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## MOFD fee hikes reflect recent salary increase, break out fees for solar installations

By Sora O'Doherty

Although Moraga Orinda Fire District staff recommended an across the board fee increase of 2.8%, the Board of Directors on March 20 adopted a 5% increase intended to reflect an equal salary increase in the district. In addition to the higher fees, the directors also approved a dozen new fees.

The new fees fall into the areas of plan review, environmental review, and a miscellaneous fee for insurance property compliance inspection of \$170 per inspection. Plan review fees are on a per form, per permit, or per inspection basis and range from \$47 for a hydrant/fire service form to \$577 per permit for energy storage system or solar photovoltaic power system inspections.

Charles Porges, an Orinda resident, commented in writing on the new fees, saying, "I find the Solar and Energy fees unreasonable and unnecessary. As you know PG&E does a thorough review of the submitted plans and performs inspections as well. With the proposed fees you will add a \$1300 disincentive to installing photovoltaic systems. Photovoltaic systems with batteries will reduce the power required to be transmitted through PG&E lines which are a known fire hazard. I request that you eliminate them or reduce them by a factor of ten."

In response to questions raised by Porges and by Director Steven Danziger at the first reading of the proposed ordinance, Fire Chief Dave Winnacker explained that the fee was not a new fee; MOFD has always charged a plan review fee for solar systems as required by Chapter 12 of the Fire Code, it just had not previously had its own category.

Winnacker added that PG&E does not perform any type of plan review required by California Code of Regulations Title 24 and, as an investor-owned private company, PG&E does not have the authority to do so. PG&E's review is limited to the interconnect requirements associated with grid connection. Should a resident be installing an off-grid system, PG&E would not be involved.

Winnacker also explained that the California Fire Code requires that the fire code official review plans and issue either a construction permit or operational permit. The office of the state fire marshal requires a construction permit for installation of energy storage systems regulated by Chapter 12 of the State Fire Code, Section 105.6.5 Energy storage systems. A construction permit is required to install energy storage systems regulated by Section 1207.

In addition to the solar and energy system fees, which, while listed as new, are really just being broken out to clarify what they are for, and the new insurance property compliance inspection fee, the other new fees are for the hourly service of senior officials during environmental reviews.

The 5% fee increases and the new fees take effect on April 22, 2024. The list of all fees, showing the 2023 levels and the new 2024 levels, may be found at

<https://d2kkoa27fdvtw.cloudfront.net/mofd/c25f0e47192374f4618bbcf5482642ad0.pdf>

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