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MOFD Board Discusses Potential Budget Deficit

By Lucy Amaral

Lower property values and higher pension obligations mean the Moraga-Orinda Fire District could face an almost \$900,000 deficit for the 2012-2013 budget year.

At the MOFD Board Meeting held May 30, Fire Chief Randy Bradley presented the preliminary projections for the General Fund and the Capital Projects Fund budgets. Typically, this presentation would have occurred during a separate Finance Committee meeting, then a draft budget would be brought back to the full Board for review and approval in June. Because the vacant Board seats leave only three sitting Board members, they also now serve as the Finance Committee.

According to Bradley's report, property tax revenue growth is predicted to be flat at best, while expenses continue to rise, especially pension charges. Bradley said that MOFD's pension costs will increase by more than \$500,000 this next year due to higher pension obligation bond payments, as well as de-pooling and loss recovery actions taken by Contra Costa County Employee Retirement

Association (CCCERA).

Last fiscal year, the Board approved pulling more than \$350,000 from reserves in order to balance the District's budget. Bradley also noted that because of the large volume of homes being reassessed this past year, property tax revenue decreased an additional \$200,000 from the original estimate. This carry-over, along with the increased expenses for next year, created an estimated deficit of \$862,208.

Bradley discussed the cost-cutting measures the District has taken over the last several years. Eliminating several full-time positions, restructuring salaries, and freezing positions were some of the actions taken by the District to balance the budget without cutting service levels.

"This year is going to be very difficult," said Bradley. "We are running out of program elements and staffing elements to cut in order to maintain the same service levels."

Bradley offered several options to try and make up the short fall including dipping into reserves again, cross-staffing one ambulance for a year, or

funding the reserves with revenue from the Fire Flow Tax.

The proposed budget does include hiring three firefighter/paramedics. Bradley noted that these hires would replace three firefighters who retired in 2012 and therefore not represent an increase in staffing. Currently, those man-hours are being covered by overtime charges. Former Board member Brook Mancinelli, who was in the audience that night, cautioned Bradley about hiring new firefighters. Mancinelli said that while it's not a long-term solution, paying overtime to firefighters is more cost effective as there is no increase in benefits or retirement charges.

Also in attendance was former Board member Dick Olsen, who expressed concern about CCCERA and the growing pension obligations. He cited a recent study where investment-interest claims by CCCERA were overestimated. Olsen advised the Board to act cautiously.

Bradley said that the Capital Projects fund preliminary draft shows that just over \$1 million of new rev-

enues are expected, with expenditures reaching just over \$2.5 million. The expenditures for the upcoming budget year include the reconstruction of Station 43 in Orinda and remodeling costs for Station 41 in Moraga.

The discussion from the Board primarily echoed Bradley's warnings of service cuts. Board members John Wyro, Frank Sperling and Fred Weil all expressed concern about changing the ambulance configuration and how that would affect response times. As well, any redirecting of funds, such as the Fire Flow Tax, would need to be a temporary fix only. Weil directed Bradley to look at where more cuts could be made without sacrificing service, and bring back a budget proposal to the June 20 meeting for review.



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:
Regular Board Meetings
 June 6, 2012
 6:00 PM Closed Session only
 June 20, 2012
 7:00 PM Open Session
 (go to www.mofd.org as the meeting date approaches for more information)

MOFD Names Assistant Fire Marshal

Board also votes to keep the Fire Flow Tax rate at last year's level

By Lucy Amaral

Fire Protection Officer Kathy Leonard has been promoted to the position of Assistant Fire Marshal for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD). The announcement was made at the MOFD Board of Directors Meeting held May 30.

The position was created after former MOFD Fire Marshal Mike Mentink announced his retirement. Bradley said that according to the health and safety code, the Fire Chief is technically the designated Fire Marshal for the District and at the last Board meeting, suggested that the Board eliminate the positions of Fire Marshal and Fire Prevention Officer and create a new position of Assistant

Fire Marshal. This new position, combined with Bradley as Fire Marshal, would help to produce a balanced financial plan with no impact on service levels.

Leonard was a firefighter with the Hayward Fire Department for 20 years before joining MOFD as Fire Protection Officer three years ago, and has recently been certified as a Fire Marshal in the State of California.

"Kathy has the training and can now develop her skills as the Assistant Fire Marshal," said Bradley.

Bradley noted that by not filling the Fire Marshal position and eliminating the Fire Prevention Officers position, MOFD will save approxi-

mately \$145,000 each year while still offering the same level of service.

"For now, we have eliminated the position of Fire Protection Officer, and frozen the position of Fire Marshal," said Bradley. "When the economy allows, we will reinstate the Fire Marshal position. Then, we will either hire or promote someone into that position and eliminate the Assistant position."

The Board also moved to keep the Fire Flow Tax rate for the 2012-2013 fiscal year the same as last year, \$0.06 for Moraga and \$0.06 for Orinda. The Fire Flow tax, assessed to District parcels, is collected for capital expenditures such as the upcoming rebuilding of Station 43 in Orinda.

A Tearful Goodbye



Photo Andy Schreck

Police and Sheriff's officers salute the casket of Contra Costa County Supervisor Gayle Uilkema prior to her funeral service held Thursday, May 24 at St. Perpetua Church in Lafayette. More

than 600 mourners were in attendance including Lafayette City Council member Don Tatzin, and past District Attorney Gary Yancey who both cited Uilkema's professionalism, hard work, intelligence,

preparedness and ability to listen as some of the key attributes she demonstrated during her many years of public service. Uilkema lost her two-year battle with ovarian cancer on May 19. *W. Schreck*

Moraga School District Entangled in Decades-Old Scandal

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Second, the School Board should mandate a zero tolerance for teachers and administrators who fail to abide by the law and do not report suspected abuse to the authorities."

Burns said that there are several steps in place in the MSD to make sure that all employees are aware of their responsibilities for mandated reporting. "[Mandated reporting] is indicated in the staff handbook, we talk

about it during the first or second staff meeting," he said. While all MSD administrators were required to take the online training provided at mandate-reporter.ca.com this year, and they did, Burns said teachers did not take the Mandated Reporting class this year, but added, "All teachers and administrators took an on-line sexual harassment class this year."

Parents asking for a continued in-

vestigation with the possibility of prosecution of Walters, however, may have an uphill battle. "I know there is a great public outcry for prosecution," Priebe said in his e-mail, "but I can find nothing prosecutable at this time from our records."

Parents have asked the Moraga School District to answer their questions at the next public Board meeting on June 12.



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