



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors
Wednesday, Nov. 15, 7 p.m.
Go to the website for meeting location, times and agendas. Visit www.mofd.org

ConFire Board of Directors
Tuesday, Nov. 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>.

Share your thoughts, insights and opinions with your community. Send a letter to the editor: letters@lamorinda-weekly.com

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MOFD accelerates pay down of its long-term liabilities

By Nick Marnell

Continuing on its march toward financial sustainability, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District board voted to contribute the largest payment yet to its retiree health benefit trust fund and to lower the plan discount rate, accelerating the reduction of its liability for other post-employment benefits.

Battered by financial woes from earlier this decade, the district rose from the canvas in 2015 and created a trust account to accumulate reserve funds to pay off its unfunded retiree health care liability. MOFD later created a similar pension stabilization trust to pay down its unfunded pension liability.

As of June 30, the district recognized \$15.2 million in net OPEB liability. In its retiree health benefit trust sat \$473,000 as of the same date. Determining that unfunded liabilities pose a threat to the district's financial condition and its ability to provide service, MOFD decided to accelerate the reduction of the OPEB liability and agreed to a 6.25 percent discount rate over an amortization period of 20 years.

"When you have a liability, the worst thing you can do is stretch it way out so that it never gets paid off," said Director John Jex. Gloriann Sasser, district administrative services director, said that financial

experts recommend to not go beyond a 20-year amortization.

As a result, the contribution to the OPEB trust jumped from a budgeted \$280,000 to \$374,000 for the current fiscal year. The district also increased its contribution to the pension stabilization fund by the same amount.

Capt. Mark McCullah, district union representative, questioned what operational funds were to be cut to pay for this increased contribution to the OPEB trust, but according to figures Sasser presented to the board, the extra money would come from a projected surplus in the district general fund.

The lone dissenting vote against increasing the trust fund contribution was cast by President Kathleen Famulener, still bristling over the budget cuts the board ordered earlier this year.

"The \$375,000 which was cut from this year's operating budget was supposed to give the district a comfortable general fund reserve for unforeseen expenses," Famulener said. "In three years, the district will have the money to make large contributions to reduce future unfunded liabilities, but right now we need the money in our general fund."

Station 16 permit approved and ConFire ready to build

By John T. Miller

After a wait of nearly six years since the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors closed down Station 16 in Lafayette, plans to rebuild are currently going through the permit process, and the station at the corner of Upper Happy Valley Road and Los Arabis Drive is about to be rebuilt.

Lafayette residents in the area will likely be relieved to hear the news, as their homes are surrounded by the same type of brush that led to the 1991 Oakland Hills fire.

The station will cover approximately 3,800 square feet and reopen on the same site as the previous one. It will have three bedrooms instead of one, and will include a workout area, an extractor machine to remove carcinogens from the firefighters' gear, and other more modern amenities.

Contra Costa County Fire Protection District Deputy Fire Chief Lewis Broschard, at the Oct. 18 Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force meeting, said, "With the improved economy and the current finances, we no longer have to look at having to borrow to finance the building. We've got the capital to build it right now."

Plans were approved last week by the building department and the permit was issued. Broschard and the construction management firm met last Wednesday to start the bidding process.

"There are five contractors already prequalified to bid," said Broschard, "so it should happen

quickly. We can then take it to the board and get some shovels in the ground."

The demolition of the existing building should take place soon and be completed by the end of the year.

The station was originally slated for closure when mold contamination resulting from rodent infestation was discovered, and in December 2012, the county board closed Station 16 along with stations in Clayton, Martinez and Walnut Creek, saving the district \$3 million a year at a time when ConFire was \$17 million in debt with no reserves.

In 2012, voters struck down Measure Q, a \$75-per-parcel bond issue, so the station never got the anticipated rebuild.

At one point the city of Lafayette threatened to detach from ConFire and join the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, but ConFire Chief Jeff Carman explained that the resources of ConFire, a much larger district, were far superior to MOFD.

Broschard met with the construction management firm Kitchell, which will manage the project from the bidding process through closeout. It will take until January to finish specifications and documents before going to bid, and the construction should be completed, barring unexpected delays, by February of 2019 at the earliest.

At the Task Force meeting, City Manager Steven Falk said, "The

city will work very closely with ConFire to make sure the station gets built as soon as possible. We'll

do everything in our power to expedite the process."

Grass fire shuts down Moraga Road



Photo Vaughn Luthringer

Moraga Road between Corliss Drive and St. Mary's Road was closed to traffic for nearly 12 hours Oct. 19 after a car crashed into a utility pole and started two grass fires.

According to Moraga-Orinda Fire District Interim Chief Jerry

Lee, the crash caused extensive damage to the pole, and because of the heat and the dry conditions, sparks ignited a 400 square foot grass fire. A second utility pole was damaged resulting in another small grass fire across the road.

No injuries were reported.

Lafayette City Council approves three-year extension

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Several of the council members who approved the package indicated that many of the grievances should be directed at the council, since Falk's role is to carry out its plans, not to make policy.

In regard to the salary, Council Member Mark Mitchell pointed out that Lafayette is one of only 10 cities out of 649 in California that is not in a CalPers retirement plan. "The costs (for retirement) are real, and this should not be compared to a salary that includes a retirement package."

Mayor Mike Anderson pointed out that Falk has been doing a good job for 21 years, and how rare it is for a city to have that kind of conti-

nuity. Council Member Samson commented that he had no problem with the financial portions of the contract, but his "no" vote centered around some objections to the non-financial components.

Asked about the three-year extension, Falk answered, "I'm gratified the council is interested in me serving three more years. I've enjoyed every single day of my 27 years working for the city of Lafayette (21 as city manager). I have the finest staff on the planet and one of the best city councils in California to work with."

EBMUD land swap deal

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The council voted 5-0 to continue the discussion until the next meeting to review the six-year-old land swap agreement, the parking needs survey and how to argue the case. The council also agreed to call an emergency meeting earlier, if necessary.

Several members of the community spoke on another issue concerning the roadway near the EBMUD power plant, questioning the

length of the median proposed on Mt. Diablo Boulevard somewhere near the cemetery in the east end of Lafayette.

Three speakers were concerned about the length of the median - EBMUD claimed it needed to be 4 feet long to protect an air valve, while the city plans indicated 50 feet. They requested that the council be aware that it would affect their end of town in a negative fashion.

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