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MOFD to Begin Search for New Fire Chief

By Lucy Amaral

The Moraga Orinda Fire Department (MOFD) is moving ahead with the search for a new Fire Chief. At the April 15 MOFD Board of Directors meeting, Avery Associates, a Los Gatos-based executive search firm, presented a proposal for services designed to produce a list of viable candidates. Also assisting in the search would be Dr. Lawrence Bienati, president and senior principal of Consultants to Management, Inc., who specializes in human resources, organizational development/transformation and strategic planning.

William H. Avery of Avery Associates outlined the plan, which will include developing the search strategy, the interview and assessment of candidates, development of the final interview processes, and the presentation of findings for final (short list) candidate reviews.

The Board directed the staff to come back at the next meeting with a contract for approval. With the assumption that the contract is approved at the May 6 MOFD Board meeting, Board Member Frank Sperling said the Board President will "most likely sign the contract immediately after the board adjourns and the search will officially begin."

Within the recruitment process, the MOFD will include "Stakeholders," groups formed from the community, the fire department, city governments and other areas. Sperling said that Bienati's experience and skill-set is ideal for ensuring appropriate stakeholder groups are established, that their mission is clear, and that meaningful and timely information is presented to the board.

"The Board wants to ensure that we complete a comprehensive search process for a new Chief," said Sperling. "This includes ensuring that the community is involved with the process and that their input weighs in our final decision."

During the public comment portion of the Board meeting, Clyde Vaughn of Orinda read a recent article critical of the current Fire Chief, Pete Nowicki's compensation, as well as a personal statement denouncing the basis in which Nowicki's retirement salary was granted.

In response to the article, Sperling read a prepared statement saying that while Chief Nowicki's actions were one hundred percent legal and a common practice for public employees, the board recognizes that this practice has caused concerns in the community and that the board is committed to reviewing the District's pension and retirement practices and implementing needed changes.

There is no firm date as to when a new Chief will be named, however Sperling said he is hopeful that final candidates be identified by the end of July.

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