



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors
Wednesday, Dec. 7, 7 p.m.
Go to the website for meeting location, times and agendas. Visit www.mofd.org

ConFire Board of Directors
Tuesday, Dec. 6, 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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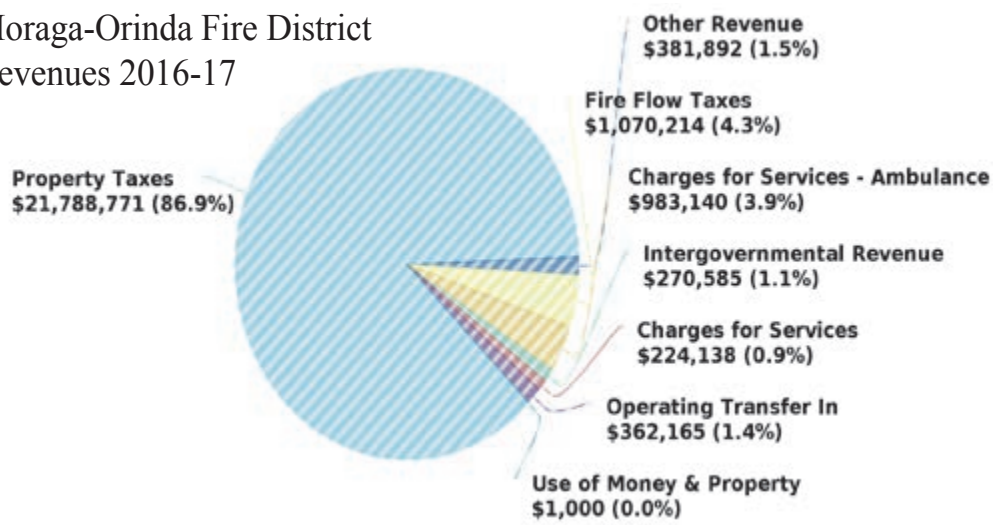
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MOFD Steps Up its Financial Transparency

By Nick Marnell

Moraga-Orinda Fire District
Revenues 2016-17



The Moraga-Orinda Fire District continued its march toward total financial transparency by contracting with OpenGov, a Redwood City consulting company, to produce software that allows complete access to district financial and budget information on the MOFD website.

For years the district struggled through major financial crises, including the miscalculation of a pension for its retiring fire chief,

the discovery of a \$2 million error that reduced its general fund, and the recognition of an unfunded pension and retiree health care liability that hovered near \$100 million. On top of that, thanks to the Great Recession, came the property tax crash. Because revenue was not covering expenses, MOFD was forced to consider an action it had never proposed in its history: laying off firefighters.

In 2013 the turnaround began.

MOFD fired its auditor, hired a new administrative services director and the following year appointed a financial manager to its board of directors. Working in a much improved economic climate, the district was able to not only balance its budget but also secure a 10 percent general fund reserve and reduce its unfunded pension and retiree health care liabilities to \$65 million. With better news came better reporting, and the MOFD Comprehensive

Annual Financial Report, produced in 2014 and 2015, won the Government Finance Officers Association award, presented to agencies that produce easily readable and efficiently organized financials.

The OpenGov financial software, unveiled at the district's Nov. 16 board meeting, could win an award from the public based on its ease of use. Administrative services director Gloriann Sasser led the audience through the new software presentation of district financial accounts, including current and historical revenues and expenses, plus assets and liabilities. Pictured is the chart showing projected revenue for the current fiscal year.

To navigate the new software program, hover on the About tab on the MOFD website home page, then click the Financial Transparency heading. Complete instructions on how to use the software, along with Frequently Asked Questions, are posted there.

"It's terrific," said director Brad Barber, and Barber would know, as he is the financial manager appointed to the board in 2014.

MOFD to Work to Improve Poor Water Flow in Orinda

By Nick Marnell



This hydrant on Charles Hill Circle in Orinda delivers substandard water flow. Photo Nick Marnell

Residents and board members have complained that substandard water flow to fire hydrants in north Orinda is so serious a community shortcoming that the Moraga-Orinda Fire District inserted water flow improvement as an additional element to its recently unveiled five-year Strategic Plan.

Outgoing north Orinda director Alex Evans has advocated for improved water flow in Orinda and Craig Jorgens, elected to fill Evans' seat, pushed for aging water pipe replacement in his campaign literature. Fire Chief Stephen Healy has maintained that even consider-

ing the 2 percent of the 1,430 district hydrants that do not measure up to current water flow standards of at least 500 gallons per minute, MOFD can handle routine emergencies any place in the district. But routine emergencies do not concern Orindans; they fear the potential of a serious wildfire that the inadequate water flow could not handle.

"It represents a significant risk to maybe the most vulnerable part of this district for a major catastrophe," Moraga resident and past board member Dick Olsen said at the Nov. 16 district meeting.

The catch for the district is that the underground piping infrastructure and the fire hydrants are owned by the East Bay Municipal Utility District. Healy recapped a recent meeting he attended with EBMUD officials who told the chief that the water district will pay for 10 percent of a pipe rebuild if MOFD pays for 90 percent. "I have a major problem with that from a public policy perspective," Healy said. "I was very disappointed when I walked out of that meeting."

"EBMUD is tone deaf about replacement of its infrastructure," added board president Steve Anderson.

The water company serves 1.4 million East Bay customers and has to be mindful of everyone's needs, according to EBMUD spokeswoman Andrea Pook. "We've been in conversation with MOFD regarding this issue for years," she said. "Our money is not our money. They are all ratepayers' dollars, and we have to be fair how we allocate them."

Understanding the political issues the district faces in this re-

gard, the MOFD board agreed that just because it adds the water infrastructure project to the strategic plan, Healy will not be effective taking on the water district by himself. "We need to mobilize with cities and citizens' groups to encourage EBMUD to do its job better," director Brad Barber said. "It may mean for the city of Orinda to try again." Orinda residents defeated ballot measures in 2002 and 2006 to raise money for city infrastructure improvements, including hydrant and storm drain repairs.

The water district will hold a Fire Agency forum at its headquarters Dec. 13. On the meeting agenda appears an update on fire hydrant inspections. Healy and the MOFD board members plan to attend.

Though the success of the squeaky wheel may be overrated, "The wheel that never squeaks never gets the grease," Barber said, as he and the other four directors approved the water flow improvement project as part of the MOFD 2016-2021 Strategic Plan.

Roundabout, New Lights will Aid in Fixing Traffic Woes

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A rendering of the Pleasant Hill Road roundabout.

Image provided

He said that more education is probably needed to get people using it correctly and says that all the cones — still necessary until construction is over — are very distracting visually as you approach. He says there will be further signage as the roundabout is completed.

In fact the city has put together an informational brochure with tips on how to navigate the intersection in a safe and orderly fashion. Hard copy brochures are readily available in the city office lobby (3675 Mt Diablo Blvd., #210) and also at the Lafayette Library, Acalanes High School and the Community Center.

Lafayette Resident John Travale would like to see the city go

further. "I would highly recommend the use of multiple traffic officers with whistles keeping the flow moving through the circle." He says he has driven on roundabouts in Europe that were quite effective. "The difference: (They're) much larger."

Ali Bodden, a recent Lafayette resident, agrees. "Roundabouts work so well in Europe." She says that drivers are used to them, yield where they should, and that the flow of traffic is generally far, far better. "I think introducing local traffic to such a tiny roundabout was a terrible idea — drivers panic and slow down IN the roundabout, causing everyone to come to a stop."

Furthermore, Lafayette resident

Linda Murphy says, "Although the roundabout has improved the delay at Pleasant Hill Road and Olympic, a big part of that might be simply that so many motorists are avoiding that intersection and instead are using smaller side streets designed for local residents to exit their subdivision. These smaller streets are not equipped to handle the volume of cars, causing backups on these small side streets."

Coe recognized that traffic along Reliez Station Road also backs up and says that the two sets of traffic lights which will be installed over the next few months will help remedy this.

Green Light for Traffic Lights

As part of the Olympic Boulevard and Reliez Station Road Corridor improvements, the reality of those two new traffic lights came closer at the Nov. 14 city council meeting.

The council unanimously gave authorization to issue a change order to Bay City Paving and Grading in the amount of \$699,500 to install two traffic signals on Reliez Station Road — a saving to the city of \$42,000 on the original bid.

The first set of lights will be at the top of the hill on Reliez Station Road by the intersection with Las Trampas Road, an area that traditionally sees very heavy traffic during the rush hours. There will be a second light at the bottom of the hill controlling traffic at the intersection of Olympic Boulevard and Reliez Station Road.

Andreason Drive Homeowners Association President Aaron Rosenberg spoke in favor of both sets of lights and pointed out that, with deference to his neighbors at the top of the hill, the Las Trampas light addresses safety concerns and should be done first, while the light at the foot of the hill is more an issue of efficiency. Coe replied that both lights will be worked on concurrently and that both lights will be up and operating by April, weather permitting.

The lights at Las Trampas will be timed to stay green for Reliez Station Road traffic, until triggered by vehicles from the side streets to turn red. However, Coe said that

the timing could be tweaked as necessary to ensure optimal traffic flow.

The council also decided unanimously to retain the crosswalk across the east leg of Olympic Boulevard when the traffic lights are installed at that intersection.

Rosenberg, who is very much in favor of the eastern pedestrian crossing, made the point that residents from Andreason Drive currently have to cross to take their children to the school bus stop on the north side of Reliez Station Road, beyond the trail head parking lot.

In a previous discussion Mayor Mark Mitchell had questioned the need and efficiency of the proposed crosswalk, questioning the demand for such a crossing and pointing out that it would mean pedestrians crossing twice, slowing traffic still further. However, noting the pedestrian and bike only phase of the lights which allows movements in all directions to occur simultaneously under signal protection (know as "scramble" phase), Mitchell said he could support keeping the crosswalk.

Vice mayor Mike Anderson said that it is currently a very dangerous intersection and agreed that many drivers roll right through the stop sign. He said that scramble lights, which are to be found all over the Bay Area, will enable people to go in all directions and seem to work well.