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MOFD Votes to Hold Elections to Fill Vacant Board Seats

By Lucy Amaral

The Moraga Orinda Fire District (MOFD) Board of Directors voted unanimously to fill its two vacant Board seats by way of election. Rather than holding a special election at District expense, the Board also opted to have this election coincide with the November 6, 2012 General Election.

Former MOFD Board members Richard Olsen and Brook Mancinelli resigned their seats in February. The remaining three Board members, Fred Weil, Frank Sperling and John Wyro, met on March 21 to decide on a course of action to replace them. Olsen represented Division 5, covering parts of Moraga, Orinda, and Canyon, and had several years left on his tenure. Mancinelli represented Division 3 in Orinda. His term would have been up this November. MOFD Fire Chief Randy Bradley said the Board had several options: Appointing replacements for both seats; holding special elections for both seats at a cost of about \$35,000 each; holding an election that coincides with the upcoming General Election in November which would cost approximately \$5,000 each; appointing one replacement and using the election option for the other; or, doing nothing and allowing the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors to decide on the process.

Members of the public voiced their opinion, with most leaning toward an election, and all decrying the concept of spending \$35,000 for a special election with the general election so close at hand. Wesley Ayers of Orinda called the special election option "fiscally irresponsible and universally disliked."

The discussion among the board members focused on balancing the variables: the length of time the positions would be left vacant, election costs, the benefit of additional opinions, and the possible public perception of the MOFD Board being an "Old Boy's Club" if they appointed candidates to these seats. All three agreed that while they would like to have a full board as soon as possible, they also felt that it would be in the best interest of the District as a whole to let the Division voters choose their representatives.

Bradley now must file the required documents by July 4, 2012 with the County Election Official to start the District's election process. Division residents interested in running for a Board seat may pick up and file papers with the County Elections office beginning July 16. The person elected to replace Dick Olsen will serve out Olsen's term, which ends November 2014. As Mancinelli's seat was due to be up this November, whoever is elected to fill his seat will serve the full four-year term.

In an unrelated but coincidental side note, it was mentioned that Weil's term is also up this November, making three MOFD seats open. Weil, who represents Division 2 in Moraga, said that it was "more likely than not" he will indeed file papers to run for another term.

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