

Northshore Fire to receive \$100,000 toward fire truck purchase

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson
Monday, 29 September 2008

NORTHSHORE – The Lake County Redevelopment Agency has agreed to help the Northshore Fire Protection District fund the purchase of a new fire truck.

The Board of Supervisors, sitting as the Redevelopment Agency Board of Directors, made the decision at its Sept. 23 meeting.

County Chief Administrative Officer Kelly Cox, who also acts as the redevelopment agency's executive director, said the fire district requested \$100,000 toward the purchase of a new truck, which will total more than \$200,000. Cox added that the funds were included in the 2008-09 budget.

The Northshore was the site of the county's most serious summer, the Walker Fire, which burned 14,500 acres in wildlands east of Clearlake Oaks, as Lake County New has reported. Northshore Fire and other local agencies were the first on the scene, battling the fire for days until Cal Fire took over as lead agency on the incident.

The redevelopment agency encourages private investment in the Northshore Project Area, and protecting them is important to avoid future blight and blighting conditions. Cox said the fire district provides such protection.

He recommended that the board make three findings: that Northshore Fire Protection District's purchase of a fire engine will benefit the Northshore Project Area; there is no other reasonable means of financing the purchase of the truck; and that the vehicle will eliminate or assist in eliminating blight or a blighting condition.

County staff researched the use of redevelopment funds for fire equipment and found it's an appropriate use of the money. Cox added that other redevelopment agencies have used funds for that purpose as well.

District 3 Supervisor Denise Rushing emphasized the importance of the agreement. “The fire district really needs this vehicle,” she said, explaining that they have an older truck that needs to be retired. The truck also will be used outside of the redevelopment area.

She added that redevelopment needs to help with the basic needs of the project area, and fire protection is one of those.

Cox said the district has lost “a significant amount” of property tax increment – well over \$100,000, in his estimation – as a result of the redevelopment agency's formation. The agency now receives that money that previously went to the district.

Supervisor Anthony Farrington said he agreed with providing the funding in concept. However, he questioned the proposed findings, particularly that the fire district lacks another source of funding and that the truck would help address blight.

Cox said he reviewed the district's finances and believes they don't have any alternatives. Farrington asked if they had challenges other district's don't have.

“Their budget is very, very tight,” Cox replied.

Supervisor Rob Brown pointed out that Indian gaming funds, which were being given to agencies for uses such as purchasing fire trucks, have been taken away by the state as a funding source. He added that Northshore Fire has more stations than other districts, and in some instances has much older equipment.

Farrington questioned how the truck would address blight. Cox said it would protect against blighted conditions, such as having burned buildings in the community.

Brown suggested another protection it could offer. “We're concerned around the entire lake about wildfire and the potential for that,” he said. With another piece of equipment, the district could hopefully conduct more controlled burns.

Rushing pointed out that the threat of wildfire along the Northshore area is significant; it also has numerous older structures susceptible to fire. The district's ability to respond to fire is dependent on its equipment.

Farrington asked if the district was looking at purchasing a new truck, and suggested they look for a used one, as Lakeport Fire Protection recently did, in order to make the tax dollars stretch farther.

“I think that they are very frugal in the management of their funds,” said Cox, adding that if they can get a truck that costs less, he trusts they will.

Lakeport resident Patricia Jonas Voulgaris chided the board – especially Farrington – over the discussion.

“You're dealing with peoples' lives, so you need to have the right equipment,” she said, with her remarks getting applause from audience members.

Rushing moved that the board enter into the agreement with Northshore Fire to purchase the truck, which was approved in a 5-0 vote.

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