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**Station 46 is on Fire**

By Nick Marnell

Although the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District bypassed Lafayette in the deployment of additional firefighters made possible by the receipt of federal grant money, the city may soon benefit from the approval of proposed fire station 46 on the Orinda-Lafayette border.

“Rebuilding an organization is as emotional as taking it down,” said ConFire chief Jeff Carman as he outlined his staffing plans at the April 1 district board meeting. “We have analyzed our performance data and we have not seen any indication that adding a second resource to the existing Lafayette stations will improve the response times.”

He suggested that the addition of a two-person squad to station 1 in downtown Walnut Creek will provide backup service to Lafayette, but he maintains that the best thing for Lafayette is to get station 46 open. Carman said he is optimistic that the joint venture between ConFire and

the Moraga-Orinda Fire District will happen.

MOFD chief Stephen Healy plans to address his board soon with the details of an agreement for the jointly operated station, and Carman said he expects to present the deal to the Board of Supervisors after that. Healy confirmed that both parties are close to a tentative agreement.

City and county officials also sound more upbeat about the consolidated fire station than they did a year ago.

“I hope that ConFire's ability to add more personnel in areas where service has been reduced is part of a balanced approach to restore service throughout the district, which should include taking the final steps to expedite the building and staffing of station 46,” said Lafayette City Council member Brandt Andersson, who co-chairs the city's Emergency Services Task Force.

District 2 Supervisor Candace Andersen expressed a similar sense of

urgency. “Carman is actively working on station 46 and believes we're getting close to a deal. We're hopeful that he will be coming forward to the Board of Supervisors soon,” she said.

In 1999, then MOFD chief Jim Johnston recommended that “it would

be rational and logical to proceed with the construction of a single fire station along El Nido Road in replacement of fire station 43 in the MOFD and fire station 16 in ConFire.” After 15 years, his idea may finally be making it out of committee.



**Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors Meetings**

**Next meetings:**

**Wednesday, April 16 check website for updates**

(Go to [www.mofd.org](http://www.mofd.org) as the meeting date approaches for location and more information)

**ConFire Pitches to Acquire County Ambulance Contract**

By Nick Marnell

Contra Costa County Fire Protection District chief Jeff Carman requested April 1 that his board authorize him to hire a consultant to study the feasibility of ConFire taking over the county ambulance service. The county's ambulance contract with American Medical Response expires in 2015.

“We're going to have to take risks and do some things we have never done before,” said Carman. He outlined how his proposal will allow ConFire to exercise direct management control over the county ambulance service. ConFire currently has no say over where ambulances are stationed or from where they respond, he said; as he envisions it, the district would be able to send the most appropriate resource to the scene of medical emergencies and better manage the location of ambulances throughout the county.

“One of the biggest criticisms I get is why we send both an engine and an ambulance to a medical emergency,” said the chief. “My answer is because we don't know where the ambulance is coming from.”

The ambulances will be staffed with non-safety emergency medical technicians and paramedics, not firefighters, said Carman. “That will be our entry level position, at a much lower pay scale, and the EMTs will have the ability to promote to a firefighter if their performance is acceptable,” he explained. “By only requiring EMT for entry, we can hire more diversity into the organization as well.”

Vince Wells, president of United Professional Firefighters of Contra Costa County, Local 1230, supported the concept, which he said is being considered by other non-trans-

porting fire agencies. “There are certain benefits to having the fire district provide first response to medical calls and transportation to the hospital,” he said. “The profits made by the business would be put back into the system. This would provide additional funds to the district, instead of the profits going out of the system to a private company. By staffing the ambulances with a lower paid, ‘single role’ employee instead of firefighter/paramedics, the fire district would be able to put in a competitive bid for the contract.”

The supervisors also appeared to be on board.

“It's exciting. This will create a lot of buzz,” said chair Karen Mitchoff. She pushed Carman to bring a concrete proposal to the board as soon as possible. Supervisor John Gioia asked for confirmation that the plan would be a financial win for the district and insisted that whatever is done be in the best interest of the overall county emergency medical service system.

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District is one of the county fire agencies that operates its own ambulance service – “201 rights,” in EMS jargon. And though the district has no intention of ceding its ambulance service to ConFire, it did not totally close the door on participation in the countywide concept. “Obviously local control and high quality service are priorities for the district and residents,” said Fire Chief Stephen Healy. “A joint powers agreement may be a means by which MOFD could participate while still retaining its 201 rights.”

Carman assured the supervisors that he will present to the board his formal request for the consultant study within 60 days.

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