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Published September 2nd, 2009

MOFD Board Selects Stakeholder Group to Interview Fire Chief Candidates

By Lucy Amaral

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) Board of Directors moved yet another step further in selecting a new fire chief. At the MOFD Board meeting held August 19, the Board announced that a committee made up of community members, local police and fire chiefs, and MOFD employees will serve as its 'Stakeholder' group (see sidebar), which will interview the candidates. The interview session was set for September 2.

Avery Associates, the executive search firm retained by the Board, was charged with submitting the top six to eight candidates to the Board and the Stakeholder group for interviews. Board President Pete Wilson said that the Board of Directors also has the option of adding any candidate from the original 56 applicants if they feel it necessary.

Once the Stakeholder group finalizes its interviews, it will make recommendations to the Board. "We hope to obtain a wide point of view as to what's important to all the different groups - municipalities, organizations, individuals, etc., - all those that the fire district serves," Wilson said. The Board will then conduct final interviews on September 14 and make its decision soon thereafter. Wilson said he hopes the process is complete and a new Fire Chief is hired by September 30.

The new Chief will replace Acting Fire Chief Pete Nowicki. Nowicki, who retired in December 2008, has been serving as interim Fire Chief until a replacement is found. Depending on the start date for the new Chief, Wilson said that the Board has the option of continuing Nowicki's contract on a weekly or monthly basis.

Also on the August 19 MOFD agenda was a request by Orinda resident Steve Cohn, on behalf of a community group, FAIR (Fire and Infrastructure Renewal), asking the Board for access to incident response time data that MOFD used for a 'standards of coverage' study.

In 2006, MOFD commissioned Deccan International, a company that offers analysis software services specifically for Fire and EMS departments, to perform a standards of coverage study to be used as an assessment tool. The resulting study, according to Nowicki, was used to evaluate community risk, response times, utilization of resources, development impact and recommended performance objectives. This report, he added, is available to the public.

The Board noted that the raw data is public information and available to whomever asks, however, the software from Deccan is proprietary and anyone wishing to use the program would need to contract with Deccan independently.

Cohn said that once he receives the data, FAIR will present the data to the City of Orinda in the hopes the city will conduct its own assessment.

According to Cohn, FAIR is a group of citizens which has been encouraging the Orinda City Council to perform a study of MOFD to determine if it can operate at a lower cost, thus freeing up tax revenue. Cohn adds that the group's members are all constituents of MOFD and the City of Orinda and include several people who have served or are serving on boards and commissions in Orinda. Cohn says the group has over 40 members and includes Al Resnick, Keith Jacobson, Heather Dunne, Alex Evans, Sandy Gross, Diane Stephens and Bill Schmicker.

Moraga-Orinda Fire Chief Recruitment Stakeholder Interview Panel

Fire Chiefs:

Rich Price - San Ramon Valley Fire District

Gerald Simon - Oakland Fire Department

John Ross - Contra Costa County Fire District

Chris Gray - San Rafael Fire Department

Police Chief:

Robert Priebe - Moraga

Internal Team:

Battalion Chief Maxwell

Captain Steve Rodgers

Financial Manager Susan Casey

Administrative Assistant Christine Pokorny

Local 1230 Felipe Barreto

Fire Marshal Mike Mentink

Community Members:

John Banuelos - Orinda resident and member of Orinda's Financial Advisory Committee

Gene Gottfried - Orinda resident and former MOFD Board Member

Richard Olsen - Moraga resident and former Moraga Fire Commissioner

Janet Keeter - Orinda City Manager

Sue Severson - Mayor of Orinda

Mike Segrest - Moraga Town Manager

Karen Mendonca - Moraga Council Member

Jonathan Goodwin - Canyon Fire Council

Gordon Nathan - Moraga resident and former MOFD Board Member

Vince Maiorana - Orinda resident

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