

**From:** [Chris Berry](#)  
**To:** [Sierra Ryan](#)  
**Subject:** FW: [FSC-SCC Advisors] Endorsing SCC Water and Wildfire Protection Act  
**Date:** Monday, April 1, 2024 11:38:33 AM

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FYI...Since you're discussing this proposal on Wed, I thought you might be interested...

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**From:** Dan Walters <dwalters@feltonfire.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 26, 2024 1:40 PM  
**To:** Joe Christy <joe@firesafesantacruzcounty.org>  
**Cc:** Sarah Newkirk <sarah.newkirk@landtrustsantacruz.org>; Eric Lombardo <eric.lombardo@landtrustsantacruz.org>; Board <board@firesafesantacruzcounty.org>; advisors@firesafesantacruzcounty.org  
**Subject:** Re: [FSC-SCC Advisors] Endorsing SCC Water and Wildfire Protection Act

Hello All,

First the "official statement"

I just wanted to let you know that the Santa Cruz County Fire Chiefs was approached several weeks ago by this group ( representatives of The Land Trust of Santa Cruz) looking for us to support and endorse this tax measure. The Chief's voted unanimously not to support this measure for the following reasons;

- 1) The funding breakdown of 50% going to special interest projects in the north and south county area, 25% going to the City projects and 25% being spread out among all the fire districts. This leaves us to fight over the 25% for funding of fire prevention projects between 11 fire districts.
- 2) The projects it replaces are mostly funded by the General Fund already. Others are funded through the individual City general funds. The initiative is a new per parcel tax. This would allow the County and Cities to divert General Funds to other projects, so it is misleading to imply these areas need funding. Funding sources for these types of projects include local, state and federal already.
- 3) In the case of Felton, the initiative would charge our fire district residents the amount of ~\$249,600 annually. Funding which could be better utilized by this district each and every year to accomplish fire safety projects, staff our fire station with daytime personnel...all without

having to "apply for a grant from a locally appointed committee" while competing with our other fire agencies. Even if we had half those funds, we could accomplish a lot of projects....yearly. If we received 25%, yearly, that would only amount to \$62,400. But what's the funding when divided among 11 fire districts? What about the water and recreation districts? Are they part of that 25% since their website calls out support for those projects too?

4) The Fire Chiefs are not opposed to improving water programs or funding fire safety programs. But we are opposed to special interests and taxing our residences under the claim of fire safety when only 25% of those funds would be available to the successful petitioning agency.

Now for the opinion of one Fire Chief;

The fire leadership of this County was never consulted on this project and only became aware of it when we were approached to support it. All the committees, rules, language and funding dividends had been decided. I feel that that is a pretty clear indication of the lack of interest on their part to provide an inclusive plan for fire prevention and mitigation with the fire districts and CalFire leaders. That the "fire" was tagged on after they realized that doing so would increase the likelihood of the measure passing.

We've seen one fire district (Branciforte) fail already this last year. Lack of funding and lack of staff to respond to incidents. A parcel tax to fix the problems failed. Zayante is next on the list unless their \$290 per parcel tax is passed in November. The fire parcel tax in Pajaro failed to pass by a wide margin. The Scotts Valley station rebuild for earthquake requirements failed to pass. There are going to be a number of other competing tax measures on next November's ballot. How deep are your pockets? Felton will need a parcel tax by November of 2026. If that doesn't pass, Felton will be the next District in the red with only 2 years of operating revenue to survive on.

Obviously, everyone is entitled to their own opinions and free to decide how they want to invest their tax dollars.

I feel that this an inappropriate measure for us to throw the County Fire Chiefs' support behind. We would rather see a measure towards the rebuilding of our antiquated fire and law enforcement radio systems which will hit the fire and law agencies budget with another estimated \$20-30 million dollar bill. This is a "you owe us" bill that is being promised to be passed on to the individual fire and law agencies by the County leadership. In case you are wondering, we are federally mandated to replace the 25 year old "County" radio system because of law enforcement encrypted channel requirements. If that happens, you will see a

lot of small fire districts go belly up and firefighters being laid off. Even those of us who are successful with parcel taxes in the next few years. But the County says pay up!

Felton Fire's annual budget is only 1.2 million. The cost of a new fire engine is \$900k, just to put things in perspective. The cost of 2 personnel around the clock fire protection is 1.1 million. We are a mostly volunteer department. On payroll, is myself and one firefighter working here Monday thru Friday. Approximately 30% of our night calls only have a single "volunteer" show up. Starting April 1, we will have two paid firefighters on duty between the hours of 0800-1600 because NO volunteers show up 92% of the time. This will consume a large portion of our annual budget and is fully necessary if you want a fire engine to show up with enough people to put out your home on fire. This will consume 77% of our annual budget (up from 41%). This means we shut off all apparatus purchases, drastically reduce our training and prevention budgets and act as if we are back in the depression era of the 1930's.

In 5 to 10 years, I wouldn't be surprised to see only 2 or 3 fire districts left standing in the County through fiscal failures and consolidations. Some Fire Boards refuse to read the writing on the wall. But it's there. Thankfully, I am retiring next month after 40 years in the fire service. So "don't kill the messenger", I'd like to enjoy a few years of retirement ;)

As my father used to say, "That's my 2 cents worth" of opinion.

On Thu, Mar 21, 2024 at 2:13 PM Joe Christy <[joe@firesafesantacruzcounty.org](mailto:joe@firesafesantacruzcounty.org)> wrote:

Sarah and Eric

I immediately went to <https://www.sccforwaterandwildfireprotection.org/> and endorsed the initiative and, while I respect our individual board and advisory committee members' consciences, I urge them all to endorse it as well.

I have one remaining question: what does Fire Safe Santa Cruz County need to do to formally endorse it as a Council? Was unanimously voting to endorse at this morning's board meeting enough?

Besst,  
Joe

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Joe Christy  
Fire Safe Council of Santa Cruz County  
[joe@FireSafeSantaCruzCounty.org](mailto:joe@FireSafeSantaCruzCounty.org) <=> 831/515-8389

Everything happens either not at all or at the same time

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**Dan Walters**

Interim Fire Chief

Felton Fire Protection District



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