

## Joe Serrano

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**From:** Becky Steinbruner <ki6tkb@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 22, 2021 2:56 AM  
**To:** Joe Serrano  
**Cc:** Carey Pico; Doug Aumack; Becky Steinbruner  
**Subject:** Comment re: Item 5a Countywide Fire Protection Service and Sphere Review, October 13, 2021 LAFCO Agenda.

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Dear Mr. Serrano,

Thank you for providing LAFCO's Countywide Fire Agency Report. I would like to submit the following comment at this time, and ask that it be included in the Commission agenda packet if possible for the October 13, 2021 discussion.

[https://www.santacruzlafco.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/5a.1-Attachment-Fire-MSR\\_.pdf](https://www.santacruzlafco.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/5a.1-Attachment-Fire-MSR_.pdf)

1) Central Fire District (page 5)

I feel the geographical description of the service area should include the Day Valley community because it is an extensive rural area with a high number of homes.

2) Scotts Valley Fire Protection District (page 8)

For consistency, the date of incorporation of the City of Scotts Valley should be included, as this information is provided for the other city fire agencies. Is Scotts Valley a charter city?

3) County Fire Dept. CSA 4 Website (page 138)

The County Fire Dept. website has been updated within the last two weeks, and now has virtually no information about CSA 4.

#5. Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities (page 142) There are a number of migrant farm workers who live and work within the CSA 4 sphere, and many medical response calls by CSA 4 staff are for these populations.

4) County Fire Dept. CSA 48

a) Types of Training (page 146)

Davenport Volunteer Fire used to be the best-trained crew in the County for cliff rescues and surf incidents. What changed such that those training services are now not recognized?

b) Why are there only two Type 3 engines serving a rural mountainous service district with many areas of substandard roads and challenging access? (Table 69, CSA 48 Inventory (page 146))

c) Finances (page 150)

*"State law requires special districts to conduct an annual audit. The law also requires special districts to file a report of the completed audit to the State Controller's Office and LAFCO (Government Code Section 56036).*

*However, no audits were readily available on the County's website."*

### **Why are there no audits of County Fire Dept. finances, as required by law?**

*"At the end of FY 2019-20, total revenue collected was approximately \$4 million, virtually the same from the previous year (\$4 million in FY 2018-19). Total expense for FY 2019- 20 was approximately \$3.3 million, which increased from the previous year by 1% (\$3.26 million in FY 2018-19). The District has ended with an annual surplus each year since 2014, excluding FY 2016-17, as shown in Figure 59."*

This is different information than was presented to the CSA 48 Special Benefit Assessment ballot procedure in that the CSA 48 Fact Sheet stated:

FACT: Without additional funds the County will be forced to close a fire station, resulting in slower 9-1-1 response times in many areas of rural Santa Cruz County.

[http://www.santacruzcountyfire.com/fdac/2019\\_csa\\_48\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://www.santacruzcountyfire.com/fdac/2019_csa_48_fact_sheet.pdf)

I feel there should be some discussion in the County Fire Dept. Sphere and Service Review regarding the Amador Agreement, and how that provides State funding for CAL FIRE emergency response within the State Responsibility Area (SRA) during fire season.

There should also be discussion of the CSA 48 Special Benefit Assessment fee approved in 2020: ***"If approved, this assessment would provide a higher level of fire protection and emergency response service by increasing the staffing levels to nationally recognized standards and provide for improved apparatus and equipment replacement. The assessment rate would result in an estimated increase of \$1,551,118 for fiscal year 2020-21 for County Service Area 48."***

d) Public Meetings (page 153)

Notice of the Board of Supervisor meetings regarding discussions of CSA 48 fees and services provided are not placed on the County Fire Dept. website, and no notice is provided via mail or media advertisement. Doing so would improve County Fire Dept. / CAL FIRE transparency and accountability to the CSA 48 property owners & taxpayers.

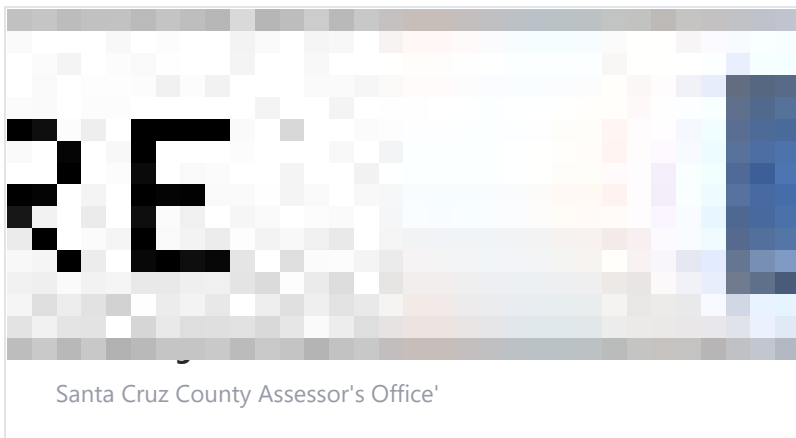
For the past year, County Counsel and General Services Director have restricted public participation in all Fire Dept. Advisory Commission meetings to only three minutes each for items on the agenda and items not on the agenda, but only at the very beginning of the meeting. Members of the public are not allowed to speak at all thereafter, severely limiting informed public comment. This Draconian policy is meant to silence dissent and streamline meetings for convenience of staff, and needs to be changed.

e) Website (page 154)

The website has been updated within the last two weeks and now provides zero information about the Special Benefit Assessment District fees, adjustments to those fees due to the CZU Lightning Complex Fire destroying 911 homes, or any information about an appeal process for this new tax passed in 2020 that is in addition to pre-existing CSA 48 fees.

Now, a property owner cannot look up their CSA 48 Special Benefit Assessment fees, and the only link to what gives the appearance of providing this information in the financial data sidebar is in fact merely a link to the County Assessor data base, but provides no information about CSA 48:

[Home Page](#)



Furthermore, it is very disturbing to see a three-page description of County Fire Dept. that includes a warning that State Budget Cuts will require reduction of staffing during non-fire season paid full-time staffing from 3 to 2 and deferred vehicle replacement. These are precisely the issues that CSA 48 property owners were promised would not happen if the CSA 48 Special Benefit Assessment were passed. [http://www.santacruzcountyfire.com/front\\_page/csa48\\_tbwb\\_public\\_ed.pdf](http://www.santacruzcountyfire.com/front_page/csa48_tbwb_public_ed.pdf)

The only News Release is a 2016 announcement of Chief Ian Larkin's appointment as County Fire Chief:  
[http://www.santacruzcountyfire.com/new%20releases/new\\_unit\\_chief\\_5-17-16.pdf](http://www.santacruzcountyfire.com/new%20releases/new_unit_chief_5-17-16.pdf)  
The Santa Cruz County Fire Events page has not been updated since 2015 Firefighter of the Year awards.

There is no map of the CSA 48 service area on the website.

The 2021-2022 County Fire Dept. Budget Narraive provides ZERO information about County Fire Dept. finances, and is an incomplete document: [https://sccounty01.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/prop\\_budget2021-22/Proposed\\_Budget\\_2021-2022.pdf](https://sccounty01.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/prop_budget2021-22/Proposed_Budget_2021-2022.pdf)

There is no e-mail contact information provided for the Davenport or Corralitos Stations, creating a barrier to potential volunteer inquiries: <http://www.santacruzcountyfire.com/>

The Santa Cruz County Fire Dept. Fire Marshal Schedule of Fees is meaningless, and provides little real information regarding cost of services: [http://www.santacruzcountyfire.com/fire\\_marshall/scco\\_fees.pdf](http://www.santacruzcountyfire.com/fire_marshall/scco_fees.pdf)

f) Transition from Dependent to Independent (page 154)

I think this is a very positive idea. The County Board of Supervisors really does not understand the needs of rural residents, and is generally unsupportive of funding County Fire Dept. They have failed to allocate any Prop. 172 State Public Safety sales tax monies to fund County Fire Dept., and have so far allocated ZERO dollars in Measure G countywide sales tax revenues to fund County Fire Dept., even though their 2018 ballot initiative to fund the County's unmet needs listed "fire" as a beneficiary of the proposed new tax. Fire prevention and emergency response would be better served by an independent elected Board and a transparent budget process.

*"Benefits include having its own board of directors, its own staff, better resident representation, and more local control by the affected communities. More importantly, it would allow the County to focus on more regional issues rather than certain municipal services, such as fire protection."*

g) Formation of Zones (page 155)

The number of acres that CSA 48 encompasses is "XX", and needs to be filled in with correct information.

A discussion of the CSA 48 Special Benefit Assessment fees instituted in January 2020 should be included in this section.

h) Overlapping Sphere Boundaries (page 155)

There needs to be a discussion of CSA 48 areas that are islands of jurisdiction that can only be accessed by travelling through another jurisdiction for response. Examples of this are Redwood Drive community and Mesa Grande Road in Aptos that would be better served by annexation to Central Fire District because Central Fire responds to nearly all calls in these communities, not County Fire or CAL FIRE. Another detachment / annexation that has been recommended by the Santa Cruz County Grand Jury is the Paradise Park Community, currently in CSA 48 but is best served by Santa Cruz City Fire Dept.

i) District Summary (page 157)

The Table states there are 75 volunteers in County Fire Dept. The number of volunteers has steadily declined, much to the alarm of the Fire Dept. Advisory Commission. Here is what the Commission included in the CSA 48 FACT SHEET to help convince voters to pass the Special Benefit Assessment tax:

*FACT: We have 25% fewer firefighters on staff today than we did 10 years ago -  
- meanwhile our number of emergency calls has grown steadily – approximately 22% since 2010.*

[http://www.santacruzcountyfire.com/fdac/2019\\_csa\\_48\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://www.santacruzcountyfire.com/fdac/2019_csa_48_fact_sheet.pdf)

The Board of Supervisors is negligent in asking why this is so. The Commission has recently discussed using some of the new CSA 48 tax money to hire a part-time Training and Recruitment Officer.

See July 21, 2021 County Fire Dept. Advisory Commission agenda item VII(A) VII(B):

[http://www.santacruzcountyfire.com/fdac/fdac\\_agenda\\_7-21-21.pdf](http://www.santacruzcountyfire.com/fdac/fdac_agenda_7-21-21.pdf)

The contact phone number for County Fire Dept. Administration is incorrect:  
(831) 722-6188

The correct phone number, according to the County Fire Dept. website home page is 831) 335-5353.

j) Service and Sphere Review Determinations (page 158)

#2 Disadvantaged Communities. According to the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, Davenport is considered a Disadvantaged Community. This was adopted by that Board on January 29, 2021.

#5. Shared facilities. The Review needs to discuss the fact that most of CSA 48 is in the State Responsibility Area (SRA) that the State funds fire suppression and emergency response costs for much of the year. This section also needs a discussion of the Amador Agreement.

It should also be mentioned that the CAL FIRE Soquel Station is closed for the next two years while a new fire station and office for Soquel State Demonstration Forest is being built, and there is no temporary quarters for firefighters that would normally respond from this station to incidents in the upper Soquel Valley. Currently, that staff is quartered at Burrell Station and Felton Headquarters.

#7 A final discussion of the Board of Supervisors negligence in their persistent refusal to fund County Fire Dept. with State Prop. 172 Public Safety money or Measure G countrywide sales tax money must be included here, with a recommendation that the Board fund County Fire with readily-available public safety tax money.

k) Sphere of Influence Review

#5. Davenport is considered a DUC.

Thank you for this thorough Review.

Sincerely,  
Becky Steinbruner