



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District

Board of Directors
Wednesday, March 2, 7 p.m.
New Meeting Room:
Moraga Town Council Chamber
335 Rheem Blvd, Moraga
For meeting times and agendas,
visit www.mofd.org

ConFire Board of Directors

Board of Directors
Tuesday, March 8, 1:30 p.m.
Board Chamber room 107,
Administration Building,
651 Pine St., Martinez
For meeting times and agendas,
visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

Emergency response information
and training:

Lamorinda Community
Emergency Response Team (CERT)
www.lamorindacert.org

Share your thoughts,
insights and opinions
with your community.

**Send a letter to
the editor:** [letters@
lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:letters@lamorindaweekly.com)

Orinda Response Times Frustrate MOFD

By Nick Marnell



MOFD engine navigates Sleepy Hollow Lane in north Orinda. Photo courtesy Moraga-Orinda Fire District

For years emergency medical call response times in Orinda have exceeded those in Moraga. The terrain and the narrow, winding roads in sections of Orinda make it difficult for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District to safely transport personnel and equipment to the emergency scenes. As fire chief Stephen Healy prepares to update the MOFD Standards of Coverage, a deployment analysis of district resources, he again confronts the reality of the lengthier Orinda emergency response times and what, if anything, can be done to reduce them.

Based on district records, the 2011 average medical emergency response time in Orinda ran six minutes and 15 seconds. The 2015 average

Orinda response time jumped to a hair under seven minutes. The Moraga times rose from five minutes and 47 seconds to just over six minutes.

A 2011 MOFD facilities report stated that for the district to improve inadequate emergency response times into the Sleepy Hollow, Orinda Downs and Upper El Toyonal portions of north Orinda, it should relocate station 45 to a site near the Camino Pablo and Miner Road intersection. Healy said that the district has no money to do that, and furthermore, he noted that moving station 45 would place it farther away from target hazards in Orinda, like Highway 24, the Caldecott Tunnel, the BART tunnels, senior assisted living facilities

and a convalescent hospital. "This is an example of how every contemplated fire station relocation has potential positive and negative effects," he said.

The report also called for structuring aid agreements with adjacent Alameda County and East Bay Regional Parks fire districts. Healy said that MOFD has executed automatic aid and mutual aid agreements with the Berkeley Fire Department and EBRP.

Some have proposed using smaller, more nimble apparatus to quickly navigate that difficult terrain and those narrow roadways. "What we'd pick up in size we'd give up in tools and equipment," said the chief.

District union representative Anthony Perry agreed. "The narrow roads and numerous blind spots of Orinda dictate the speed of the apparatus," he said. "A smaller response vehicle would have the same limitations, and yield no faster response."

As for those narrow roads, the district can expect no help from the city of Orinda. According to Chuck Swanson, director of public works and engineering services, Orinda is only reconstructing the road pavement, and because of the high cost will not be widening or straightening the city roads. "Also, many of our residents like the semi-rural character of the roads the way they are," he said.

In that case, those residents need to prepare themselves even more so for a major disaster, when evacuation times will matter maybe more than response times. District emergency preparedness coordinator Dennis Rein advises Orinda residents to not wait for the community warning system alert, but to take action on their own. "If there is any doubt in your mind, go," he said.

As Healy works on his Standards of Coverage document, and his geographic information system analyst crunches the numbers yet again, the chief conceded that the fact of longer response times in Orinda will not go away.

"It may be an unavoidable issue," he said.

January Projected Reopening of Lafayette Station 16

By Nick Marnell

Inside the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District 2016 Operational Plan lies one sentence that Lafayette residents have been waiting to read for nearly four years: the district will propose to its board that "we open a newly rebuilt Fire Station 16 in January 2017."

The county closed the uninhabitable Lafayette fire station in 2012, and as the proposed station 46 joint venture between ConFire and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District dragged on, ConFire opted to rebuild its own station for \$1 million rather than spend three times the money to erect a shared station at the Lafayette-Orinda border.

A structural engineer delivered the district a positive report on the condition of the building, and ConFire awaits the results of a geothermal test on the soil beneath the floor slab. The report should be completed by mid-March. "The slab has settled, probably as a result of soil loss under it, and will most likely require us to mitigate surface runoff from the street," said fire chief Jeff Carman.

Concurrently, the district will select an architect, and should then be ready to draw documents and put out

bids for the station construction. Once all of the documents are prepared, the district will secure a rough price estimate and be then able to go to its board for project approval.

"We are still feeling good about

our original direction that we can use the existing foundation and rebuild the station," said the chief. "With anything like this, we are prepared for the unexpected and think we can react to whatever is thrown our way. Worst

case scenario is we will have to rebuild the entire structure, which I think we are even prepared for should that happen."



Letters to the Editor

Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly. All published letters will include the writer's name and city/town of residence -- we will only accept letters from those who live in, or own a business in, the communities comprising Lamorinda (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only). Letters should be 350 words or less; letters of up to 500 words will be accepted on a space-available basis. Visit www.lamorindaweekly.com for submission guidelines.

email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com; Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, P.O. Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570



Editor:

The February 10, 2016 article "Community Outreach Meeting Kicks Off Downtown Parking Study" helpfully provided overview of the January 27, Parking Study meeting where the Orinda City Manager introduced TJKM, the City's consulting firm. Held in the same auditorium in which the City Council meets, a large body of Orindans with parking concerns was present. The article referenced the methodology of the study, but failed to describe the size & type of comments made by the public, noting only that "public comments were received". Thus the article omitted the substance of the public comments. Given the clearly significant importance of the Study to the readership, which in many ways is as important as a meeting of the City Council, one wonders why this omission.

Council meetings allow microphone access so all public speakers can be heard, and audio and video are recorded. For this Meeting, however, disregarding those unable to attend but interested in following the public dialog, the City apparently chose to not use that same voice/video recording system that is used in Council meetings. Absent those Council meeting features, members of the public were not given access to a microphone. Instead, they had to almost shout trying to make their comments audible to all, and the audience was straining trying to hear what was being said by members of the public. Many worthy comments were not heard by all, likely including by the consultants.

Lastly, there was no apparent electronic recording of audio or video of that Parking Meeting. Rather, unbelievably, one TJKM person was seen taking abbreviated notes using hand markers on an easel, clearly an obsolete technique, involving inherent filtering of the public comments by the person writing with the markers. It is simply not understood why the exact comments made by the public were not amplified, and not accurately and properly recorded. What was the City afraid of? Do we not deserve a chance to study those comments and perhaps continue the dialog? Just asking.

Chet Martine
Orinda

Editor:

Thank you for your recent article, "Call It a Dam," which brought attention to the plight of fish and other aquatic life in San Pablo Creek. Not only could fish return to their natural habitat if the small dam/drop structure on Bear Creek Road is removed (or at minimum, maintained regularly by EBMUD to keep the opening clear of debris), but this would restore the more natural functioning of the creek.

Unaltered waterways balance erosion with deposition in carrying their sediment load. Prior to 1990 streams were engineered to "control nature" and an unfortunate consequence was to disrupt this balance. It has since been shown that dams and other concrete projects increase erosion downstream by creating "hungry" water without a natural "load." At the same time, they are only temporary structures because sediment and debris fill up the waterway behind the dam. This is a physical reason they are being dismantled all over the country. The biological objective is to allow fish and other aquatic creatures free movement upstream and downstream in a healthy environment; fish also need the gravel trapped behind the dam to spawn.

The creek behind Orinda Village is another example of an engineered problem that needs restoration. The channel was straightened, narrowed and placed in concrete in 1958, but a few years later half of the concrete blew-out in a storm and traveled downstream blocking a major culvert. The now bare banks were/are exposed to "hungry" water and created an erosion problem we still have today. In addition, the failed project increased the likelihood of flooding by decreasing the capacity of the natural creek. In the last two decades, hardscaped projects began to be replaced with natural riparian channels. Re-vegetating banks and restoring some of the meanders would not only be aesthetically pleasing and improve habitat, but also slow runoff and increase the capacity of the creek to hold flood waters. (To see the creek, walk behind Siam Orchid and Orinda Veterinary Clinic on Orinda Way, where trees have regained a foothold over the last 55 years.) Friends of Orinda Creeks has been working on these two projects for years. Orinda is lucky to have fisheries biologist Brian Waters and UC wildlife professor Reg Barrett engaging with EBMUD and other government bodies.

Cinda MacKinnon, hydrogeologist (ret.)
Orinda

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