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## MOFD Board Approves Staffing Cuts

By Nick Marnell

After requesting public input at two financial workshops, and despite being divided on the specifics of the implementation, the board of directors authorized fire chief Stephen Healy to put into effect a staffing model that may result in service reductions for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District. The new plan will lower the number of daily on-duty safety personnel at the district's five fire stations from 19 to 17. The directors unanimously passed the motion Oct. 16.

The district's current staffing model includes five fire engines, one full-time ambulance each in Moraga and Orinda, and one cross-staffed ambulance. The cross-staffed ambulance - an ambulance staffed by the crew of the station's engine company - resides at station 44 in Orinda. Under Healy's recommended staffing model, which he presented at an Orinda community workshop prior to the meeting, the district will employ three cross-staffed ambulances at the Orinda stations, with a full-time ambulance at station 41 in Moraga. The engine-only company at station 42 will remain unchanged. The proposed model - labeled "17-2" - will result in a reduction of two on-duty employees per day but will require the purchase of an additional ambulance.

"It's the quickest way to make a difference," said John Wyro, board president. The district is staring at a third consecutive year of red ink, and the revised staffing model is estimated to save more than \$70,000 a month in operating costs.

Not everyone saw the solution as so simple and obvious.

"How much money are you trying to save?" asked Vince Wells, president of Local 1230, United Professional Firefighters of Contra Costa County. "Maybe we can find the money other than in service reductions and personnel costs." The district is forecast to lose \$950,000 this fiscal year.

Even the board members did not agree on the details of a new staffing model. Though he voted with the board to pass the motion authorizing service reductions, director and northwest Orinda resident Alex Evans was vehemently opposed to the plan that Healy recommended. "I'm not voting for 17-2. Not today, not next week, not ever," he said. The proposal also disturbed MOFD station 45 captain Mark McCullah. "Orinda will see a service reduction with 17-2," he said.

Others cautioned that additional senior housing was coming to Orinda, which may put a strain on MOFD services if they are cut back there. And a citizen wondered aloud how the new staffing model will be affected if "station 43 becomes 46," the proposed station on the Lafayette-Orinda border that would be jointly owned by two fire partners. "Yes, everything needs to be on the table," said Wyro. "(17-2) is not the only thing that we will look at."

"We are at great risk," added Evans. "Other things that we may have to do will be much worse."

One of the first orders of business for the district is to discuss the proposed changes with the firefighters union. So, before any action is taken, Healy and Wells will meet and confer over the effect of the proposed changes on firefighters' workloads and their safety.

Wyro did find a positive for district residents amidst all of the uncomfortable news that was shared that evening.

"We will be able to handle this problem ourselves," he said. "There is no need to raise taxes."

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