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## Public Forum 1

Editor:

We need to take exception to statements in the letter appearing in this paper's Public Forum column of October 28, 2009 from Ellen Dale and her characterizations about F.A.I.R. (Fire and Infrastructure Renewal) and its arguments for examining how our tax dollars are being spent by MOFD. This letter will focus on the main issues and facts; copious details and supporting facts can be found on FAIR's website: [www.fairfororinda.org](http://www.fairfororinda.org).

First, FAIR is a "grass roots" group of concerned, civic-minded volunteers dedicated to improving our community's safety. However, Ms. Dale calls us a "small band of malcontents with a misguided crusade." We are neither small nor misguided! We are 70 strong and growing, led by a retired senior partner of a major accounting firm, a well-respected marketing and campaign pollster, a retired corporate turnaround specialist, Orinda's first city treasurer who was also the CFO of several public companies, and a financial consultant who analyzes business deals for a living. We are, however, malcontented - unhappy with MOFD's inefficient use of our tax dollars. Simply stated, FAIR wants:

- Quality service for less money - Almost 23% of the property taxes Orindans are about to pay this year go to MOFD, an average of \$1700 a parcel; our Lafayette neighbors pay \$800. Orindans pay over 100% more! Why? See our website.
- Increased local control over expenditure of our property taxes - We are against annexation by Con Fire. We are for a contract for fire and emergency services, an arrangement restoring to Orinda control over the \$12 million we are now paying to MOFD for community safety.
- Improvements in community safety - We have a plan to use the savings from a MOFD reconfiguration to expand medical service, repair water pipes and improve residential road access.

Second, LAFCO is being falsely accused of having diabolical motives to annex MOFD and take our tax monies. Ms Dale is simply using a scare tactic. LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission) is composed of local representatives from our county charged with insuring that local agencies in the county work together efficiently and effectively. Its chairperson, Supervisor Gayle Uilkema, is our own Lamorinda representative who herself was instrumental in the formation of MOFD. Moreover, Supervisor Uilkema is on record, as are other LAFCO commissioners, as encouraging - not forcing - transparent solutions to common local problems.

In its recent review of fire districts LAFCO has simply "encouraged" MOFD and its constituents to investigate MOFD's "relatively high service costs." But, MOFD has strongly resisted this public scrutiny, embarrassed by the Nowicki pension spiking scandal. Alternatively, LAFCO has also encouraged our communities to explore three MOFD restructuring options to free up tax dollars for Orinda's unfunded street, drainage and water infrastructure needs: (1) annexation by Con Fire, (2) contract with Con Fire, or (3) an independent fire department. FAIR supports the contract option. But, Ms Dale sounds very certain that if we explore these restructuring alternatives, the annexation option will be forced on us, claiming that "We cannot stop annexation at the ballot box!" We simply remind her that MOFD itself was created in 1997 after Orinda voted in 1994 against annexation by Con Fire. We do have local control of this process. Let's stop using fear tactics to obstruct an honest examination of our restructuring alternatives.

Third, we taxpayers are warned by Ms Dale that our taxes for fire services are "mandated by state law" and "frozen by Prop 13," unavailable for any other purpose. This is another obstructionist scare tactic. In fact, at the recent request of neighboring community, Kensington, Contra Costa County's legal counsel could find no restriction on local discretion in reallocating such tax revenues. Moreover, any reasonable definition of "fire services" would surely encompass water flow and road access, a definition embraced by LAFCO as well as by FAIR.

Fourth, FAIR's contention that our community is paying too much for MOFD services is based on extensive analyses, all contained in our website. Ms Dale argues for the status quo, based largely on her opinions. She attacks FAIR positions as "misleading and erroneous", LAFCO's report as "seriously flawed", and The Contra Costa Times column of Daniel Borenstein as "totally misleading." And, she also tells us she speaks for "99%" of Orindans. Instead of accepting the opinions of one vocal person, we ask you again to visit our website, [www.fairfororinda.org](http://www.fairfororinda.org), to see just the facts.

In conclusion, FAIR believes that although the model created for MOFD back in 1997 did a credible job in improving our fire protection services, it is now outdated, inefficient and unfair to Orinda. FAIR's objective is, and has always been, to formulate a plan that when implemented will provide Orinda and Moraga cost-effective fire and

emergency medical services. That plan is near completion. Therefore, we request and encourage our political leaders, indeed all of our citizens, to join us in pursuit of this important community objective.

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Orinda

(Art Haigh is a member of FAIR and has engaged in extensive community service to Orinda, including serving as the first chairman of the Orinda Citizens Infrastructure Oversight Commission in 2007-2008.)

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