



**Salmon Creek Volunteer Fire Department is proposing to create a fire protection district to support sustainable community fire and rescue service!**

### **WHY IS DISTRICT FORMATION BEING PROPOSED?**

The Salmon Creek Volunteer Fire Department (SCVFD) was founded in 1978 by community members who recognized the need to protect people and property from fire and injury as scattered subdivisions and rural residential development expanded within the watershed. Since that time, the SCVFD has been sustained by generous contributions from Salmon Creek residents. People contribute their time as volunteer firefighters/emergency medical service providers, organizers, and grant writers, they make donations of cash and/or supplies and equipment, and they help organize and participate in fundraisers. All of this support is appreciated and has made the difference between having a local fire department and not having one. However, times are changing and the demands on local fire departments are increasing.

Like many other fire departments, the SCVFD is facing growing challenges that include:

- Ever increasing mandatory requirements and standards.
- Limited volunteer recruitment and retention programs and incentives.
- Inadequate levels and types of training opportunities.
- Limited administrative capacity to address growing organizational requirements.
- Insufficient funding to cover growing expenses, including:
  - The replacement of aging safety equipment and apparatus,
  - Communication equipment and infrastructure improvements,
  - Insurance and worker's compensation,
  - Training and certification for volunteers, and
  - Fire station maintenance and the growing need for an additional strategically placed station to increase response times.

The SCVFD is also struggling under the pressure of ever-increasing training and performance demands on volunteers and an increasing volume of calls. None of these challenges will be easily overcome but members of the SCVFD are continually working together and with neighboring departments to prepare themselves and their equipment to improve the level of community fire and rescue services and coordinated wildfire prevention and suppression within the watershed. **We also need your help to overcome**

**these challenges. Please join us in taking advantage of an opportunity to form a local fire protection district and establish a reliable and equitable source of revenue to ensure that the SCVFD survives and thrives.**

### **WHY NOW?**

To help address some of the challenges mentioned above the Humboldt County Fire Chiefs' Association commits a portion of their annual Measure Z grant funding to provide ongoing support for countywide fire service planning. These grant funds are supporting a technical team that is available to help us through the district formation process and will cover many of the associated expenses. Let's take advantage of this opportunity and help ensure the survival of our local fire department.

### **WHAT IS A FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT?**

- A fire protection district is a type of special district formed to provide services within a specific jurisdictional boundary and may be supported by revenue from a combination of taxes, fees, grants, and fundraising.
- A fire district formed in Salmon Creek would be governed by elected local residents, independent of the County of Humboldt.
  - Governing board members would be elected by the registered voters residing within the boundaries of the new district.
  - The existing SCVFD would continue to provide fire and rescue services, supported by tax revenue managed by the district board.

### **IS MY PROPERTY WITHIN THE PROPOSED SALMON CREEK FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT BOUNDARY?**

- Please use this [link](https://arcq.is/1mae8z)<sup>1</sup> to access an online map that shows the proposed district boundary; a simple map is also attached.
  - We are proposing to include all of the parcels where we are most likely to be called as the primary local responder.
  - We also want to include residents who consider themselves part of our SCVFD family and who expect to be served by us.
- The members of the governing board will be required to reside within the boundary of the district.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://arcq.is/1mae8z>

- It will be the registered voters who reside within the proposed district boundary who will vote on the following:
  - Forming a fire protection district and electing the governing board.
  - Establishing a special tax to support fire and rescue services.

**WHAT WILL THE NEW FIRE DISTRICT COST YOU?**

- **Special Tax:** A new fire district would be supported by a new special tax that must be approved by the voters of Salmon Creek.
  - To support a baseline, barebone budget, we are proposing a flat tax of \$75.00 per Assessor Parcel per year.
  - If the proposed special tax is approved by local voters (2/3 majority of votes cast), the amount will appear on your annual property tax bill.
  - Although these taxes are collected by the County, they do not go to the state like property taxes; they are deposited in a fund for the use of the district (nominal processing and administration fees may be charged by the County).
  - Landowners with multiple contiguous Assessors Parcels which are undeveloped, held under identical ownership, and used solely for timber production or agricultural grazing, will have the opportunity to lump them together so they are taxed as one parcel. An ordinance establishing the application process will be approved by the local elected governing board.
  - Initial estimates indicate that, if approved by registered voters, the special tax could generate between \$20,000 to \$25,000 per year in revenue. The range depends on how many property owners are approved to count multiple contiguous Assessors Parcels as one (see details above).
- **Tax Exchange Agreement with the County:** In addition to proposing the establishment of a new special tax, we are working on a proposal to the County to receive a portion of the property taxes already collected to support a local fire district (property tax exchange agreement).
  - If those negotiations are successful and the tax exchange agreement is approved by the Board of Supervisors, it is estimated that it could initially generate approximately \$1,000 per year and increase thereafter based on the growth in property value. This will generate revenue in addition to what is generated by the special tax.

- The revenue provided through this agreement between the District and the County will come out of property taxes you already pay and will cost you nothing extra.
- Between these new sources of tax revenue, which we don't have access to unless we are a district, and continued fundraising, donations and grants, the SCVFD will be able to maintain and improve its capacity to provide the services that we all depend on. The new tax revenue will be used to pay for recurring costs such as worker's compensation, liability insurance, training, and fire truck fuel and maintenance.

**HOW WILL THE NEW FIRE DISTRICT BENEFIT YOU?**

- It will give us peace of mind that the SCVFD will be able to continue to respond to fires, medical distress calls, vehicle accidents, hazardous material spills and the many other calls we receive (note that the majority of calls to the fire department are for emergency medical services).
- As a result of the widespread wildfires experienced the last couple years, fire insurance is getting harder and harder to obtain if you choose to live in a rural area. Being located within the boundaries of a fire district may greatly benefit your ability to obtain fire insurance or keep the policy you already have.
- In response to severe wildfire impacts and changes to state law, property can only be subdivided if it is located within the boundaries of a fire-related district. Being located within a fire district will allow you to develop or subdivide your parcel, if you choose to do so, and it is consistent with county General Plan and Zoning requirements.

**HOW WILL THE SALMON CREEK FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT BENEFIT THE COMMUNITY AND THE EXISTING VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT?**

- Forming a fire district will establish a consistent, long-term community-based and locally controlled revenue source to support the sustainable delivery of fire protection services by the SCVFD.
- The SCVFD would still rely on volunteers, but the new district will have more revenue to support its volunteer firefighters through increased training opportunities and improved equipment.
- The new district will be eligible to apply for grant funding and access tax revenue that is available only to local government entities like fire districts.

- We know that many of the Salmon Creek residents enjoy the Fire Department Bar-B-Que fundraisers. The good news is that they will continue! However, with the new fire district funding covering our basic costs, monies donated at our fundraisers can now be used for strategic purchases and capacity building efforts.

**WHAT ARE THE STEPS IN THE DISTRICT FORMATION PROCESS?**

- Note that the following steps are not necessarily in sequential order.
- A Notice of Intent to Circulate a Petition to form a Fire Protection District will be posted in the newspaper and filed with the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) and County Clerk for a 30-day posting period.
- A petition will be circulated and the signatures of at least 25% of the registered voters in Salmon Creek must be collected to move forward with the district formation application process. Petition signatures will be verified by County Elections and applications by petition accepted as complete by Humboldt LAFCo as the lead agency
- The district formation application will be submitted to LAFCo:
  - Upon receipt, LAFCo will send a notice of filing to interested/affected agencies.
  - Once the application is determined to be complete, a hearing date will be scheduled.
  - A public notice will be issued 21 days in advance of the hearing.
  - If written objections are received by the close of the hearing, a protest hearing will be scheduled to take place in Salmon Creek and another notice will be issued 21 days before that hearing.
  - LAFCo will then confirm hearing results and adopt a resolution requesting the Board of Supervisors to call the election.
- A Tax Exchange Agreement will be proposed to the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors:
  - A proposal will be submitted, demonstrating the proposed Salmon Creek Fire Protection District's ability to meet expectations for becoming a fire protection district and responsibly administering public funds generated from property taxes.
  - If approved, the Tax Exchange Agreement will be executed by and between the Salmon Creek Fire Protection District and the County. This agreement will be contingent upon the registered voters approving the district formation and the new special tax.
- Election Process:

- If the schedule for all of the above steps holds, the election will take place on March 7, 2023.
- A consolidated District Election will be called by the Board of Supervisors for a vote on the Salmon Creek Fire Protection District formation and special tax.
- District formation will be conditioned upon voter approval of a special tax.
- If 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s of the votes cast by registered voters are in favor of the new special tax, the proposed district formation will move forward.

**LEARN MORE!**

Contact Us: If you have questions and want to learn more about this effort, please contact:

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