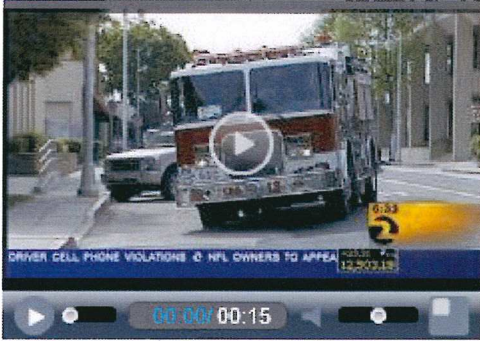# KTVU.com

San Carlos Votes Against Outsourcing Fire Department

SAN CARLOS: City Council Votes Against Outsourcing Fire Department

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SAN CARLOS, Calif. -- After two hours of at times emotional debate, the San Carlos City Council late Monday unanimously voted to seek a partnership with Redwood City for its fire protection and rejected a plan to outsource the service.

Officials said they would attempt to reach an agreement with nearby Redwood City to form a joint fire department. However, they added that if those efforts failed, outsourcing would once again be on the table.

San Carlos city leaders say the cost of fire services is up 30% over the last five years. Now the city is facing a $3.5 million budget deficit

On Monday night, the city council discussed the controversial idea of hiring a private company -- Florida based Wackenhut Corporation -- as its new fire department.

Resident Joe Caprioni was incredulous.

"Fire to a contractor? A low-bid contractor? What happens if they fail," asked Caprioni. "Will any of you guarantee my house will be saved in a fire?"

Chris Dennebaum was also appalled.

"What's next? Blackwater for our police deparment? Halliburton handling our public works?" said Dennebaum.

Questions were raised about Wackenhut's abilities and it's priorities.

"They have a responsibility to their stockholders and their job is to maximize their profits," said Ed Hawkins of the San Mateo County Firefighter's Union.

Wackenhut representatives argued they have a long track record of providing fire services at major facilities including Cape Canaveral. They also said they'll have to perform if they want to stay employed.

"As a private contractor, you audition for your job every day," said Rick Tye of Wackenhut Corporation, "If we don't live up to our contract, the council can replace us."

The city could save a million dollars or more a year and the savings could grow over time. A few residents thought the money saved might be worth a try.