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## One Step Closer to a Lamorinda Fire District?

By Nick Marnell

After the defeat of a proposed fire station consolidation with the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District altered its strategy and sought a partnership with the city of Lafayette.

The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors on May 14 rejected ConFire Chief Daryl Louder's request to pursue a joint venture fire station with the MOFD. The proposed station 46 was to have replaced ConFire's closed station 16 and MOFD's station 43, which had been scheduled for renovation. The partnership was estimated to save each district \$1 million in annual operating costs.

"It's \$1.1 million more than we're spending now," said Supervisor John Gioia, referring to ConFire's share of the projected annual operating cost of the proposed station. "And we have no immediate plans to reopen 16."

The board did agree that the consolidation idea was a sound one. But having discussed even more layoffs for the district earlier in the day, the supervisors said that the timing of the proposal was unfortunate. Only District 2 supervisor Candace Andersen voted in favor of moving forward with the proposed station 46, which was to be built on Lorinda Lane near the Lafayette-Orinda border.

The next day, the MOFD board voted to terminate the sales contract to purchase the Lorinda Lane property and forfeit a \$15,000 deposit.

"I was in favor of this deal because it made sense financially," said director Steve Anderson, whose swing vote resulted in a 3-2 count in favor of the contract termination. "But it is no longer attractive. I don't see ConFire as ever being a viable partner, and I am not willing to roll the dice on a real estate deal."

"I am obviously disappointed," said MOFD Fire Chief Randall Bradley. "Without control of the property, we lose the leverage we need to find a partner." Director John Wyro, a fierce advocate for the Lorinda Lane purchase, also said that he was disappointed in the board's action. "I am evaluating alternatives," he added.

An alternative surfaced the following evening.

At a May 16 special meeting the Lafayette City Council, based upon the recommendation of Council Member Don Tatzin, agreed to investigate and study the possibility of detachment from ConFire and annexation into the MOFD.

"I'm not feeling the love from ConFire," said Mayor Mike Anderson. "Let them know we're looking at moving on."

MOFD directors Wyro and Anderson attended the council meeting; Wyro pushed hard for the council to have Lafayette step up and partner with MOFD. "We ask that you give us a commitment that this is a serious idea worth pursuing," he said. "Maybe then we can put together a contract (to purchase property for a station)."

"It's going to take some time," cautioned Mike Anderson. "I don't want to raise people's expectations that we can move quickly. And I don't know if it's fair to MOFD. But if MOFD's eyes are open, then that's great."

The council directed its public safety committee to develop a proposal for detachment and annexation, and charged city manager Steven Falk to find out the requirements of the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission.

"If we don't do something, ConFire will be our only option," said Council Member Brandt Andersson. "And that won't be a good situation to be in."

The council is expected to review the information at its June 10 meeting.

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