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MOFD Restores Salary Cut to Firefighters

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District presented its 2014-15 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report Nov. 18, highlighting a general fund surplus of \$1.4 million. Contributing to the surplus was the 3.5 percent wage reduction agreed to by district employees. One percent of the reduction was restored July 1.

With this considerable improvement in district finances, the board agreed to restore the remaining 2.5 percent wage reduction effective Dec. 1, seven months earlier than outlined in the memorandums of understanding between MOFD and its labor groups. The motion passed 3-1, with Steve Anderson dissenting and Alex Evans absent.

"I'm pleased that we're doing this, and I'm happy that we were able to do it," said director Fred Weil.

"This was very difficult," said fire chief Stephen Healy, commenting on the original labor negotiations that resulted in wages lost by the firefighters. "It's kind of a deep wound to them. I'm sorry this had to happen in the first place."

The directors should probably not expect a thank you card from the union. Representative Mark DeWeese blasted the original pay cut as unnecessary, and he said that the elimination of the cut leaves the firefighters with the same pay they were making seven years ago. "If you look at the data in tonight's board packet you'll see MOFD's total revenue over that same time period has grown over 25 percent," he said in a prepared statement. "Our stagnant wages and lagging medical benefits have caused a growing recruitment and retention problem for our district, along with growing frustration among current employees."

"When we worked out that original contract, we needed help to keep MOFD running," Anderson said later. "We were on the edge. The financial situation was impacting our ability to serve our citizens and our employees."

"I don't believe in renegotiating contracts," continued Anderson. "There's no end to it when you do. These are unsettled times, with unsettled markets. We have to be financially conservative."

The district calculated the one-time cost to restore the salary reduction seven months early at \$187,000.

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[back](#)

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