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But They'll Certainly Be Well Protected

By Nick Marnell

Station 41 captain Anthony Perry, on behalf of the nearly two dozen firefighters standing behind him, sent the board a message regarding the labor negotiations at the March 19 meeting of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

"We're not here to impede your meeting," said Perry, one of the district's Local 1230 representatives. "We've had some positive things occur and it's clear evidence that both sides are working hard on a solution. We hope that an agreement can be reached soon." The district declared an impasse in the negotiations in January, but one month later accepted the union's request to enter into mediation. Vince Wells, the union president, had publicly expressed his gratitude and the presence of the rank and file seemed to endorse his position. The firefighters stayed until the end of the meeting and contributed during public discussion of the main agenda item.

Real estate developer City Ventures, Inc., has proposed a 36-unit townhome project to the Town of Moraga, to be constructed on a site adjacent to MOFD station 41. Fire

chief Stephen Healy presented the latest update on the project: that the developer agreed to construct a sound wall along the property line shared with the district in an attempt to minimize noise for the residents.

The first to object was director Fred Weil. He lambasted the idea that the sound wall will provide noise protection. He predicted that the development's proposed hiking trail will impede the ability of the district to reconstruct station 41. And he demanded that residents be warned of the fact that fire service training will be going on at all hours on MOFD property. "The fire district was there first," he said. "I will not agree to further degrade that site. It's the wrong place to put (the development), and I would like the board to tell the council that it's the wrong place to put it."

Director Kathleen Famulener offered that constructing a children's playground adjacent to the district's training facility was a terrible idea. "We need to fight now to have it built on the other end of the development," she said. "The first 3-year-old who cries because he's afraid of the chain saw noise, we're going to lose."

"We could no longer flow water during our training," added Perry. "Since water can shoot several hundred feet, we would no longer be able to use our hoses by the playground."

All of these objections can be stated in the covenants, conditions and restrictions of the homeowners' association, said director Steve Anderson: "There's a fire station next to you, and there's going to be a lot of smoke and a lot of noise." Board president John Wyro agreed that the compatibility issues need to be addressed, and the board authorized Healy to present the district's concerns to the Moraga Planning Commission in late April.

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors Meetings

Next meetings:

Wednesday, April 16
check website for updates

(Go to www.mofd.org as the meeting date approaches for location and more information)

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ConFire's Quest for Additional Revenue

By Nick Marnell

When the final draft of the Fitch Report was presented to the Board of Supervisors in February, the document offered no ideas for revenue generation for the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. The report focused mainly on how the struggling district could improve its service model. "As a fire chief, I've looked for revenue sources for 40 years and found none that were sustainable or reliable," said Jim Broman, the Fitch consultant who made the presentation.

ConFire chief Jeff Carman did not accept that message. He recently outlined his ideas for securing additional revenue for the district, his first notion being the implementation of a first responder fee, a fee-for-service program that he proposed to the Board of Supervisors at its March 11 meeting.

A portion of your property tax bill has traditionally been allocated to fire departments to protect just that - property. But fire districts have expanded their service models over the years to include medical calls, technical rescue operations, hazardous materials responses and the like. As long as times were good, there were no issues providing these and other services.

Times are no longer so good, acknowledged Carman, and revenue needs to increase; at least, to offset the expenses of responding to these non-property protection incidents. "We have to find a way to stabilize our revenue streams, so that is my main pri-

ority for the district while I am here," he said.

Carman's proposal will enable ConFire to collect a first responder fee for the assessment and treatment of medical patients at the scene. At \$416 per incident, to be billed to insurance companies, Carman expects the district will generate over \$1 million per year. The insurance companies benefit, he said, because it will cost them less in the long run to have quality care provided early in a medical emergency. Under a similar, but not identical, program, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District budgeted more than \$1 million in ambulance fee revenue this fiscal year.

The Board of Supervisors agreed in principle with Carman's proposal, but supervisors Federal Glover and John Gioia asked Carman to perform more due diligence on its implementation. "We want to be sure we are not violating our responsibilities to the California Welfare and Institutions Code," said Gioia, referring to the county's duty to provide health care services to indigent and dependent poor persons and those otherwise incapacitated.

Other ideas Carman discussed included using the ConFire training division to generate revenue. He explained that the cost of running the division could be offset by allowing colleges and other organizations to use the training facility to provide high level fire service education. "We are fortunate enough to have a facility

like we do, and many of our neighbors do not," he said. "We could host training classes at our facility and invite our neighbors. They can attend classes close to home, we collect tuition costs and it is a win/win for all."

The chief envisioned a similar situation involving his maintenance facility, providing repair work for neighboring agencies that do not have their own shop. "If we determine we have extra capacity in our shop, we could contract with those neighboring agencies to bring their equipment to us," said Carman. "It would save them travel time and money, and it could support our fleet maintenance program." He also threw out the possibility of performing mobile repairs on other agencies' apparatus, potential for yet more revenue.

"With our areas of expertise and specialty, including our communication center and radio service programs, we can provide a better and more economical service to our co-operators," said Carman. "We all win!" Other than for the first responder fee program, he did not estimate revenue figures.

First comes internal house cleaning, though. ConFire's lead mechanic retired in February, and the district is considering an organizational change in the fleet maintenance division. Lewis Broschard was recently promoted to assistant chief of support services, and one of his first goals is to improve the performance of the district's communications center.

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