

Union Rallies Against MOFD Board

By Nick Marnell

A loud, standing-room-only crowd of disgruntled firefighters punctuated its message to the Moraga-Orinda Fire District board of directors at the Feb. 19 district meeting: the rank and file are not happy with the direction of labor negotiations.

In January the board made its last, best and final offer to Local 1230 of the firefighters' union. The terms included a 9.5 percent pay cut for one year. The board declared an impasse; the union rejected the offer and has until Feb. 27 to request state-mandated fact finding.

MOFD union representative Mark DeWeese said that the board, not the firefighters, needs to be held accountable for its poor financial decisions. "We are the ones out in the street doing the work," he said. "If you don't sup-

port your workers, you are going to hurt your chances of having a successful organization."

"We don't deserve to be treated like this," said an emotional Tim Hill, MOFD engineer-paramedic.

Board president John Wyro assured the firefighters that nothing has been imposed and negotiations are ongoing. "Our goal is a sustainable fire district five years from now," he said. "We are available to talk at any time, about anything."

The most raucous ovation of the evening came after DeWeese blasted the terms of a self-administered pay cut requested by fire chief Stephen Healy.

In November, the board approved an employment contract for Healy at an annual salary of \$220,000, more than \$30,000

over the salary of his predecessor, Randall Bradley. At the meeting, Healy offered to amend his contract with a pay cut of 9.5 percent, the same reduction in salary offered to the firefighters.

"I appreciate your leadership on this," said director Fred Weil. "I take it to mean that you are prepared to do whatever else develops out of the negotiations or imposition with respect to the firefighters. On that basis I would vote to approve this." Healy said he understood that, at the will of the board, the term and the amount of the adjustment could change.

"The board is trying to market this agenda item as the same proposed pay cut they are threatening to impose on the firefighters," said DeWeese. "This move may deceive a casual member of the pub-

lic, but the rank and file employees are able to put it in proper context." He explained that the 9.5 percent pay reduction that the board presented to the firefighters would lower their pay to 2 percent less than they made in 2006. The comparable base salary for Healy should be \$169,000, he said.

DeWeese did acknowledge appreciation for Healy's gesture. "But he is about \$30,000 short of putting (his salary reduction) on par with what he and the board are trying to force on the rest of us," he said.

The motion to amend Healy's contract passed 3-0; directors Alex Evans and Steve Anderson were absent.

Wyro later confirmed that the original negotiations with the chief were done in good faith. He said that one of the reasons for the

chief's large pay increase was that Healy would be taking a hit in loss of overtime from his prior position as division chief. Wyro also insisted that the pay reduction amendment to Healy's contract was not a predetermined ploy.

"I can see how it might look that way, but that's definitely not the case," he said.



Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors Meetings

Next meetings:
Wednesday, March 19
Wednesday, April 18
check website for updates
 (Go to www.mofd.org as the meeting date approaches for location and more information)

Lafayette Task Force Inches Forward

By Nick Marnell

The Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force, charged with seeking alternatives for the delivery of fire and emergency medical services to Lafayette residents, presented an update at the Feb. 10 City Council meeting. It also received a lecture from the president of the firefighters' union.

"Some of the things you've been saying are insulting to us," said Vince Wells, president of the United Professional Firefighters of Contra Costa County. "I have never heard a discussion at your meetings about putting fires out. All of the discussion has been on the finances." The task force meetings have focused mostly on the city's possible detachment from the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, the finan-

cial condition of the local fire districts and a proposed fire station 46 at the Lafayette-Orinda border, to be jointly owned and operated by ConFire and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

"There has been no intention to insult you or the firefighters," said Councilmember Mike Anderson. "That's not the issue. We're not getting what we're paying for, and the Board of Supervisors is not giving us what we want."

Task force co-chair Traci Reilly was just as direct. "Our residents demand that we fix a problem," she said. "We are trying to do what's best for Lafayette."

Wells, a ConFire captain, tried to downplay the city's frustration. "I hear this same complaint in

every district," he said. "Orinda thinks it's subsidizing Moraga. Brentwood thinks it's subsidizing East County. I'm almost ready to tell Brentwood to go ahead and leave. They'll find out how good they had it." He concluded with an admonition to the task force on its priorities. "Fire should not be minimized," he said.

The task force's report to the City Council outlined the bleak financial situation of both fire districts, but it noted that MOFD has taken steps to address its problems. It specified that a detachment from ConFire would be very difficult to accomplish without a negotiated agreement on the allocation of assets. Reilly explained that Lafayette is too small to stand on its own, so contracting for fire service is an option – with

ConFire, MOFD and Cal Fire as potential candidates.

Slower response times in western Lafayette since the closure of ConFire station 16 were confirmed by task force co-chair Brandt Andersson, who complimented fire chief Jeff Carman on his willingness to at least consider new ideas for service delivery. Because of the deterioration of service, Andersson urged the City Council to not close the door on the idea of station 46, in spite of the current financial challenges.

Mayor Dan Tatzin summarized the direction from the City Council. "What level of fire and emergency medical service do our residents want, and what will it take to get us there?" he said. The task force was given the go-ahead to continue its investigation.

A glimmer of cautious optimism arose at the Feb. 20 task force meeting.

Andersson, who has been pushing Carman and MOFD chief Stephen Healy to move on station 46, requested an update. Healy said the district is awaiting results of environmental tests on the property, and after that, it will have architectural renderings of a new station to show the committee. Carman said he is putting together a presentation for the Board of Supervisors on the financing of the shared fire station. Commenting on the initial feedback to his proposal, Carman uttered a phrase not often heard the past two years in discussions of fire district finances.

"I'm encouraged by it," he said.



RECLAIM THE RIGHT TO LAUGH YOURSELF SILLY.

It's no fun to swallow a laugh, stifle a sneeze or suppress a cough just because you're afraid of a little leakage. More than 13 million people in the U.S. struggle with urinary incontinence, including one out of every four women. Come hear urogynecologist Anna Frick, M.D., discuss options for managing female continence. Then get back to having all the fun you deserve.

THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 6:30 - 8 P.M.

LOCATION:

Lafayette Library and Learning Center
 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd.
 Lafayette, CA 94549

Call (510) 869-6737 to save your seat.

altabatessummit.org

 **Sutter Health**
 Alta Bates Summit Medical Center
We Plus You