



**Independent, locally owned and operated!**

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published February 17th, 2010

updated February 18th, 2010

## MOFD, FAIR Meet To Discuss Fire Service

By Lucy Amaral

Although it was obvious that the two sides were not going to easily agree on what to do about the fire district's financials, the Moraga Orinda Fire District (MOFD) and a citizen's group, Fire and Infrastructure Renewal (FAIR), met on February 3rd at a MOFD Board work session to start the conversation.

Nearly 100 people packed the Fellowship Hall of the Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church to hear representatives of FAIR offer their ideas to dissolve MOFD, then contract with the Contra Costa Fire Protection District (ConFire) and American Medical Response (AMR) to provide fire and emergency services to the City of Orinda. According to FAIR, this new arrangement would save Orinda millions in tax dollars, which could be redirected back to the city to be used for infrastructure improvements.

The MOFD Board had submitted 30 questions to the citizens group for their review. Most of the questions dealt with how FAIR arrived at the lowered costs. During the meeting, all but two questions had been pre-answered. The two questions, according to FAIR member, Steve Cohn, were of key concern to FAIR as they felt one was a 'trick' question challenging FAIR's assurance that service levels would not degrade, and the other question contested FAIR's statement that local control would increase under FAIR's proposal. Those questions were clarified and debated but seemingly not answered to any side's satisfaction.

Many of the projections offered by FAIR were, by their own admission, estimates, and during the presentation, MOFD board members requested contacts and additional data to use for verification. There were moments of contention on both sides of the aisle, however for the most part, civility maintained its place.

MOFD focused a portion of their questions on the contract options for American Medical Response, a medical transport company that would provide ambulance service to Orinda if MOFD were to be dissolved. Currently, MOFD has two ambulances, one stationed in Moraga and one stationed in Orinda. The Board's concern included response time, staffing and asked about the possibility of having transport housed in Orinda. FAIR's response was that any such details would need to be worked out in a contract between Orinda and AMR.

The Board then asked Manuel Navarro, vice president of EMS development for AMR to speak. Navarro said that currently, MOFD has authority over its emergency medical services. He added that if the City of Orinda breaks away and contracts with ConFire, AMR must contract through Contra Costa County, not the city, therefore leaving it up to the County's EMS Agency to determine any service levels.

During the public comment section of the evening a new citizen's group, OrindaCARES (Citizens Against Reducing Emergency Services), announced its formation in support of MOFD. Speakers supporting MOFD outnumbered those wishing to dissolve the district by more than 4 to 1, including pro-MOFD comments from Moraga Police Chief Robert Priebe and Orinda School Board President Riki Sorenson. Those speaking in favor of dissolving MOFD focused on the examination of how current funding is used and how that might be changed.

Board President, Frank Sperling, said the meeting was productive. "It's a first step in the MOFD Board of Director's quest to fully understand the details of this group's proposal," he said.

The Board requested Director John Wyro begin the vetting process and validating FAIR's information. Wyro said he will report his progress at the Board meeting scheduled for Wednesday, February 17.

Cohn said he hopes now that Moraga, Orinda and MOFD will look into FAIR's proposal further and that this meeting was a necessary step.

"We think we were asked good questions and we believe we answered them well," said Cohn. "We believe we have done our homework and that our responses reflected that."

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA