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## **Public Forum**

Moraga Orinda Fire District

As we enter a new decade in 2010, it is appropriate to both look ahead at what is planned for your Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) - and to also look back at the progress that has occurred over its first 13 years.

Many of us well remember the driving factors surrounding the District's formation. Specifically: (1) we wanted to significantly enhance the seriously deficient emergency medical services that existed at that time in much of Orinda; (2) we needed to replace almost all of the old Orinda Fire District's apparatus and to seismically retrofit its fire stations; (3) we wanted to ensure that the outstanding paramedic engine company, paramedic ambulance, and fire services which already existed in Moraga, Canyon, and the portion of Orinda that was formerly served by the old Moraga Fire District would be sustained and (4) we wanted to secure local control over our fire and emergency medical services, which at that time were controlled by the County.

I personally remember a day in 1988 when our pediatrician in Orinda told my wife to quickly drive one of our children to the hospital, as it was critical our baby receive immediate emergency treatment. Today, that advice would be irrational - as the safest and most expedient method for such an emergency medical transport would be an MOFD paramedic ambulance. However, that was definitely not the case in Orinda before MOFD was formed.

Since its formation 13 years ago, MOFD has increased its paramedic ambulance service from the one paramedic staffed ambulance that formerly served the old Moraga Fire District to three paramedic ambulances - two of which are based at stations in Orinda. Canyon now has an 11,000 gallon water tank to help provide precious water in the event of a fire in that area. MOFD's Orinda stations have received new fire engines, a new water tender (tanker) and new paramedic ambulances. The Moraga stations have also received new fire engines and new paramedic ambulances. Two new, seismically safe fire stations have been built - one in each of Moraga and Orinda. Along with a seismically retrofitted Orinda fire station, we can ensure that firefighters and emergency medical staff will be able to deploy equipment in the event of a major earthquake. Firefighter training - and particularly emergency medical services training - has also been significantly expanded and improved.

Of course, improving the District over the past 13 years has not come without pain, learning, and admittedly, a few mistakes along the way. With what we learned last year regarding an arguably arcane system that allows for retirement pay to exceed base salary in one's last year of service, we have taken steps to structure the new chief's contract in a way which will limit retirement benefits to be more consistent with the intent of the program. We have also worked with the firefighters union to produce a new contract that has no salary increases and also enables the parties to re-open discussions if new pension or medical coverage issues emerge.

MOFD has not been immune to the financial challenges that have impacted public entities as a result of the severe economic recession these last two years. The fire district's 2009-2010 budget reflects a deficit. Fortunately, MOFD has diligently set aside a rainy-day reserve which will help us through this year's shortfall. Furthermore, the District has a solid long-range financial forecast which conservatively indicates that we will shortly be back in the black. Other issues we are addressing include increases in our annual pension contribution as a result of the County Pension Plan suffering investment losses and ever-rising health care costs.

So what's in store for MOFD in the coming year?

We truly want to encourage more community involvement and we want to make sure that communication from MOFD to you is clear, concise, and current. To accomplish this, we will be implementing the following:

First, we are in the process of introducing an improved website. Our website - MOFD.org - will make it easier for you to see when Board meetings are scheduled, what is on the agenda for upcoming meetings, and also the minutes that detail what occurred at past meetings. The website will also provide easy access to information that will help you to understand the District's ongoing operations. That information will include: budgets, financial statements, long-range financial forecasts, employment contracts that cover all of the District's staff, and our strategic plan.

Second, we are looking at larger sites for the board's regular meetings that will facilitate greater public participation.

Third, we are seeking to enhance community participation in the review of the district's financial plans. The following agenda items have been tentatively scheduled and can be confirmed at MOFD.org.

Strategic Plan review - February 3rd

Long Range Financial Forecast update - March 3rd

2010-11 Budget review - April 7th

Finally, we recognize that our community is blessed with well educated and forward-looking citizens. We encourage

everyone with any and all good ideas for improving MOFD's service, efficiency, and effectiveness to come forward and share them with us. After all, a 13 year-old doesn't have all of the answers. We as a Board will continue to do our absolute best to ensure continued outstanding fire and emergency medical service. We value your help and input in assuring our success in that endeavor.

Sincerely,

Frank Sperling

Moraga

(Frank Sperling is the President of the Board of Directors, Moraga-Orinda Fire District)

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