



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District

Board of Directors
Wednesday, Feb. 15, 7 p.m.
Go to the website for meeting location, times and agendas. Visit www.mofd.org

ConFire Board of Directors

Tuesday, Feb. 14, 1:30 p.m.
Board Chamber room 107,
Administration Building,
651 Pine St., Martinez
For meeting times and agendas,
visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

MOFD Board OKs Major Apparatus Purchase

By Nick Marnell

A standing-room crowd that included more than a dozen firefighters saw the Moraga-Orinda Fire District board approve a \$2.85 million purchase of two fire engines, one fire truck and two ambulances, though two of the directors questioned the timing of the expenditure.

The district's long-range capital plan called for replacing the three major apparatus in the 2017-18 fiscal year, but in response to a question by Director Craig Jorgens, Fire Chief Stephen Healy said that an early purchase was necessary not only because of the condition of the equipment but due to rising interest rates and the cost savings of buying the vehicles prior to the beginning of February. In addition, mechanical issues with two ambulances have persisted and worsened and the chief said the district needs

to purchase two additional ambulances, replacing one with over 150,000 miles and the other with over 100,000 miles.

Healy explained that the new ladder truck will take 14 months to build, the engines take about nine months and the ambulances six, and once MOFD commits to the purchase the district jumps to its place in line for assembly. Plus, with the 3 percent price increase taking effect Feb. 1, the district would save about \$100,000 if it purchases the vehicles early. "We know we'll need them anyway," the chief said.

Variances in the current year-to-date budget figures that indicate the district may end up short \$1 million in revenue this year concerned Director John Jex, who said he would prefer to have the apparatus expenditures reviewed by the

finance committee first.

But most of the discussion dealt with the purchase of the truck versus a quint, a vehicle that carries an aerial ladder, a ground ladder, a pump, water and a hose. It operates both as a fire truck and a fire engine but according to many firefighters, does neither operation well.

"I know what an engine can do and I know what a truck can do," said Capt. Daryle Balao, one of the original MOFD firefighters. "My responsibility as a truck captain is to open holes and break things so that the engine company can put the fire out."

A ladder truck carries disentanglement equipment and specialized rescue supplies. It carries more tools than an engine but no water. Its aerial ladder is bigger. Its features are more in line with current firefighting needs, said the captain,

whose words were echoed by Fire Marshal Kathy Leonard. "Three-story buildings are being constructed on 20-foot-wide streets," Leonard said, making access by a ladder truck a near necessity.

Nevertheless, Jex and Jorgens voted against the purchase of the truck and the engines, but the motion passed 3 to 2 at the Jan. 18 meeting. The board unanimously agreed to buy the two ambulances.

After the district purchases the equipment it will then bid out lease-purchase contracts for the \$2.85 million. The chief will bring the options back to the board, which hinted against financing the apparatus and paying cash, as the district capital budget sits at \$10 million, restricted only by the \$4 million committed to the construction of Station 43 in Orinda.

Solar Panels on Their Way to the Lafayette BART Station

By Nick Marnell

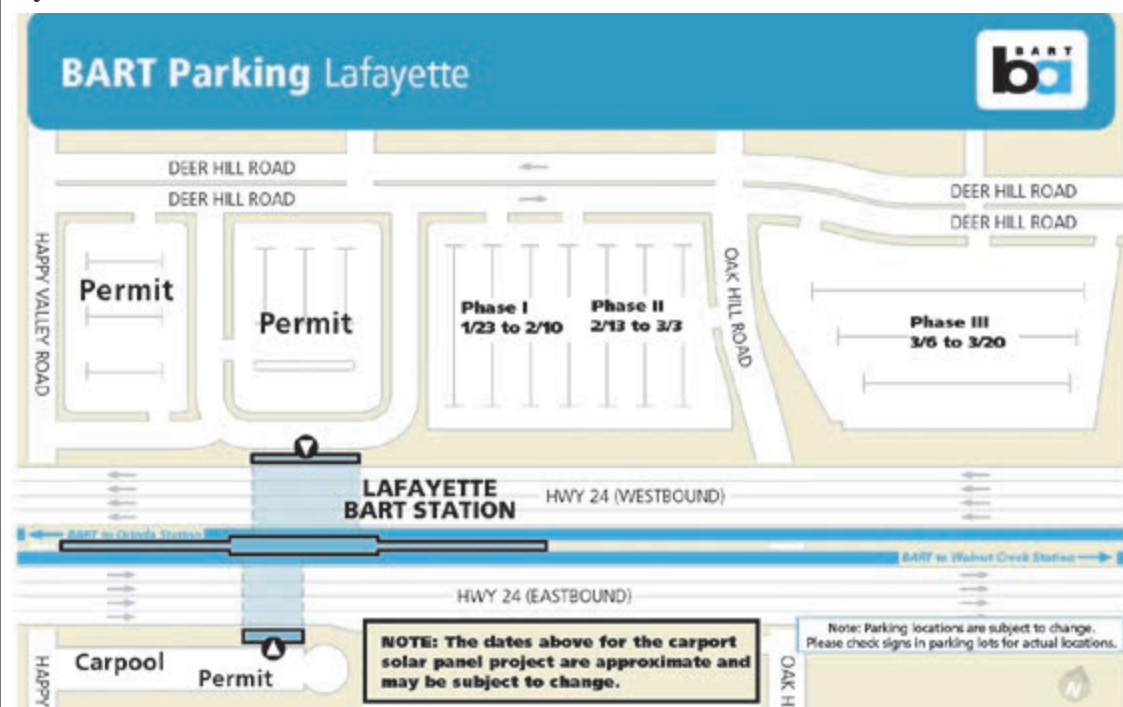


Photo courtesy Bay Area Rapid Transit

Finding a parking spot at the Lafayette BART station becomes even trickier Feb. 6 when construction crews start to fence off areas in the parking lot to allow installation of solar-paneled carports as part of a project the transit agency board authorized in October.

BART entered into a 20-year

power purchase agreement with San Mateo-based SolarCity to design, install, operate and maintain solar panels on the Lafayette station property, with the money to fund the \$3.85 million project coming from the BART energy operating budget. The agency will purchase all of the electricity generated and

use it throughout the system, making the Lafayette installation one of BART's largest solar generation facilities, according to the district.

As additional benefits to customers the panel canopies will feature LED lighting on the underside for safety, and will provide shade from the California sun.

"We apologize for the inconvenience this will cause and are trying to minimize disruption to folks trying to get a ride on BART, thus working on smaller sections of the lot at a time," said BART spokesman Taylor Huckaby. "We encourage riders to carpool together or seek an alternate means of transportation like bicycle or bus to get to the station."

The work will proceed in three phases with approximately 200 parking spaces fenced off at a time over a six-week period. Huckaby said that Lafayette riders can expect no service disruptions as a result of the project because work will be done only in the parking lot.

SolarCity completed a similar installation at the new Warm Springs station, which has yet to begin train service, and plans to install solar panels at the new Antioch eBART station this fall.

BART recommended a solar installation for the Orinda station six years ago but was rebuffed over concerns that the project would conflict with plans for the city's downtown development.

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Online Purchases ... continued from page A1

In a Dec. 9 memo about its "shop local" campaign, the Lafayette Chamber reported to its members, "One of the comments we hear from merchants is customers coming into your store, asking questions, taking photos of products and then ordering them on line from their smart phones." The solution? "Consider making a little card you can hand your customers that reminds them why it is so important to shop local." The reasons include maintaining the vibrancy of the downtown and keeping the local tax base strong. At its basis, though, the issue of online shopping is usually price, as well as the convenience of ordering items from the comfort of home while dinner is cooking.

Several local business owners agree that customers engage in buying behavior that amounts to using their stores as showrooms. Bill Snider, owner of Moraga Hardware and Lumber, has seen customers scan the UPC codes from his merchandise with their smart phones, then leave the store to order online. The owner of a service-oriented retail business in Lafayette, who asked not to be identified, reports that customers have come in to make a selection, photographed sample merchandise, flipped the items over to photograph the codes, and then departed, never to be seen again. This seems to be a common occurrence in certain types of businesses where the merchandise can be substituted, like hardware.

Some businesses succeed in combating such behavior by cultivating a loyal base of customers who wouldn't dream of abusing the owners. Other businesses have taken an even more successful tack, at least from the competitive standpoint: they offer unique or unusual items that cannot be found online. Moraga Hardware and Lumber, for example, offers items such as pickles from Colorado, high-quality flashlights, and hand and foot warmers to draw customers in. These sold well as stocking stuffers this holiday season, bolstering the store's bot-

tom line. Its associated store, Across the Way, sold gift items such as homemade cutting boards fashioned from distressed Berkshire Mountain hardwoods, flat scented candles and designer place mats and napkins that are simply not available on Amazon. Although sales at the two stores are gradually trending downward according to Snider and general manager Susan Marconi, these specialty items helped rescue this season's sales results.

Sarah McDonell, owner of Orinda's McDonell's Nursery, agrees. She has been expanding the store's offerings by increasing the selection of holiday ornaments, gifts and décor that cannot be ordered online, resulting in a better season this year than last. And Nicole Jarotzky, owner of Whimsy, a children's clothing, toy, and accessory store in Lafayette, attributes her good year to offering many unique items, although her holiday season sales were "somewhat disappointing," she admits. If there is a pattern, it seems to be related to the willingness of shoppers in affluent communities like Lamorinda to overlook price in favor of individuality and uniqueness when shopping for holiday gifts.

Nevertheless, the impact of online sales is undeniable. One local merchant said her vendors confirmed that brick and mortar stores suffered from slow sales this season. Although local UPS Store owner Doug Meyer does not handle many inbound packages because they are delivered directly to customers, his post-holiday package business is running 15 to 20 percent ahead of last year. "Returns," he explains. Those items were not purchased locally.

Although catalog sales have been around since the days of Sears Roebuck without destroying local competition, only time will tell what strategies will be effective for local businesses to meet the more daunting challenge of internet buying in a changing world. Perhaps we will know by the time drones deliver the packages and whisk away the returns.

Moraga Parents Rally to Defend Accused Los Perales Teacher

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In other media outlets, his version of the story has been that last year, during a class and in front of all his classmates, Tang put a piece of tape on John Doe's face and stigmatized him in front of the other children.

The family complained to the principal and filed charges with the Moraga Police Department. MSD immediately removed Tang from the classroom and she was suspended during the police and administrative investigations.

Moraga Police Chief Jon King said that last year when the family brought charges his officers investigated the case against the teacher. At the time King says that there was not sufficient evidence against the teacher and the district attorney decided to drop the charges. Tang returned to the classroom after the investigation and has been continuing to teach since.

It is a different version of the incident that is given by parents of other children who were in Tang's class at the time. Several reached out to the Lamorinda Weekly.

Joey Yoder had a daughter in room 22 at the time of the incident. Yoder says that what her child has said is that all the children agree that John Doe put the tape on his mouth himself, that Tang asked him to remove it and to respect class rules. Another parent who would rather not be named said that Tang's roll of duct tape in the classroom was a prop she pointed to when she wanted the children to calm down, but that she never used it against any of them. That parent and at least one other confirmed to this reporter that their children said John Doe put the tape himself on his mouth and clowned around with it, refusing to remove it.

At the school board meeting that followed the breaking of the story in different media outlets, parents came to express their unconditional support of Tang. They said they are sad that the nature of the accusations wrongly impugned the professional character of a beloved teacher.

Testimonies of her caring, skills, extraordinary ability to reach and impact even the most challenging students and to make a positive difference in their lives were described over and

over again in person and in the letters to the district. Parents whose children were in her classes said they held her in very high regard and felt she was honest, forthright, caring, compassionate, bright, loving, innovative and held the children to a highest level. Parents who went on field trip with her said they were blown away by her energy and dedication.

One parent explained to us that the sentence, "What happens in room 22 stays in room 22" used by John Doe's lawyer to hint that Tang threatened the kids, was in fact used by Tang to protect the privacy of what the children would share in the classroom. Many of Tang's current and former parents portray a teacher that would not likely put down a child, and whose passion for teaching has made a difference in her students' lives.

These parents asked the school district during the meeting not to settle the case. "The district has to stand up to defend Mrs. Tang," said the mother of a former student of Tang now in college and who had come back to support his former teacher. "Anything else would be a shame."

In the letters sent to the MSD are also missives from Tang's former students. "She took the time and effort to understand me as an individual, re-engaged me academically," wrote one ex-student, while another wrote "(she) was so welcoming, and she was a great role model and influence to me. My fourth grade year was, undoubtedly, the best year in my life."

This year, as a civil suit was filed against the MSD, King reactivated the case and his officers interviewed John Doe, something his family had not agreed to previously. The case was then brought to the District Attorney's office on Jan. 20. At the time Lamorinda Weekly went to press a decision had not been reached on whether to file charges against Tang. The story will be updated online at www.lamorindaweekly.com as soon as a decision has been made. The D.A.'s decision has no bearing on the civil law suit against the school district.