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Published April 24th, 2013

Lamorinda Fire News Briefs

By Nick Marnell

Advisory Fire Commission

The fire station consolidation plan and Fire Chief Daryl Louder's retirement announcement highlighted the April 8 meeting of the Advisory Fire Commission of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District.

Louder said that county counsel and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District were fine-tuning a joint powers agreement to cover the purchase and operation of a new combined fire station 46. He expected the agreement will be completed in time for the May 7 meeting of the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors. Louder said he will ask the board for the district's \$7,500 share of the deposit for the proposed fire station and also for seed money to be used for the station's site study.

The commissioners asked Louder how he would sell the Lafayette/Orinda station consolidation plan to other areas of the fire district. "That it's a long-term strategic solution," he said. "The public is demanding this kind of thinking. They expect us to be smarter than we have been."

Louder said that the district has no fallback plan if the merger is not approved.

"You're leaving too soon," said Commissioner Ed Haynes as the board recognized Louder's October retirement. Commissioner Barry Cunningham complained that the chief had been poorly portrayed by the media. "You shouldn't have been criticized for doing your job, since so many of your tools were taken away," said Cunningham.

Fitch & Associates

Financial issues have plagued the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, forcing it to consider options for providing fire service. Property tax revenue has dropped, and a district parcel tax ballot measure did not pass in 2012. The message is clear from the taxpayers: they will not increase their contributions to fund ConFire, station closures or not.

Faced with the reality of these fiscal limitations, the Board of Supervisors recently authorized Fitch and Associates, a Platte City, Mo. public service consulting company, to conduct an evaluation of ConFire operations. The company will analyze all aspects of the fire agency, including fire suppression, prevention and disaster response, and will recommend options for a more efficient fire service model. The project is expected to be complete in January 2014. This is the third contract with Fitch and Associates the board of supervisors has authorized in the past 18 months. In October 2011, a \$95,000 contract was awarded to evaluate and identify potential new funding sources for the county's Emergency Medical Services. An additional \$198,500 was contracted in December to conduct a study for the county's EMS Modernization Project. And the fire district evaluation contract is \$170,000; that cost will be borne by the county, not ConFire, according to Jackie Lorrekovich, ConFire's chief of administrative services.

Canyon Multi-Agency Wildfire Meeting

Townspeople and officials gathered at Canyon Elementary School on April 10 to explore the challenges that a major wildfire presents to both the community and the fire agencies.

Lamorinda Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Dennis Rein described how a major disaster was averted during a wildfire in an isolated southern California community similar to Canyon, thanks to cooperation between residents and the fire agencies. Contra Costa County District 2 Supervisor Candace Andersen discussed emergency preparedness planning. And Moraga-Orinda Fire District division chief Stephen Healy detailed how residents can coordinate an evacuation, including the use of Reverse 911, and PulsePoint, a free smartphone app that lets users view emergency activity as it is happening.

Healy emphasized a life-saving basic: "When we say evacuate - please go!"

"There are things that you can do to save your home," said MOFD fire chief Randall Bradley. He challenged the community to take him up on an offer to have the MOFD conduct a free fire prevention assessment of their properties.

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