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Published January 16th, 2013

## MOFD Board Dispatches Task Force Report Approves the hiring of six firefighters

By Nick Marnell

The patience of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors appeared to be tested at a meeting in early January.

The Orinda Citizens Emergency Services Task Force, a group of residents investigating MOFD's management and fiscal policies, submitted a document titled "Report to the Community on the State of Emergency Services" to the Orinda City Council in September, 2012. That same month, the MOFD board directed its staff to provide an analysis of the report.

Fire Chief Randall Bradley addressed each of the report's observations and recommendations at the MOFD board meeting Jan. 9.

The report assailed the district's emergency response times. "Response times will always be an issue," Bradley said. "We will never meet national standards. We are a rural environment, and they are looking for us to maintain suburban service levels. It's not possible." The report recommended against replacing Station 43, but Bradley insisted that the station, which is over 60 years old and does not meet seismic, space, gender, or firefighter health and safety requirements, needs to be replaced. Bradley also decried what he described as the use of flawed methodology in the report, which stated that the district has close to a \$700 million pension liability.

"I read the entire 90-page report. Twice," said director Fred Weil, noting that, as an attorney, he has "great admiration for people who pull together arguments." But he declared the report to be "fundamentally flawed. It's a polemic." As to one of the report's basic premises, that Orinda is paying too much for its emergency services, he stated, "In fact, a lot more money has been spent in Orinda than in Moraga."

The report frustrated board president Frank Sperling, who said that the Task Force "continues to perpetrate a false picture to the community. I was hoping to hear new ideas, but there were none to be found." Director John Wyro put an end to the lengthy discussion. "It's time to move on," he said. "We've got work to do." No further action was taken.

Directors Alex Evans and Steve Anderson, both Orinda residents, maintained near silence throughout the Task Force report discussion.

Task Force member Steve Cohn said later, "After (the) dismissal of our concerns regarding service in Orinda, equitable funding by Orinda's taxpayers... and MOFD's long term financial stability, we are not sure what else there is for us to do."

There was indeed other work for the board to do. Despite the closure of Lafayette Fire Station 16, and the mutual aid agreement that MOFD has with the Contra Costa Fire Protection District, Bradley assured the board that the MOFD need change nothing operationally as a result, partly because Lafayette gave more aid to the MOFD than the other way around.

Vince Wells, president of Local 1230 representing firefighters, reminded the board, "You need good relationships with the other agencies. We all share the burden" of saving lives. And Dick Olsen, past MOFD board member, tried to assure the board that history has shown there will not be a problem with the two districts working together.

As a result of a December accident on Highway 24, and the consequent long-term disability of three firefighters, plus the retirement of three firefighters coming within the next few months, Bradley said that there is mounting pressure being felt by his staff. Firefighters receive "mandatory" overtime - they are required to work even when they turn down overtime - but, Bradley explained, mandatory overtime can have an impact on family life and also on the firefighters' health and safety. To partially ameliorate these issues, Bradley requested approval to hire six firefighter/paramedics. Once the new hires are made, the department will still have nine open positions.

No resistance to Bradley's request was offered. The board unanimously approved the hiring of the six firefighters.

The hirings will be finalized on or about March 1.

The next scheduled meeting of the MOFD board is Jan. 16.

Consultant to Investigate Highway 24 Accident

MOFD Fire Chief Randall Bradley gave the board an update on the conditions of his three injured firefighters who were involved in an accident on Highway 24 in December, 2012.

"I can say that all three are in good spirits and we do expect all to have full recoveries and to return to work," he said. "I do not want to speculate on timeframes."

Kelly Morris sustained a fractured right foot, a fractured right leg and a left knee injury. She is at home recovering from her injuries. Steve Rogness required reconstructive surgery on his right foot and also injured his right knee, which may require surgery at a later date. Rogness is also recuperating at home. Mike Rattary continues to recover from the symptoms of a significant concussion.

Bradley hired a consulting firm, John Sharry and Associates in Discovery Bay, to investigate the accident. Sharry was the fire chief of Lawrence Livermore Laboratories in the early '90s. The consulting contract was signed the week

of Jan. 7. The contract specifies a rate of \$125 per hour, up to an 80-hour maximum. Since the contract did not exceed Bradley's \$10,000 spending authority, no board approval was required for this action. N. Marnell

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