

# MOFD Considers Restructuring Fire Marshal Position

By Lucy Amaral

The sudden announcement of the retirement of Moraga Orinda Fire District Fire Marshal Mike Mentink at the end of March has afforded Fire Chief Randy Bradley the opportunity to look at ways the District can continue to streamline its administration without compromising service. At the April 18 Board of Director's meeting Bradley presented the Board with an option.

In his report Bradley asked the Board not to fill Mentink's former position noting that, according to the health and safety code, the Fire Chief is the designated Fire Marshal for the

District. Bradley suggested that the Board eliminate the positions of Fire Marshal and Fire Prevention Officer and create a new position of Assistant Fire Marshal. The move, he said, would help to produce a balanced financial plan with no impact on service levels.

Mentink had been with MOFD since 2008 and his duties included fire prevention, public relations and fire investigation. Bradley said that when looking at the job responsibilities of the Fire Marshal, Fire Prevention Officer and his position as Fire Chief there were many similarities and over-

lapping responsibilities. Eliminating the two positions and bringing on an Assistant Fire Marshal would result in a reduction of \$145,000 in total salary and benefit costs.

"This arrangement is not built to be a permanent solution," Bradley said. "When the economic environment improves, I fully expect a full time Fire Marshal would be hired and the Assistant Fire Marshal position would most likely be dissolved." He added that the Assistant Fire Marshal at that time might move into the Fire Marshal position.

Bradley said that because Mentink

only gave a one-week notice, the current Fire Prevention Officer, Kathy Leonard, took over many of the Fire Marshal's duties and suggested to the Board that she is the best qualified to move into the role of Assistant Fire Marshal.

Questions from the Board focused mainly on the vagueness of the new position's job description as presented, and how fire districts compare salaries. The Board agreed, however, that a decision should be made quickly and instructed Bradley to return with a re-edited job description and a clear salary matrix.

A common theme from both the Board and the public comments dealt with concerns about the quality of service. "We want to make sure services don't fall through the cracks," Board member Frank Sperling said regarding his request for more details from the Chief. "We are looking for additional information to ensure that the Board, and the community, understands how this move will be better while still offering the same level of service."

The Board plans to meet again in early May to deliberate and possibly approve the position.

## Fire Station Open House Sparks Interest

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Avery Coats from Orinda was obviously thrilled to be the man/boy behind the wheel. Photo Cathy Tyson

Perhaps burning off some energy from complimentary popcorn, the dog-inspired bounce house was as popular as the vehicles. Parents seemed more interested in some of the safety and preparedness information available; it's no secret that both Moraga and Orinda have potentially high fire danger and a nearby earthquake fault line.

Grace Santos, Secretary to the

Fire Chief, was responsible for the logistics of putting together this semi-annual event - no easy task, especially with celebrities like Smokey the Bear and Sparky the Fire Dog popping in. She said they always have their Spring Open House in Orinda, and a fall pancake breakfast event in Moraga to equally cover the two municipalities that compose the Moraga Orinda Fire District.

## MOFD Board Considers New Option to House Administrative Staff

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Currently MOFD staff is split between two fire stations: 41 in Moraga and 45 in Orinda. The report said that combining the currently split administrative offices would allow for an economy of scale, saving the District money while increasing efficiency. The Board had considered a wide range of office locations including renting space for the City of Orinda, renting from a private building owner and purchasing and renovating an existing building. All of the options were eventually shelved.

Bradley's staff report discussed the previous choices as a review, however this time he recommended the purchase of a modular building which would be located directly behind Station 41. By using a modular structure of approximately 1,000 square feet, Bradley said the two offices could be combined, Station 41 could be updated without a major renovation, and the operating budget would not be affected as funds would come from the Capital Fund budget (fire flow tax). Bradley added that he has spoken with the current project manager for the reconstruction of Station 43 in Orinda regarding the possibility of taking on this project as well.

"We are trying to find what would work best with regards to our budget and our logistics," Bradley said. He added that he believes the project could be completed for \$150,000 and would cover needed improvements in order to blend with the Moraga Scenic Corridor requirements.

Board members Frank Sperling and John Wyro were hesitant to approve a modular unit until more information was presented and understood how this building would blend into the long-range strategic plan. Board President Fred Weil said he wanted to move the process along and find an economical option that would not impact MOFD's level of service. "This is cheaper than any other alternative that has come before us," he said. "We need to give the Chief what he needs

to consolidate staff in one place and to reduce the cost of administration as best we can."

Orinda's Mayor, Victoria Smith, and Vice Mayor, Amy Worth were in attendance that night and made an appeal for the MOFD Board to reconsider leasing space in Orinda City Hall. "We would really like to have you there," Smith said. "Having your administrative staff (housed in Orinda) would allow us to create a public safety floor. It makes a lot of sense, having police, emergency communications systems (and MOFD) located there." Both Smith and Worth stated they were willing to work with MOFD regarding the lease length and vetting any concerns the District might have.

The Board instructed Bradley to return to the next Board meeting with a site and space plan for the modular units as well as a detail cost estimate. The Board also requested that Bradley keep the idea of leasing space from the City of Orinda on the table. However, Weil finished the conversation by stating that the financial aspect would be key. "I would like to find as low cost a solution as possible," he said.



**Moraga Orinda Fire District**  
**Board of Directors Meetings**  
 Meetings of the MOFD Board of Directors are open to the public and take place on the third Wednesday of each month at the Orinda City Hall, Sarge Littlehale Room, 22 Orinda Way, Orinda.

**Next meeting:**  
**Next regular MOFD Board meeting May 2, 2012**  
 (6:00 pm closed session)  
**7:00 pm at Orinda City Hall**  
 (go to www.mofd.org as the meeting date approaches for more information)

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