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A message from Chief McDonald regarding Measure F

(McKINLEYVILLE, CA) – November 13, 2020 – I would like to say thank you to all those that promoted and voted for Measure F. I am excited to see such great support from the community. I would also like to take this opportunity to explain what the passage of Measure F will look like, post-election. The District Board is waiting on the official notification from the County Elections Office for the final election results. The Board will then implement Ordinance 20-20, which calls for the Measure F special tax to be collected. However, the big topic that everyone wants to know is, “When will the third fire station open?” Unfortunately, re-opening the third station will not be as easy or as swift as we would all hope and the following are a few of the reasons.

First, and most importantly, the District will not receive the funding from Measure F until January 2022. Although the new tax was approved during 2020, the current fiscal year tax bills have already been processed and sent out to the property owners in our District. This means that it could not be included this fiscal year and the District will have to endure one more budget cycle of tight revenues. As reflected in the current budget, the Board has made cuts to operations and staffing to balance the budget.

A second reason reopening the third station cannot be a quick process is related to staffing. Operationally, the District is currently short-staffed, and without enough firefighters to safely, or contractually, staff more engines, we cannot open the third station. Presently, there is not enough money in the District reserve account to begin hiring new employees immediately. As such, the process of hiring new employees is expected to begin around July 2021, at the beginning of our new fiscal year. It is not as simple as hiring an entry-level firefighter, we have vacancies in all ranks/positions of the organization that will also need to be filled. We will likely be conducting promotional exams concurrently with the recruitment of new firefighters. In addition to the time it takes to advertise and interview potential candidates, all new employees must go through a background check, health exam, and a new hire academy. This process can easily take six months to accomplish.

During last week’s Board meeting, a follow up question was posed about using overtime to cover the needed positions to reopen the station, as we work through the new employee hiring process. Unfortunately, as mentioned above, we do not have enough current employees or reserve funds to accomplish this undertaking as a long-term solution. However, the District’s Finance Committee will be reviewing the feasibility of utilizing overtime to open the station on an infrequent basis, depending on daily staffing levels.

Finally, The District Board will be developing the Measure F “Citizens Review Committee.” Once the parameters of the committee and selection process are settled, we will be looking for community members to participate on this oversight group.

Regular updates will be provided as new information becomes available. Please check our website and social media for these updates regarding our hiring process and any other information related to Measure F funding.

Arcata Fire District has been proudly serving the communities of McKinleyville, Manila, Bayside, Jacoby Creek and the City of Arcata for over 70 years and we look forward to many more. We sincerely appreciate the community support and request continued patience and understanding as we work through this process.

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