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## 16+43=46 MOFD board approves negotiations with ConFire

By Nick Marnell

The tale of two fire districts may not be of Dickensian proportion, but it's not without plot twists of its own. The board of directors of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District recently authorized Fire Chief Randall Bradley to begin formal negotiations with ConFire for the consolidation of MOFD Station 43 in Orinda with ConFire Station 16 in Lafayette. Bradley presented his plan for the consolidation to the MOFD board Feb. 6.

ConFire Station 16 was shut down in 2012 due to mold and rodent infestation, and was closed permanently on Jan. 15 after the failure of a Lafayette parcel tax ballot initiative in November. Concurrently, the renovation of its Fire Station 43 has been a top priority for the MOFD. In January, ConFire Chief Daryl Louder approached the MOFD to determine if there was an interest in pursuing a partnership to combine the two stations.

Using the example of a new station 46 on El Nido Ranch Road, Bradley outlined that the proposed consolidation would have only minimal impact on overall response times, call volume would still be low compared to other MOFD and ConFire stations, and the potential operational savings to the MOFD would be nearly \$1 million annually. "This is something that I would definitely consider," he said. "It makes sense."

A member of the Acalanes Valley Homeowners Association responded. "We're going to our board of supervisors with this," he said. "We want this (consolidation) to happen." District resident Keith Jacobsen offered his pragmatic viewpoint. "If response times are almost a wash, a million bucks is a million bucks," he said. "I urge the board to accept this."

A couple of Lafayette residents spoke in favor of a total merger between Lafayette and MOFD - one dubbed the suggested new entity "Lamorinda Fire."

But former MOFD director Brooke Mancinelli warned that "Contra Costa is after our tax revenue to fund their county. This could harm the citizens of Moraga and Orinda."

Dick Olsen, also a past MOFD director, was skeptical of the response times presented, suggesting that they be road tested. He also wanted to be certain that any new station in Lafayette would be an MOFD fire station.

Director John Wyro tried to put any concern about the size of the MOFD to rest. "We will remain a five-station district," he stated.

Director Alex Evans asked Olsen and Mancinelli how they would vote on this issue. "If I were on the board, I would vote against continuing these discussions," said Olsen. Mancinelli agreed. "I would shut this idea down immediately," he said.

Following public comment, the board took up its discussion. "How does Louder think he can come up with the money to do this?" asked Frank Sperling, board president. Director Fred Weil insisted that any contract be a long-term contract, and that he preferred that the deal be made with the city of Lafayette rather than with Contra Costa County. "We must be protected from the political problems of the county," he said.

Wyro recommended that Bradley pursue the consolidation idea with Louder. "We have a fiduciary responsibility to study this," he said. Sperling was also in favor of continuing the discussion.

But Evans held up his confirmation until he was assured of one final requirement.

"The only way to get me to agree is to get more information," he said. "We need a lot more public input. We need a plan to get it." Wyro agreed that the community had to be more engaged. "And we need to be sure that there is dialogue with the city of Lafayette," he said.

The final motion, which read, "To continue to evaluate service level impacts, financial impacts, community concerns and station relocation options while beginning formal discussions with the Contra Costa Consolidated Fire District, and the city of Lafayette, to develop a Fire Station 43 and 16 proposal for the board's consideration," passed unanimously, 4-0; director Steve Anderson was absent.

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