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Letters to the editor

An issue of fire flow tax fairness

I write in response to Sora O'Doherty's July 5, 2023, article regarding the MOFD's continuing to charge the same fire flow tax to Moraga and Orinda residents. As it is a well-known fact that Orinda subsidizes Moraga for fire services, raising the fire flow tax for Moraga residents would have helped to equalize a small part of the inequality that currently exists. Property taxes support the MOFD; over the years, property values in Orinda have increased more than those in Moraga (currently \$9.38 billion vs \$5.55 billion). The result is that while Orinda and Moraga are served by the same number of firefighters per capita, Orinda is paying \$2.43 million per firefighter while Moraga is paying 42% less, at only \$1.41 million.

The MOFD was formed in 1997 with the sole intent of using Orinda's fire service taxes in Orinda, but each year the amount of Orinda's subsidies to Moraga for fire services grows larger. For 2023-2024, Orindans will be overpaying \$4.3 million to subsidize Moraga's fire service: Orinda will be paying \$21.8 million to MOFD for fire service to Orinda that is costing the MOFD only \$17.5 million.

Rather than subsidizing Moraga, these funds should be used to reduce the very real problem of Orinda's excess vegetation that presents the city with a serious wildfire risk. I am disappointed that MOFD director Mike Roemer (from Orinda's district 4) claimed it is a matter of "fairness" not to raise Moraga's fire flow tax, which might reduce the inequality between the two cities just a bit. I am also disappointed that the Orinda district MOFD members (Roemer, Jorgens and Danziger) who represent over 11,000 Orindans continue to permit these subsidies. Director Roemer said in this paper's July 5th article that he has "an obligation to keep this community united," but directing \$4.3 million of Orinda's taxes to Moraga causes conflict and not unity.

Kathleen Finch
Orinda

MOFD Fire Flow Parcel Tax

The MOFD Fire Flow Parcel Tax is a "top up" tax used to supplement regular property taxes. MOFD Director Mike Roemer, elected to represent 7,300 Orinda residents, said that it is fair to tax Orindans and Moragans the same rate for this top up tax. He is wrong.

\$21.2 million of Orinda's property taxes go to MOFD. That equates to \$2,925 per household. \$10.8 million of Moraga's property tax goes to MOFD. That equates to \$1,900 per family. The average revenue for the district as a whole is \$2,475 per household.

Orinda families already pay \$450 a year more than it costs MOFD to operate while Moraga families pay \$575 less than it costs to serve them. Orindans pay 50% more than Moragans for the same service.

Why is it fair that Orinda families pay any "top up" tax at all and why is it not fair that Moraga families pay the full \$575 shortfall

Currently the average property owner in Moraga only pays \$82 in parcel tax. The MOFD Board could have increased that to \$410, an additional \$1 per day. It still would not cover the shortfall but would have come closer than what it is now.

How Roemer can tell the 7,300 residents he is representing in Orinda that charging them an additional \$80 on top of the \$450 a year they are already being overcharged is fair, is beyond me.

Steve Cohn
Orinda

Fire flow tax, continued

I too wrote to the MOFD Board saying that it is not fair to have Orinda residents pay ~150% of what Moraga residents pay for the same service, and that increasing Moraga's fire flow tax rate would help reduce the difference.

I think Steve Cohn is right. When I asked MOFD (long ago) to tell me how much they spend in Orinda vs Moraga they said we don't and can't do that. Based on what little data MOFD does make available it seems that the cost of service to both communities is about the same!

I also note that a Moraga fire station is being rebuilt.

Charles Porges
Orinda

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

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