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MOFD Schedules New Director Workshops, Responds to Grand Jury Report, Delays Collective Bargaining

By Lucy Amaral

Two incoming trustees, Alex Evans and Stephen Anderson, will officially join the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) Board of Directors when they are sworn in this December. At the Board meeting held September 5, the current Board approved scheduling two public workshops before that time to help the new members become acclimated to the legal and governance responsibilities of the Board.

Evans and Anderson each ran for one of the Board seats vacated last February. They ran unopposed and were appointed in lieu of election. Evans will represent Division 5 in Orinda and Anderson will represent Division 3, which encompasses parts of Moraga, Orinda and Canyon. They will join Fred Weil, Frank Sperling and John Wyro to complete the five-member Board of Directors.

Weil's term on MOFD's Board is set to expire this November and he also chose to seek re-election. He ran unopposed and was appointed in lieu of election and will be sworn-in this December alongside Evans and Anderson. Weil will continue to represent Division 2 in Moraga.

The workshops will be held during regularly scheduled Board of Directors' meetings on October 3 and November 7. MOFD's legal counsel will facilitate the first workshop, which will focus on the legal requirements of Board members. The second workshop will discuss governance, protocols, policies and decorum. MOFD Fire Chief Randy Bradley had suggested that Board President Fred Weil facilitate this workshop, however Weil recommended that an outside facilitator be retained, allowing him to be a general member along with the others.

During the meeting the Board of Directors also approved comments offered by Chief Bradley in response to the Contra Costa County Grand Jury report: "Contra Costa County Fire Protection and Emergency Response Services, Leveraging Combined Strengths to Address Individual Weaknesses."

In the report, the Grand Jury's findings noted declining revenue, increasing personnel costs, the need to examine alternatives to how fire agencies are structured, and reducing expenses and finding additional revenue for some individual fire agencies. The Grand Jury's recommendations included ensuring a 'sunset' clause to any proposed parcel tax while evaluating alternative service delivery models, and that Fire Agencies, Local Agency Formation Commission of Contra Costa County (LAFCO) and the County should cooperate in evaluating these alternative service delivery models.

MOFD was required to respond to each of the findings and recommendations. Bradley's comments agreed or 'agreed in principle' with most of them, but disagreed on one of the recommendations. With regards to Fire Agencies, LAFCO and the County finding ways to evaluate and adopt alternative service delivery models, Bradley did not agree and stated that action should be taken only when in the best interest of the citizens they serve.

Board Member Frank Sperling was more direct. He noted that while there is a good deal of information within the report, there were no specific, actionable findings or recommendations and was unclear about the purpose of the report. "(Responding to this) is an absolute waste of everybody's time," said Sperling. Wyro and Weil agreed.

Coming out of closed session at the beginning of this meeting, Weil stated that because of the recent passage of the pension reform bill, further collective bargaining meetings with Union 1230 would need to be put on hold until MOFD's labor negotiator has the opportunity to review the bill and determine its effects on MOFD and the current negotiations. In July, MOFD and Union leaders had reached an impasse in their labor negotiations, failing to reach an agreement on a Memorandum of Understanding. Weil said their labor negotiator would return in two weeks with recommendations.

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