency Medical	ALS	ALS	ALS	ALS	ALS	ALS	ALS	ALS	ALS	ALS
STAFFING										
Fire Control, Emergency Svcs Staff	54	54	36	30	6	6	48	6	6	30
Command and Control (Chief Officers), Prevention, ALS, Training	10	10	8	4	8	2	8	0	2	4
Support Staff (non-safety personnel - mechanic, clerical)	4	4	3	1	4	4	4.4	0	2	1
COST ESTIMATES										
Fire Control & Emergency Services	\$ 7,299,605	\$ 9,526,427	\$ 4,986,208	\$ 4,886,333	\$ 4,986,208	\$ 4,886,333	\$ 7,097,720	\$ 303,392	\$ 799,511	\$ 1,108,484
Support Services	233,023	269,751	179,865	55,000	234,865	55,000	315,225	106,532	29,966	123,697
Facility Maintenance/Capital (est.\$20,000 per station per year)	100,000	100,000	60,000	40,000	100,000	40,000	212,604	20,000	12,104	140,500
Equipment Replacement (est. \$80,000 per station per year)	400,000	400,000	240,000	160,000	400,000	160,000	372,090	80,000	17,870	174,220
District Mgmt/Other Operating Expenses (est. \$200,000 per station per year)	1,000,000	1,000,000	600,000	243,649	843,649	243,649	729,854	200,000	54,479	231,726
Increase to 3-person w/ALS							639,000	213,000	213,000	213,000
Administrative Charge (CAL FIRE 12% / Watsonville 10%)	903,915	979,618	619,929	494,133	1,114,062	494,133	273,733	74,751	25,560	173,422
Total Cost, including Equipment Replacement, Capital Needs	\$ 9,936,543	\$ 12,275,795	\$ 6,686,002	\$ 5,879,115	\$ 12,565,117	\$ 5,879,115	\$ 9,640,225	\$ 997,675	\$ 1,152,520	\$ 2,105,049
REVENUE/ASSESSMENT ESTIMATES										
1% Property Tax (All 3 Watsonville FD = General Fund allocation)	\$ 2,953,362	\$ 2,953,362	\$ 2,270,459	\$ 682,903	\$ 2,953,362	\$ 682,903	\$ 7,037,040	\$ 504,726	\$ 521,633	\$ 1,244,100
Other Fees/Revenues	570,295	570,295	285,295	285,000	570,295	285,000	727,295	43,295	10,000	232,000
Subtotal	\$ 3,523,657	\$ 3,523,657	\$ 2,555,754	\$ 967,903	\$ 3,523,657	\$ 967,903	\$ 7,764,335	\$ 548,021	\$ 531,633	\$ 1,476,100
Balance to be funded through assessments	\$ 6,412,886	\$ 8,752,138	\$ 4,130,248	\$ 4,911,212	\$ 9,041,460	\$ 4,911,212	\$ 1,875,890	\$ 449,654	\$ 620,887	\$ 628,949
Estimated No. of Parcels	17,149	17,149	7,703	9,441	17,149	9,441	17,149	2,385	625	4,148
Estimated No. of Assessable Parcels	16,439	16,439	7,092	9,347	16,439	9,347	16,439	2,495	569	4,028
Average Assessment per Assessable Parcel	\$ 390	\$ 532	\$ 582	\$ 525	\$ 547	\$ 525	\$ 180	\$ 180	\$ 1,091	\$ 156
Current Assessments - FY 2006/07 (Single Family Dwelling)										
CSA 48	\$ 111	\$ 111	\$ 111	\$ 111	\$ 111	\$ 111	\$ 111	\$ 111	\$ 111	\$ 111
CSA 4	\$ 649	\$ 649	\$ 649	\$ 649	\$ 649	\$ 649	\$ 649	\$ 649	\$ 649	\$ 649
PVFPD	\$ 30	\$ 30	\$ 30	\$ 30	\$ 30	\$ 30	\$ 30	\$ 30	\$ 30	\$ 30
NOTES:	Costs based on a Schedule A Agreement type with no Amador Plan	**For properties within Watsonville, some amount of the assessment would be offset by a reduction in the retirement tax	**For properties within Watsonville, some amount of the assessment would be offset by a reduction in the retirement tax	**For properties within Watsonville, some amount of the assessment would be offset by a reduction in the retirement tax	**For properties within Watsonville, some amount of the assessment would be offset by a reduction in the retirement tax	**For properties within Watsonville, some amount of the assessment would be offset by a reduction in the retirement tax	Costs based on 25% of current Schedule A and Amador agmtis plus facility/equipment capital estimates	Costs include \$15,370 lease purchase pymts	Costs include \$66,800 for debt service and \$120,000 for Watsonville contract service	Costs reflect WFD budget plus \$390,000 for addl personnel and capital costs for facilities and equipment

7.4 Fire Protection District Formation

The independent Fire Protection District considered in the alternatives could be achieved through annexation to the PVFPD (with detachment from CSA 48 and dissolution of CSA 4), or creation of an entirely new district. The District would be an independent special district governed by a locally elected Board of Directors. The County's role in providing fire services within the area would be eliminated. Establishing a new Fire Protection District presents a number of challenges. The principal act for Fire Protection Districts is the Fire Protection District Law of 1987 (California Health and Safety Code §13800 et seq.). A proposal to form a new Fire Protection District may be initiated by not less than 25% of the registered voters within the area to be included, or by resolution of a County, City, or District that has jurisdiction in the area to be served. The formation election requires majority approval of the registered voters. A benefit assessment to fund District operations requires a majority vote of the landowners within the District, based on assessed property value. As discussed earlier, the City and County may negotiate the transfer of some property tax to the new district; however it would not be enough to adequately fund service. An overview of the LAFCO process for district formation is included in *Appendix C*.

Any alternative that includes detaching area from CSA 48 could have a potential negative financial impact on County Fire and its service provision to the remaining portion of CSA 48. The FY 2005/06 adjusted net value of CSA 48 parcels within the Study Area was \$883.2 million, 32.8% of the value of all properties within CSA 48.¹⁴ At June 2005, CSA 48 received \$1.54 million in property tax revenue and \$880,797 in special levies. Of those amounts, \$504,726 in property tax and \$288,650 in levies is attributable to parcels in the Study Area.

The City of Watsonville's Blue Ribbon Committee on providing a sustainable revenue base has recommended that a new fire protection district be formed to serve the City. This District would be funded through assessments, reducing demands on the City's General Fund by an estimated \$4.3 million annually. This would be subject to registered voter approval for the district formation and landowner approval of the assessment. Per Government Code §56810, LAFCO could require that a portion of the property tax that was used to fund Watsonville's fire services be directed to the new fire protection district.

7.5 Recommendation

Due to escalating costs and funding constraints, local governments will continue to be challenged to maintain current service levels. The fire agencies in South County are dependent on each other for resources when responding to a structural fire and work cooperatively to provide service through automatic aid. With only one ambulance assigned to the south county area, an increase in ALS services provided by fire agencies would provide significant life safety benefits. However, given costs and

¹⁴ Data provided by County of Santa Cruz Assessor-Recorder's Office, April 2006

7.0 FIRE SERVICE ALTERNATIVES

financing trends, it is expected that service levels will degrade in the future under the current funding structure.

Based on the analysis completed for this study, either maintaining the current organization of fire agencies or forming a single fire protection district in the entire study area would result in substantially the same operating costs to upgrade service to a uniform service level of a 3-person paramedic company in all stations. There would be some non-monetary operational benefits from forming a single district. Consolidation of fire agencies has been recommended in previous studies but not been implemented for a variety of reasons, including political will, union issues, and funding constraints.

There are significant economic factors associated with consolidating into one fire protection district. Within South County, 91% of fire service costs are labor related. The importance of the union issue should not be understated, as it is very challenging to merge these two labor contracts without significant cost. In order to transition to a single department, seniority, pay scales and benefits must be maintained in order to successfully integrate two programs, which typically results in costs rising to the highest common denominator. In addition, the difference in the shift schedules between CAL FIRE and Watsonville is important; CAL FIRE has 72-hour work weeks including 19 hours of overtime whereas Watsonville has 56-hour work weeks with minimal overtime.

As an interim step, the agencies could enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or form a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) similar to that which was used when the Freedom and Salsipuedes FPD's were consolidated. With a formal agreement, the participants could establish shared policies and procedures. An MOU or JPA could facilitate the functional consolidation for response, training, fire prevention, joint purchasing, and management discussed above.

Prior to implementation of any alternative, additional study would be needed to further determine resource needs and allocation, including staffing, equipment and administration. This would include both capital and operational costs. The study should also include further evaluation of funding opportunities and the impact on County Fire. Given the recent changes with detachments from CSA 48 and interest in increasing service levels at three stations, any proposed reorganization that affects County Fire should be done within the context of a master plan for County Fire.

The Santa Cruz County Fire Department Advisory Commission provided its annual report to the County Board of Supervisors on March 20, 2007. The report identified seven goals of the Commission for the upcoming year, including several applicable to the future of fire service in the South County:

- Review and discussion of efforts by the Fire Chiefs Association to use fire resources within the county more effectively;
- Review and discussion of efforts to improve the operational functions within the County Fire Department;
- Review impacts to County Fire from proposed annexations by Fire Protection Districts;

7.0 FIRE SERVICE ALTERNATIVES

- Review potential opportunities to improve service delivery through cooperative arrangements with other local agencies; and
- Assess the ability of the County Fire Department to maintain existing service levels given increasing demands on CSA 48 funds.

The County's Office of Emergency Services, the Fire Department Advisory Commission, LAFCO, and the fire agencies recognize the critical interdependence of the fire service providers within Santa Cruz County. With boundary changes and State negotiated labor agreements, the County believes it has reached a tipping point where it is no longer economically feasible for County Fire to continue to provide services without a change in service levels or increased funding. Considering a change with CSA 48 in South County further highlights this issue. LAFCO has authority over boundary changes, and part of the Commission's consideration is economic impacts and changes to the level of service, to both the annexing and detaching areas. CAL FIRE is likely to continue to have a long-term presence in Santa Cruz County due to the State Responsibility Areas; however County Fire may choose to alter its services over time such that structural fire and life safety are provided through a different approach, such as independent fire protection districts.