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MOFD Board to Monitor Progress of Con Fire's Station 16 Repairs

By Lucy Amaral

Contra Costa County Fire Protection District's (Con Fire) Station 16 on Los Arabis Road in Lafayette closed in June due to infestation and mold issues. With no estimated time for reopening, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District's (MOFD) Board of Directors is keeping an eye on the situation and its effects on MOFD.

Con Fire's Station 16 is located within two miles of MOFD's Station 43 on Las Cruces and both Districts employ what is called an "Auto-Aid Agreement," whereby the closest resource from either participating agency responds to an incident. With Station 16's closure, one of the Board's concerns is that the MOFD would be called more frequently into Con Fire's district, leaving MOFD residents vulnerable.

At MOFD's Board meeting held August 1, Battalion Chief Stephen Healy offered a staff report outlining recent call volume and how it has changed since the closure of Station 16. Healy stated that since June 20, MOFD's response into Con Fire's jurisdiction increased 13 percent, while Con Fire's responses into MOFD's territory decreased 16 percent. Healy noted that because the closure was recent the data is limited, but the trend indicates MOFD will provide an increasing number of responses while Station 16 is closed.

Healy said that auto aid agreements are rarely equal in their distribution and it would be important to remember that simply by their size, Con Fire would always be able to send more units to an emergency than MOFD. He emphasized that the auto aid agreement is mutually beneficial and worth protecting, however an unreasonable increase in calls for MOFD outside the district would be unacceptable.

The Board was cautious with its comments. Board Member Frank Sperling said that one month or even one season does not make a trend, but voiced concern about the possibility of multiple calls out of the district leaving District residents under-covered. Board President Fred Weil was also concerned about the long-term effects if voters do not pass the tax increase Con Fire has placed on the November ballot.

Con Fire's Fire Chief, Daryl Louder, recently asked the Contra Costa District Board to place a parcel tax on the next ballot to address serious budget shortfalls. Concerning Station 16, Louder said the current situation has nothing to do with funding or taxes other than if revenue were available before it would have been replaced sooner. "Our requirement and desire is to provide a healthy and safe environment for our personnel," he said. "This has caused us to close the station, not a budget issue."

Louder added that the firefighters that were housed in Station 16 have been temporarily moved to Station 15 in downtown Lafayette and progress is being made to reopen Station 16. "We have completed the environmental studies," he said. "The facility would require a significant amount of work as far as remediation of areas that were affected by water leaks and rodent infestation so we are exploring other options."

Louder said that a short-term option would be to place a re-fitted construction trailer on the site, getting the firefighters back into the area quickly while a longer-term solution, either repairing or rebuilding, is considered. Those discussions, he said, are ongoing. He noted that if a construction trailer were approved, it would take about 45 days from the time of the approval to reconfigure one to be appropriate for firefighters and get it set on the fire station property.

As the presentation by Healy was for information only, no action was required, however the Board asked to be kept informed of the progress. "We are watching this closely and talking to (Con Fire)," said Healy. "We are still waiting to see the long term impact of that closure. Presently we don't know how long that station will be out of service."

Weil said he appreciates how much support MOFD receives from Con Fire. "We certainly don't want to create an unfriendly situation with Con Fire, which is providing us with so much backup and support," he said. "I just hope they will be able to kill those rats in a hurry and get Station 16 up and running again."

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