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Council Says No to Emergency Services Task Force

By Andrea A. Firth

Reasonable people can disagree. And that was the case for some of Orinda's citizenry at the June 6th City Council meeting. The Council decided, in a four to one decision with Council Member Amy Worth dissenting, not to establish a citizen emergency services task force to further investigate whether the Moraga Orinda Fire District (MOFD) is delivering emergency services cost-effectively and if Orinda is paying its fair share.

"No citizen-led audit [of the MOFD] has ever been performed in the 14 years since the District was formed," said Steve Cohn, a founding member of the citizen group F.A.I.R. (Fire and Infrastructure Renewal). Cohn had in-hand a petition signed by over 200 Orinda residents who support the formation of a citizen-led task force. "There is a strong likelihood that over \$1 million of Orinda [annual property tax] dollars are being spent to provide emergency services in Moraga," said Cohn adding that since both Moraga and the MOFD rejected the idea of contracting a third-party consultant to evaluate the situation, the City should take advantage of the citizen's expertise.

There were also several residents, who addressed the Council, who did not support the creation of another task force to investigate the Orinda and MOFD controversy.

"Yes, the MOFD has made a lot of mistakes in the past, and the County has made some decisions which have caused unfunded liabilities..." said Orinda resident Gene Gottfried, "But if [Orinda] property taxes were removed from the MOFD, they would go back to the County and most likely ConFire which is struggling financially... It's time to move on."

"You have been a very conscientious sounding board, now for several years," Carl Weber told the Council. "More discussion is a waste of time."

Worth provided a brief recap of the four meetings held by the Tri-Agency Ad Hoc Committee. The Committee, which included two members from each of the Orinda and Moraga Councils and the MOFD Board, became educated about the MOFD but no conclusions on future steps were determined, said Worth. City Manager Janet Keeter indicated that the Com-

mittee members from Moraga reported back to their Council that they were satisfied with the process and no changes were necessary, and that the MOFD Board had reached the same conclusion.

"These are complex issues that reasonable people can disagree on," said Worth. "The voters created this district [the MOFD]. We represent the same people and need to work together," she said stating her support of creating a task force.

Council Member Dean Orr disagreed. "A citizen's committee would put us back in the same spot," said Orr adding that it would require an independent third party to review the situation, and the City does not have the money to support this.

Mayor Smith, who is the Council's liaison to the MOFD, concurred. "We have studied this. I am satisfied," she said, suggesting that further comments should be directed to the MOFD Board.

Worth discussed the collective responsibility of the City and the MOFD for maintaining Orinda's infrastructure and pressed for the two groups to continue to work together on this issue.



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