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Civic News Fire Districts

Lamorinda Fire News Briefs

By Nick Marnell

MOFD Seasonal Staffing Increase

Because of a general fund deficit, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District lowered its daily on-duty minimum staffing level from 19 to 17 in November. But with the district facing drought conditions and the risk of a large vegetation fire, particularly in north Orinda, fire chief Stephen Healy requested a staffing increase from May 12 through Oct. 31 at the May 7 board of directors meeting.

Healy specifically recommended that the district re-staff the ambulance at Orinda Village station 45 from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily. "It will increase the availability of engine 44 in south Orinda, which will add three additional firefighters to a vegetation fire the majority of the time," said the chief. His proposal will increase overtime charges by \$65,000 this fiscal year and \$142,000 in 2014-15.

A motion to approve the staffing increase passed 4-0, with board president John Wyro absent.

MOFD Budget Workshop

After three consecutive years of General Fund deficit spending, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District presented a fiscal year 2014-15 budget with a projected operating surplus at its May 14 Finance Committee meeting.

"We were given direction to present a balanced budget for 2014-15," said Gloriann Sasser, administrative services director. "In order to do that, significant changes had to be implemented."

Many of those changes resulted from the new four-year labor agreement struck by the district with Local 1230 in April; under the new contract, salaries decreased 3.5 percent for the first year and health benefits were capped at 2010 levels for active employees and retirees. The district will also continue to operate with one less division chief. As a result, salaries and overtime are projected to decrease nearly \$600,000 for the new fiscal year.

Though 2014-15 property tax revenue is projected to increase more than \$1 million, the district's retirement contribution jumps nearly \$2 million. Combined with a \$300,000 increase in workers' compensation charges - mainly due to the major accident on Highway 24 in 2012 (see our online archive for details, www.lamorindaweekly.com) - the district will use more than \$700,000 of its fire flow tax revenue to fund operating

expenses.

Total district revenue for 2014-15 is projected at \$22.2 million, with total expenditures - including capital expenditures and debt service fund expenditures - equaling \$21.7 million.

Sasser also updated the district's Long Range Financial Plan. "We will have a balanced general fund, with revenue meeting expenditures in each year," she said, with the positive trend resulting from projected rising property tax revenue and lower retirement costs. Sasser also projected that the general fund balance will exceed 10 percent of budgeted general fund revenue by 2019.

"Last year we were looking into a chasm," said director and finance committee member Steve Anderson. "Labor and management have done remarkable work in keeping us from falling off the cliff."

Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force

One of the issues on which many members of the Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force agree is the completion of proposed fire station 46, a joint venture between the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. A precipitating event in the formation of the task force was the closing of ConFire station 16 in Lafayette.

ConFire chief Jeff Carman and MOFD chief Stephen Healy have said that they are very close to an agreement on the construction and operation of the new station. At the March task force meeting, however, Carman said that he was reticent to present a station 46 plan to his board when, at the same time, Lafayette was considering secession from the district. "I need to decide where to put our emphasis," said Carman.

The task force approved a draft of a resolution at its May 15 meeting to present to the Lafayette City Council affirming and supporting the concept of station 46. "This resolution does not end our discussion of governance, modeling, financing and response times," said co-chair Traci Reilly. "But it will be an affirmation from Lafayette that we're not packing our bags." Co-chair Brandt Andersson added, "We do want this and we think that station 46 should be built."

The draft will be presented for approval at the May 27 City Council meeting; Carman's station 46 presentation is expected to be delivered to the Board of Supervisors on June 3.

Community Foundation Grant Giving Celebration

By Cathy Tyson



Representatives from grant-winning organizations: Lafayette Community Garden, Food Bank, Generations in Jazz, Town Hall Theatre, Lafayette Library and Learning Center, Interfaith Council, Las Trampas, Lamorinda Adult Respite Care, Spirit Van, Gold Coast Chamber Players, along with Board Members Sereta Churchill and Kathy Bowles.
Photo Cathy Tyson

It's not surprising why the Lafayette Community Foundation is so popular. The foundation, now in its 15th year, began with the sole purpose of raising funds for the spectacular Lafayette Library and Learning Center, ultimately securing over \$12 million for the project.

Currently the LCF hands out generous grants twice per year to local non-profit organizations, large and small, that serve a wide array of needs in the area. They have given away more than \$300,000. The group takes its mission seriously, investing in programs and projects that promote and enhance the civic, cultural, educational and environmental health of Lafayette.

In a first-ever afternoon event to

celebrate all the recipients, one lucky winner, Janet Thomas representing the Lafayette Community Garden and Outdoor Learning Center, proudly announced when they got the call, "we started digging." The lovely garden that was once a patch of dead dirt near the entrance to the Lafayette Reservoir is now thriving. What had been a very labor-intensive manual watering effort will be replaced with a much more efficient timed drip irrigation system, thanks to a \$2,000 grant from the LCF.

Grant chair Kathy Bowles explained, "Our donations come from community members, along with the Garage Tour and participating in the Taste of Lafayette. I urge you to support us so we can continue to support

you." Despite the temperature on a record breaking day, a parade of very thankful recipients came forward to graciously accept their checks. From Generations in Jazz, which received funds to replace its aging audio speakers and microphones, to Lamorinda Adult Respite Care Center that provides care and activities for memory-impaired participants, and Town Hall Theatre for the purchase of stage lighting, a total of 10 non-profit organizations received checks from the LCF.

The foundation received 23 grant requests this cycle. "It's a bit frustrating that we don't have the money to fund everyone who applies," said LCF volunteer Matt Geiser. For more information, go to www.lafayettecf.org.