



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District

Board of Directors
Wednesday, March 21, 7 p.m.
Go to the website for meeting location, times and agendas. Visit www.mofd.org

ConFire Board of Directors

Tuesday, March 13, 1:30 p.m.
Board Chamber room 107,
Administration Building,
651 Pine St., Martinez
For meeting times and agendas,
visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

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New MOFD chief tackles a longstanding Orinda problem

By Nick Marnell



MOFD aides Connor Rowan, left, and Pete Stathakos conduct hydrant testing in north Orinda. Photo MOFD

Fire Chief Dave Winnacker outlined his plans to maximize the available water supply in north Orinda and to mitigate the hazards presented by the area's wildland terrain at the Feb. 21 meeting of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District. The chief's presentation made clear that the district, whose hands have been tied by financial limitations, outside agency policies and voter indifference, will focus on what it can do, rather than complain about or remain hostage to what other parties say they cannot or will not do.

The East Bay Municipal Utility District, which owns most of the fire hydrants and water infrastructure in the fire district, replaces underground pipes on its own terms, on its own timetable. "EBMUD

will not, as the only participating agency, undertake system modifications solely to improve fire flow," the district states in its Fire Flow Improvement Program. Since 1999, the water district has replaced 19 miles of the 130 miles of underground pipe in Orinda, according to David Rehnstrom, EBMUD manager of water distribution.

Studies concluded that \$50 million was needed to update the inadequate piping infrastructure, which Orinda voters declined to fund via three different ballot measures. So Winnacker began the search for the worst of the worst of underperforming north Orinda hydrants by doing fire flow measurements with EBMUD, which will insert the calculations into a shared database.

MOFD will test 15 hydrants per week, with hydrants flowing at less than 500 gallons per minute as the top priorities. "Once these are completed, we will have an updated report on where the problems are," the chief said.

Concurrently, MOFD will prominently label acceptable water sources, so that when outside agencies flood into the area to help fight a major fire, suppression personnel will be able to easily identify reliable water sources. The district will also identify supplemental water sources, like pools and ponds, privately maintained water tanks, and water supplies along Bear Creek Road and the Briones Reservoir.

The second part of Winnacker's plan features heightened levels of fire mitigation. A wildfire spreading down from the Bear Creek Road and Briones areas is a major threat to north Orinda, and noting that the best fire attack is fire prevention, the chief said the district will quarterback the efforts of wildland fire mitigation among various agencies and private citizen groups.

EBMUD owns open space adjacent to north Orinda, PG&E owns several large parcels in north Orinda and the county road maintenance crews are responsible for maintaining the shoulder of Bear Creek Road. Winnacker said that the district will assist the agencies to make sure that mitigation efforts are reinforced and complementary,

such as arranging for the Cal Fire Delta Crew to trim back vegetation in the Bear Creek area. The chief noted that, though often not popular, the PG&E tree trimming efforts have real value for fire prevention.

MOFD will also coordinate efforts of neighborhood groups to carry out fuel mitigation efforts, and will encourage homeowner associations to create safe, defensible spaces. Notification and evacuation plans have been updated, though the chief said that an early warning is needed for a wildfire that starts on the north side of the ridge.

"We want to identify things we can do now within our existing budget, utilizing and leveraging people's money though the grant process and engaging the community to buy in to everything they can do to prevent a catastrophic wildfire from spreading," Winnacker said. The chief pledged that, though north Orinda has been identified as the No. 1 target area, the water flow and mitigation programs will eventually be rolled out into the rest of the district.

Dick Olsen, a former MOFD director and a revered founding father of the fire district, praised the chief's attempt to fix a problem that has frustrated the district since its 1997 inception. "This is way beyond what anybody else has ever done," Olsen told the board.

ConFire chooses general contractor for Fire Station 16

By Nick Marnell

Contra Costa County Fire Protection District Assistant Chief Aaron McAlister announced that D.L. Falk Construction of Hayward submitted the winning bid for the Lafayette Fire Station 16 construction project. Falk's bid came in at \$3.43 million, just under the \$3.5 million estimate, a minor miracle of sorts considering the sky-high construction costs in the

Bay Area. Five other bidders were prequalified by the county, but only Falk submitted a number.

ConFire has four fire stations in various stages of construction or design, but because of its small size and location, Fire Station 16 will be the only station of the four with a back-in apparatus bay. The district prefers a drive-through bay because it lessens the probability of

damage to its trucks and engines. "This station will not become a future ConFire template," McAlister said at the Feb. 26 Advisory Fire Commission meeting.

The general contractor appeared undaunted by the unique specifications of the Lafayette fire station. "We've built fire stations the size of a house, within a housing development," said Greg

Schmidt, Falk director of operations. Schmidt said the company has also built a fire station in San Jose with a back-in apparatus bay.

The formal award of the bid for Fire Station 16 should occur at the March board of directors meeting. Kitchell Northern California remains the station construction manager.

New Academy graduates



After months of high-intensity training, Contra Costa County Fire Protection District Academy 51 recruits graduated Feb. 23. The 24 probationary firefighters will each ride as the fourth person of an engine company until the middle of March, when they will be assigned to their own stations.

This influx of new firefighters will allow the district to staff Lafayette Fire Station 16 with three engine companies early next year.

— Nick Marnell

New pet rescue bill would allow firefighters to administer emergency care to dogs and cats

By Nick Marnell

Imagine firefighters putting out a fire at your home and saving your residence, with minimal damage, except that your dog remains unaccounted for. After a few agonizing minutes, a firefighter races out of the smoky home, cradling your small dog. The dog suffers from smoke inhalation and desperately needs oxygen, but should the firefighter attempt to resuscitate the animal using a pet oxygen delivery pack, that heroic effort could be met with legal action.

That is because it is unlawful for anyone — including first responders — to practice veterinary medicine in California unless they are a licensed veterinarian. Firefighters and paramedics are not allowed to provide first aid to dogs or cats rescued from a fire or other emergency. A violation is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of up to \$2,000, or imprisonment, or both.

Upon enactment of Senate Bill 1305, introduced by Sen. Steve Glazer in February, neither first responders nor their employers will be liable for damages or criminal prosecution for providing emergency care to an injured dog or cat

at the scene of an emergency.

Jay Kerr, a veterinarian and a director of the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District, came to Glazer with the idea for the bill. "We don't want our firefighters to hesitate to treat a pet because they're worried about it," Kerr said. "This legislation will allow them to provide these services legally."

Glazer said that at a recent town hall he asked how many in attendance had a dog or cat. "Seventy percent of the audience raised their hands," said Glazer, who grew up with dogs and cats in his home, and has had dogs throughout his marriage.

"Imagine someone who has the training and ability to save the life of a pet and wants to, but can't because it is illegal," said the bill's co-author, Assemblywoman Catharine Baker. She talked about Max, the mixed-breed dog she rescued from the pound and kept for 16 years, as if he were family. "Providing comfort for pets provides comfort for family members," Baker said.

"From my perspective, anything that allows our first responders to effectively care for the public during their time of need is a

positive," said Moraga-Orinda Fire District Chief Dave Winnacker.

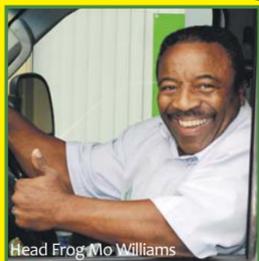
Kerr's fire chief, Lafayette's Paige Meyer, knows all too well the scenario described in the opening paragraph. "We are committed to saving life and property, and pets check off both boxes," Meyer said. "Actually, some people would be happier that we rescued their pet than saved their home."

The bill does not require first responders to treat the animals. If the emergency providers choose to, they can administer services like opening and maintaining an airway, giving mouth-to-snout ventilation, immobilizing fractures and bandaging.

According to Glazer's policy analyst, SB 1305 will likely be voted on after spring break, which ends April 2.

This is not Glazer's first legislation to aid animals in need. The state senator from Orinda coauthored the 2017 Right to Rescue Act, which exempts a person from criminal liability for actions taken reasonably and in good faith to remove a dog or cat from an overheating vehicle.

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