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Tri-City Meeting Features Fire Stations

Councils also discuss bundling infrastructure projects

By Sophie Braccini

"This was the heftiest meeting we've had- maybe we should consider having a follow-up later this year," said Lafayette's Mayor Mike Anderson at the end of the tri-city meeting Feb. 22. The traditional annual meeting, once a forum for the three Lamorinda city/town councils to present their achievements, turned into a real tri-city work session at which two main topics were actively debated: The consolidation of two fire stations in separate fire districts; and bundling public works projects to save public money.

Contra Costa County Fire Protection District Chief Daryl Louder and Moraga-Orinda Fire District Chief Randall Bradley gave a joint presentation of their plan to combine ConFire station 16 in Lafayette with MOFD station 43 in Orinda.

Their rationale -the two stations are only about 1.5 miles apart, both are under-utilized in terms of average number of calls and houses served, and both agencies are scrambling for money. Station 16, known as the Los Arabis station, was recently closed by the county and station 43 is scheduled to undergo major renovations. Both see synergy and savings in a plan that's now in a study phase.

The Lafayette City Council had nothing but encouragement to offer the two chiefs; Anderson called the project a "perfect storm." The Orinda City Council was a bit more reluctant. "MOFD was created because we wanted to improve fire and paramedic response time," noted Mayor Amy Worth.

Most members of the public who spoke were in support of the idea, although they indicated that the issue should be further studied. But Gordon Nathan retold the story of how Moraga and Orinda became a joint fire district. "It was not good timing for Lafayette to secede from ConFire then," said Nathan, "but it may be now." Mayor Dave Trotter of Moraga said he thought folding Lafayette into MOFD was an idea worth considering.

When the councils turned their attention to public works, Contra Costa Transportation Agency Deputy Executive Director Ross Chittenden took the stand to present the benefits Lamorinda could expect if the communities bundle their infrastructure projects and bid them together. Chittenden said recent studies show that the economy of scale results in a 10 percent savings for cities. "This is about stretching our dollars," said Worth. The three cities agreed they should work together on their summer of 2014 roadwork campaign.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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