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Published August 19th, 2009

MOFD Moves Closer to New Fire Chief

By Lucy Amaral

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) moved one step closer to choosing a new Fire Chief. At a MOFD work session Board meeting held August 5, executive recruiter Bill Avery advised the Board that 56 applications have been received, many, he said, "at senior command staff levels within their current agencies." The individual hired for this position will replace interim Fire Chief Pete Nowicki, who officially retired in December of 2008 but has been retained on a contract-basis until a replacement can be found.

Avery told the Board that the next step would be to conduct formal interviews and, with the help of "Stakeholder" groups including a community panel, an internal team and a Chief's team, will whittle down the applicants to a "short list" that would then be presented to the Board for their review. No specific date was given for the final presentation. Board members Frank Sperling and Fred Weil strongly recommended a very expedite the process and requested a timeline going forward. Weil said he hoped a new Fire Chief would be signed no later than September 30.

During the meeting, the Board also responded to the recent press coverage regarding Chief Nowicki's retirement package. Through an ad hoc committee the Board issued letters to the editor to various publications (including Lamorinda Weekly) and responded to press and community inquiries. Board President Pete Wilson said he hopes these efforts will suffice and that the Board can get back to "working for the good of the district." (The Board has posted its response on the MOFD website: <http://www.mofd.org>.)

With regard to the Board's request to learn more about how the retirement components work (this time specifically the "3% at 50" rule), and what changes the Board might be able to enact, Chief Nowicki advised the board that the San Ramon Fire District (SRFD) recently retained an attorney to report on the Ventura Decision (vacation buy-back), where the Board's responsibilities end and legislative responsibilities begin. Nowicki also said that SRFD has hired an independent retirement consulting company to compare SRFD's retirement system to other fire departments in the area. These reports will be presented to the SRFD at their board meeting on August 27 which will then become available to the public. Nowicki said he will acquire these reports and present them to the MOFD Board in September.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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