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AVENAL FACES RISING KINGS COUNTY FIRE SERVICE RATES, SPARKS DEBATE OVER VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENT



By [Francisco Ramirez Jr](#), Kings Network News

June 23, 2025

Avenal, CA: On June 19, 2025, Avenal residents and city leaders gathered for a heated town hall to debate the future of the city's fire services after Kings County announced that rates for fire protection would nearly quadruple, jumping from \$450,000 to \$1.9 million annually.

The steep hike left Avenal officials scrambling for alternatives. [City Manager](#) Anthony Lopez and Assistant Police Chief Robert Nevarez explained to a crowd of more than 100 people that continuing under the county's contract would cripple the city's limited \$5 million general fund. Lopez said the city had to look at other options, including creating its own fire department, to protect both public safety and the city's financial [health](#).

"For us, this is about control and sustainability," Nevarez told the crowd. "When your fire service fees more than triple overnight, we have a responsibility to look at every option to [protect](#) the community."

The proposed plan would establish a mostly volunteer fire department led by two paid positions, a fire chief and battalion chief, supported by trained local firefighters. Officials argued this hybrid model could reduce costs by more than half and allow the city to train

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youth and residents who want to serve their community.

However, many residents and current firefighters voiced serious concerns. Rosa Moreno, an [Avenal](#) resident since 2003, said she felt blindsided by the city's plan. "We deserve to be part of these decisions," Moreno told the council. "Professional firefighters have been here for every emergency, every fire, every car crash, every medical call. It feels like we're being left out without a real say in what happens next."

Longtime resident Luther Barajas shared similar worries. "Public [safety](#) is the most important thing," he said. "If we move too quickly and don't have enough experienced people, what happens if someone's [home](#) burns? What happens if response times slow down?"

City officials assured the audience that public safety would not be compromised and that no decisions would be finalized without public input. City Attorney Moses Diaz emphasized that all legal requirements would be followed, and [Kings County](#) Supervisor Richard Valle urged the community to stay engaged.

"This is a tough situation for everyone," Valle told the crowd. "Your elected leaders need to listen carefully. Let's work together to make sure whatever plan we choose keeps our community safe."

The [city council plans](#) to hold another public meeting next week to answer questions and allow more dialogue. City officials encouraged all residents to continue sharing their thoughts.

What do you think? Should Avenal form its own fire department to control costs, or is it better to continue contracting with [Kings County](#) despite the higher rates? Join the conversation in the comments.