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Published July 2nd, 2014

## U-Turn, Then Full Speed Ahead

*By Nick Marnell*

The Board of Supervisors reversed course from one year ago and unanimously passed a motion to authorize the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District to continue negotiations with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District to jointly build and operate fire station 46. Only Supervisor Candace Andersen, whose district includes Lamorinda, cast a yes vote at both meetings. The four supervisors who voted no in 2013 fell into two camps.

Chair Karen Mitchoff and Supervisor Federal Glover based their assents on the timing of the proposal. "It's the right idea at the wrong time," said Glover in May, 2013. But now, with the threat of closing additional ConFire fire stations all but squelched, he said he did not want to bypass doing something that could be beneficial to the district. "We've been able to reopen fire stations that served communities more critically impacted by closures than was Lafayette at this time last year," said Mitchoff.

Two supervisors based their turnaround votes on the proposal that ConFire presented to the board on June 17. "With the more complete information we were given, I felt comfortable acting to pursue the station," said vice chair John Gioia. "There were better details, and it was a better deal for ConFire," added Supervisor Mary Piepho.

Those details were outlined by ConFire assistant chief Lewis Broschard. According to the deal points he presented, ConFire will pay for the construction of the station on land that MOFD purchased last year for \$1.2 million. The construction is expected to be completed by fiscal year 2016-17 at an estimated cost of \$6 million; ConFire would pay \$2.5 million from its capital fund up front and finance \$3.5 million over seven years.

Once the station opens, MOFD will pay 100 percent of the operating costs for five years before ConFire begins to chip in. Broschard presented a detailed payment schedule which showed that both districts will have contributed nearly \$16 million each for the purchase, construction and operational costs by 2026-27. From that point forward, the estimated \$2.2 million annual operating cost of station 46 will be shared equally by MOFD and ConFire.

"By September, we hope to have a final draft of an agreement to present to the supervisors, along with a detailed financing plan," said Broschard, who noted that meetings with county counsel and with MOFD had already been scheduled.

"What happened today pushed us toward a solution for fire service for western Lafayette," said Brandt Andersson, co-chair of the Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force, at its June 17 meeting. "Now that we've reached this milestone, where do we go next?"

"We should redirect our focus on getting 46 built," said co-chair Traci Reilly. The group agreed to next meet in October, allowing time for both districts to work out further details, including design review. "That will be the critical point," said MOFD fire chief Stephen Healy. "The selection of an architect will be very important."

One stakeholder offered words of caution. "Local 1230 is in support of the concept," said Vince Wells, union president. "But we have not yet sat down and agreed on the staffing model."

The agreement states that fire station 46, though physically in Lafayette - ConFire's territory - will be staffed by MOFD personnel. "Having MOFD staff a station in Lafayette is something we have to talk about," said Wells. He explained that ConFire would be relinquishing up to nine positions under the proposed staffing model.

Broschard remained undaunted. "We are going to get everybody in a room and make this thing work," he said.

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