

# Keizertimes

NEWS + PEOPLE + LIFE



## Stop, drop and wait

Written by Lyndon Zaitz Editorials, Opinions Dec 9, 2011



It is time for the Keizer Fire District and Marion County Fire District #1 to stop their bickering, take a breather and plan for a future that few want to acknowledge.

The back and forth between the two fire districts, especially in front of the Keizer City Council, has long passed the point of being embarrassing for Keizer. For every point one side makes, the other side refutes it. What are Keizer residents, especially those who live in the Clear Lake area to think?

Keizer residents of both fire districts seem to be satisfied with the service they receive. With mutual aid agreements no one's house will be allowed to burn due to petulant territorial claims; no one will die of a heart attack because there's disagreement on which district should respond to the emergency call. The two districts (along with the other fire fighting organizations in our region) have a long and proud history of coming to the aid of their brethren.

Both the Keizer Fire District and Marion County Fire District #1 are rightly proud of the service they provide their constituents and communities. But that is what we have grown up believing that firefighters do—provide excellent service in times of emergency and tragedy. So the issue of the Clear Lake annexation is more than just about levels of service. It is about revenue and the sustainability of each district.

More than 80 percent of the calls the districts respond to are not fire related. They are medical emergencies which means sending an ambulance and a EMT crew to each call. With changes to Medicare reimbursements, providing ambulance service is a losing game regardless of which district or department is responding. That is a fact that cannot be argued away or refuted.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars have spent so far on legal expenses on the Clear Lake annexation issue. With budgets as constrained as they are now and will be in the coming years this kind of unnecessary spending has got to come to an end. As one witness at this week's city council meeting remarked, the money that will be spent on legal bills during this fight could buy a new fire truck.

The fire districts are not faced with just declining Medicare reimbursements, they will also face decreasing tax revenues over the next years. There is little confidence that this annexation issue can be a win-win for all sides. Both districts have their challenges. If the City of Salem continues its annexation march into areas east of Interstate 5 that could eventually include large swaths of the Jan Ree neighborhoods which provide upwards of 60 percent of Marion County Fire District #1's tax base. If Jan Ree is annexed out of the District #1 that will severely limit what the District will be able to do. The annexation process in northeast Salem may not happen for a few years, but it will happen.

In June we called for the city of Keizer to withdraw Clear Lake from Marion County Fire District #1. The way this issue has been handled by both sides forces us to reassess our position. It is unsettling to watch the two fire chiefs trading barbs; this issue should be discussed at the board level, where policy is set.


Both districts are manned by dedicated public servants. No one would ever say that the paid and volunteer firefighters and EMTs do not provide the finest in service and care. That is not an issue and never has been. At issue is how that service can best be provided in light of new economic realities now and in the future.

The best solution is for the district's to reinstate the ambulance agreement that allows Keizer Fire District to collect the \$75,000 it lost when the agreement was abandoned. Then the two districts should agree to a moratorium on the annexation issue for five years, allowing for in depth discussions on the future of both districts.

—LAZ

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#### 4 Responses for "Stop, drop and wait"

1.  Agree!!! says:

December 9, 2011 at 3:49 PM

Thank you Lyndon, I agree we are better served with our two fire districts working together as they have for decades and backing each other when things take the step above normalcy.

Where's the reset button? From what I can see they should return to the past and start over, nothing was broken when the debate started. I have faith in both districts to do the right thing and work together to protect us all.

2.  *Keizer Voter says:*

December 12, 2011 at 12:40 PM

Well said LAZ.

However our city council will never let this be put on the back burner for 5 years. It's full steam ahead with getting Clearlake under Keizer Fire and expanding the Urban growth Boundary.

3.  *Bailey says:*

December 12, 2011 at 2:05 PM

I want to say thank you Lyndon, you are right on the money here!! Taxpayer money is being wasted in a colossal way in this unneeded battle. This issue has been pushed too fast especially when we consider the questions posed around the statutes being used for the withdrawal and annexation. The way this has been handled just invited unneeded legal challenges and thus the waste of taxpayer money. Who is the real winner in this battle? Not the citizen's of Keizer or the citizens of MCFD1. As you state with the constrained budgets both districts are facing this unnecessary battle needs to come to an end. I urge the citizen's to call or write the city council and both districts and say enough is enough. Sit down and negotiate.

4.  *Citizen says:*

December 12, 2011 at 4:40 PM

MCFD#1 Dave Zahn, well said. I watched the counsel meeting at keizertv.com. Both Districts need to work together. Chief Cowan presents himself and Keizer Fire District as "shooting from the hip" Chief Cowan appears to push this issue and over sell his issues to the Keizer City Counsel.



## M.C. Fire offers Clear Lake compromise

Written by Jason Cox General, News, Top Stories Dec 16, 2011

By **JASON COX**  
*Of the Keizertimes*

Marion County Fire District 1 offered a compromise to the City of Keizer and Keizer Fire District earlier this week, in hopes of avoiding an election deciding which fire agency will serve the Clear Lake neighborhood.

The proposal would essentially reset the status of ambulance service in north Keizer – a move that purportedly sparked KFD's move to annex homes in that area. Both agencies have admitted to spending nearly \$100,000 each on various legal challenges and responses thus far.

"I would dare say we're both going to be in it for that much more at least," said board president Randy Franke at a meeting Wednesday, December 14. "I don't think any of our taxpayers think that's a good expense."

The MCFD board offered Wednesday to conditionally reinstate an ambulance service agreement that would designate Keizer Fire District as the primary medic responder. The move by MCFD to end that agreement would in theory send an estimated \$75,000 per year in ambulance revenue back to Keizer Fire District. The board also said it would drop the lawsuits and state land use actions filed against KFD and the City of Keizer. However, the board signaled it would not go so far as to move its medic out of the Clear Lake station entirely, with a key caveat in the motion that the arrangement not degrade service in the Clear Lake area.

Said reinstatement would hinge on both the city and Keizer Fire dropping any annexation attempts.

While the city has been named in the legal documents, the Keizer Fire District board has agreed to pay any legal costs incurred by the city due to the annexation.

The framework was credited to an editorial by Keizertimes Publisher Lyndon Zaitz. The editorial was mentioned several times during the discussion.

"I'd be willing to go so far as to say we'll guarantee you, if that's the right number ... that \$75,000," Franke said. "I don't think that means we have to take Medic 33 out of Clear Lake."

MCFD Chief J. Kevin Henson expressed some reservations, saying the move could result in less ambulance protection for the Clear Lake area. He suggested he'd be open to a variety of arrangements, including placing a Keizer Fire ambulance in MCFD's station at Clear Lake.

"I wouldn't want the residents of Clear Lake to think we backed away from them and reduced the service level," Franke added.

Keep Our Firefighters  
Keep Our Ambulances  
**KEEP KEIZER SAFE**  
Vote NO!

## Keep Our Firefighters

### Solve Clear Lake question now

Written by Lyndon Zaitz Editorials, Opinions Dec 30, 2011



The deadline to place the question of annexing the Clear Lake area on the March ballot is fast approaching. Both sides, Keizer Fire District and Marion County Fire District #1, have a scant few days to come to an agreement that would make an election a moot point.

The annexation issue was front and center at the Dec. 19 city council meeting. Officials from both fire districts were exhorted by several councilors to come to an agreement.

The council, by 6-1, voted to place the annexation question on the ballot in March; the Keizer Fire District board also voted to place their own ballot question. These moves were made in part by the desire to let the people decide.

The electorate is unpredictable; we could end up with a bigger mess. What happens if it passes but the courts rule the whole election question void? What is the plan then?

We renew our call for the the ambulance agreement to be reinstated and putting a moratorium on any annexation movement for five years. With the ASA agreement back in place Keizer Fire District would get the \$75,000 a year in revenue it lost. The deadline to place the issue on the March ballot is January 12; that is enough time for the two boards to sit down together, hash out their issues and do what is best for the community.

Some say it is that future viability of Marion County Fire District #1 and its tax base that leads them to believe that annexing Clear Lake now is a the best course for the Keizer and for Keizer Fire District.

The debate has grown so vitriolic that some players won't even talk to each other. That is no way to run government. If there is no agreement between the two fire districts and the issue goes to the ballot, they may find that voters will say no simply because they are fed up with the fighting.

There are larger issues the city and its citizens will face in the coming years. In the end the fight between the two fire districts is parochial and Keizer residents who live outside the Clear Lake area may not deem the annexation issue at all important. In the new year Keizer residents will hear about ever tightening city budgets; they will hear about bond payments for a Local Improvement District at Keizer Station; they will hear about development at Area C which could include a Walmart.

Annexation of Clear Lake into Keizer Fire District needs to be put on hold. There are other issues that need our resources and attention.