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Letters to the Editor

Editor:

The alleged inequity in the contributions of Moraga and Orinda taxpayers to the Moraga-Orinda Fire District has come up again in recent letters to this publication. That claim is based on faulty information and has already been thoroughly discredited.

Every homeowner in California pays the same 1% of assessed valuation in property tax. Contra Costa County distributes the revenue in various ways, but the proportion allocated to MOFD from Orinda is identical to what was provided to Con Fire prior to our merger with the Moraga FD.

The area served by MOFD is not defined by the borders of Orinda and Moraga. The Orinda service zone includes Highway 24, the BART station and the Caldecott Tunnel, plus some additional unincorporated land previously covered by Con Fire. The Moraga service zone includes not only the Town of Moraga, but also 700 Orinda homes (even more for ambulance service) plus the village of Canyon. In any case, MOFD is an integrated service. All but the smallest events require ambulances, engines and other equipment coming from multiple fire stations.

A separate question concerned the inadequate flow from many fire hydrants. A 1996 engineering study indicated that 29% of the hydrants did not meet the 1000 gpm standard. A total upgrade would have cost \$50 million (2002 dollars) but 2/3 of the pipes could have been fixed for \$12 million. Three subsequent bond measures failed to achieve the required 2/3 approval of the citizens. (MOFD now deploys more water tenders to mitigate the problem.) It should be noted that EBMUD is the sole owner of these pipes, and all upgrades are under their control. EBMUD will repair broken pipes, but only up to its own "design standard" of 500 gpm. Any further improvement is subject to the Rockridge Formula, which shifts most of the charge to the requesting agency, despite an actual cost difference of only a few cents per foot.

MOFD enjoys an excellent reputation, not only locally but throughout California and beyond. It is a shame that some of our citizens do not recognize their good fortune.

Gene Gottfried

Orinda

Editor:

I cannot help but notice the tension of Moraga Safeway's employees when their present manager, Brett Turner is on the scene. Disturbingly, I have overheard this manager berate, humiliate and demean employee's on numerous occasions. Apparently this type of "management" is condoned by Safeway Corporation, and it has created an ongoing and hostile environment for employee's in the Moraga Safeway. As a regular shopper there, employee's I have interacted with and become familiar with over a number of years are quite visibly "on guard" and no longer in a "normal" state of being. I believe this would be considered "oppression", as I have observed the manager treat the employee's like they are his personal "subjects". Has anyone else noticed or sensed this "devolution" in the employees' demeanors?

Marie Slocum

Moraga

Editor:

I read that the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) has voted to implement a new "cost recovery" fee for attending to car crashes. It is not enough that we pay \$17.5 million per year (\$1,500 per household) in taxes for the insurance of having emergency services, now the lucky 125 people who get into a car crash each year and actually need help have to pay for the service on top of the \$1,500 insurance they pay. It is not like the district has to hire new people to provide this service as each of their 7 units, on average, only responds to two incidents per day. But they do need the money to pay back the ill conceived \$70 million of unfunded employee benefits that they have granted over the past 14 years.

Steve Cohn

Orinda

Editor:

Recent letters to the editor have claimed that Orindans pay more than their fair share of the costs of providing fire and emergency medical services. Some calculate the taxes paid by Orinda and compare them to those paid by Moraga. Others divide those taxes by the number of fire fighters in each city. BOTH ARE INCORRECT BECAUSE THEIR CALCULATIONS ARE BASED ON CITY BOUNDARIES.

The operations of every fire district in America are based on "service areas," AKA "station and apparatus response areas." In other words, fire districts are divided into service areas based on RESPONSE TIME, NOT CITY BOUNDARIES.

While the old fire district boundaries and the old "Moraga and Orinda Zones" have been abandoned, service areas are essentially the same as they were before MOFD was formed in 1997 which means that the 700 Orinda homes

that used to be in the old Moraga Fire District are still "first due" out of Moraga stations. The significant exception is that the homes between Ivy Drive and Glorietta now get ambulance service out of Moraga, and the rest of Orinda out of downtown Orinda, instead of from AMR out of Walnut Creek.

Since 700 Orinda homes are "first due" for all emergencies out of Moraga, and an additional 800 Orinda homes are "first due" for the Moraga-based ambulance, it makes sense that any calculations attempting to determine whether or not an area is paying its fair share should factor in that information. Our city boundaries are irrelevant to the operations of MOFD and irrelevant in any calculations to determine the fair share of costs.

The claim that Orinda is subsidizing Moraga has been investigated by several agencies and committees and proven incorrect. We do not need another task force to study this issue. It is time to move on and find practical ways of generating revenue to re-build our roads and infrastructure.

Ellen Dale

Orinda

Editor:

The City of Lafayette wants to impose another parcel tax, but they have failed to prove that they are competent enough to be trusted with new revenue.

On March 1st, Mayor Carl Anduri and several other city officials met with local citizenry and attempted to justify a new "temporary" parcel tax by telling us that they don't have enough money to repair the roads.

The truth of the matter is that Lafayette had money (because of the 1995 bond measure) to do the job.

Unfortunately, they weren't competent to manage the project and the money ran out before the work was completed.

Now they want us to pay again. Roughly 25% of the citizens in Lafayette live on roads which should have been repaired more than ten years ago. Frankly, I don't believe they can do any better this time.

When our government fails, it needs to be punished for that failure. Parents know that when you reward bad behavior, you get more bad behavior. Now is not the time to reward the city's bad behavior, it is time to punish that bad behavior. In this case, the punishment should be a reduction in revenue for Lafayette. Passing a parcel tax to raise revenues is the exact opposite of the right thing to do, because it rewards the city.

I explained at the March 1st meeting that the concept of a "Revenue Shortfall" is a fiction. It's a fancy way of saying they want to spend money they don't have. The alleged "Funding Gap" for repairing the roads exists only because they don't want to spend existing city funds to repair all the roads.

I was told that the city might have to close down if the budget were cut any more than it already has been recently.

I have no sympathy for them. If they close, they will experience what millions of other Californians are already suffering through, and it would be wonderfully refreshing for City Hall to experience an economic reality check.

Kurt Schultz

Lafayette

Editor:

As a lifelong resident of Lafayette I am writing to urge community support for Measure B, the upcoming Lafayette Elementary School parcel tax measure. I am a fortunate beneficiary of a K-12 Lafayette education, attending Montecito, Springhill, Stanley and Acalanes High Schools. My husband and I purchased our home in Lafayette based on the excellence of the school district that would later provide an outstanding education for our three children. As a lifelong educator I value and appreciate what our schools provide for Lafayette's students in preparing them for the future. It is now my privilege and obligation to provide for the education of the current students of Lafayette.

The State budget crisis has continued to erode financial support for our schools. It is now up to our community to provide temporary emergency funding to preserve core academic programs, excellent teachers, and other classroom support. 100% of Measure B funds will go directly into classroom instruction in Lafayette schools. Mandatory audits will ensure proper expenditure of the funds. The tax will sunset in four years. It seems a small price to pay to continue the tradition of academic excellence that I and many others have benefitted from. Please join me in voting YES on Measure B. Excellent schools benefit our entire community!

Mary McCosker

Lafayette

Editor:

The Lafayette schools are a gem within our community, providing Lafayette's children with the strong enriched education they deserve. What's more, that education is provided very economically - we spend half of what comparable communities in other states spend to achieve similar results. State budget woes, now affecting education funding for the 4th year in a row, threaten the quality of that education and we must band together to preserve this critical community asset.

Fortunately school leaders have provided us the opportunity to support the school children of Lafayette by placing a temporary "bridge the gap" parcel tax on the ballot, Measure B. From my 8 years on the school board I can attest that our schools are already run as efficiently as possible - 4 years of budget cuts have a assured that. There is nowhere left to economize without directly impacting quality of education - in fact some programs have already been pared back and now face possible elimination. While scaling up is relatively easy once funding returns to normal levels, programs eliminated are very difficult

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