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Lamorinda Fire News Briefs

By Nick Marnell

New ConFire Chief Given Heads-Up

The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors formally approved Jeff Carman as the new fire chief of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District at its Sept. 17 meeting. His start date was confirmed as Oct. 21.

But in a requisite sign of the times, controversy over his pension preceded the board's unanimous vote.

Because Carman worked for the City of Roseville Fire Department, and contributed to its pension plan, he will transition into the Contra Costa County Employees' Retirement Association as a legacy employee; meaning, since he was originally hired prior to Jan. 1, 2013, he is not subject to the stricter rules of the California Public Employees' Pension Reform Act. "His retirement was one issue we had no control over, and we wanted to make sure that was on the record," said supervisor Karen Mitchoff.

Rollie Katz, supervising business agent of Public Employees Union, Local No.1, groused about the vacation benefit that Carman received. "I can't remember anyone (in our union) starting with 80 hours of vacation credit, or being given seven weeks vacation when they start. It may simply be a means to enhance one's pension," he said.

ConFire has an unfunded pension liability, including other post-employment benefits, of more than \$400 million.

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District carries more than \$80 million in unfunded OPEB and pension liability.

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Approves Operating Budget

Though the Moraga-Orinda Fire District passed a 2013-14 fiscal year budget Sept. 18 that included no service reductions, an ominous tone emanated from board members.

The budget, prepared by interim fire chief Stephen Healy and new administrative services director Gloriann Sasser, forecast an operating loss of \$950,000 and a capital loss of over \$500,000. As a result, the district will dip into its reserve fund for the third consecutive fiscal year, dropping the fund to approximately \$1.2 million.

District revenue increased thanks to projected higher property tax receipts and as a result of an award granted by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to fund four firefighter positions. The hiring of the new firefighters is forecast to reduce district overtime charges by more than \$700,000. However, contributions to the employee retirement fund increased to more than \$3.3 million.

The capital budget was most affected by the purchase of the property to be used for potential fire station 46. The district's purchase of the \$1.2 million parcel at 1035 Lorinda Lane in Lafayette closed in July.

As director Steve Anderson pointed out at the recent finance committee meeting, these losses are not sustainable by the district. "We need to do something different," said board president John Wyro.

The retirement charges foisted on the district by the Contra Costa County Employees' Retirement Association will increase another \$2 million in fiscal year 2014-15. "These changes wrought by CCCERA need to be responded to," said director Fred Weil. "What are we going to do structurally?"

The board scheduled a community budget workshop for Oct. 2, in order to seek public input for changes to be made in district operations. "The things we are considering are significant," said Anderson.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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