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Much Ado About Not Much

By Sophie Braccini

Executive Director Paul Morsen came out of retirement to help fix the management of the Central Contra Costa Waste Authority. Recently, a controversy emerged as the fairness of the use of a reserve fund was questioned. “The issue of the difference in use of fund reserve between jurisdictions needs to be put into perspective,” says Morsen. “We are talking about the allocation of a three million dollar reserve accumulated over a 13 year period, when the annual garbage collection envelope is \$30 to \$35 million a year.”

Each city pays a different rate. The solid waste rate is very dependant on the terrain,

the number of private streets, the size and practicability of the drives, and the number of commercial businesses. The more businesses, the lower the rate. So it is no wonder that Orinda, with its miles of roads and limited business population, suffers the highest rate. “Orinda is the toughest city to collect,” explains Morsen, “while Walnut Creek is much cheaper.”

In order to smooth the rates that are dependent on oil prices, the Authority saved money in a reserve fund that could be used in the subsequent years. It was found that Orinda had benefited more than its share from that fund.

“We are trying to find ways to solve what has been done in the past,” says Morsen, “but there is no risk of a related rate increase.” Decisions will be made by the Board in the coming weeks. Morsen would rather see attention focused on the good management of the Authority, which has maintained and even reduced pick-up rates over the past ten years, in spite of oil price increases and investment in new equipment. In Lafayette the rate went from an average per house per month of \$26.69 in 1994 to \$19.93 now, in Moraga from \$22.94 to \$19.98 and in Orinda from \$25.63 to \$25.23.