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Civic News Fire Districts

ConFire Purchases Two Squad Vehicles

By Nick Marnell

The Board of Supervisors, acting as the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District board of directors, approved the purchase of two new squad vehicles for \$345,000 at its Oct. 7 meeting. The new vehicles will replace the two makeshift squad units currently in service.

ConFire added squad units to Walnut Creek station 1 and to Concord station 6 as a test program in 2013. The squad units respond to primarily low level medical emergencies, leaving the engines to respond to structure and vegetation fires. One reason that ConFire added the squad unit to Walnut Creek was to pick up some of the slack from the closure of station 16 in Lafayette. Including backup for rescue calls and most of the structure fire calls, Squad 1 is on track to respond to over 200 calls annually in Lafayette, according to the fire chief Jeff Carman.

"You're spending money on something that we've not even agreed to yet," said engineer Vito Impastato, because, explained Local 1230 president Vince Wells, the district has not accepted the union's terms for making the squad program permanent. "For us, squads are not the right fit," said James "Whit" MacDonald, captain at Lafayette station 17.

"You took away seven engine companies and gave us back two squads," said engineer Leslie Grundler. "It won't be the same until we have real engines. Give us our fire

department back!"
"I don't agree with replacing engines with two-person squads unless there's a good reason," said Carman. "But we don't have the money to buy an engine. We've given this thought, and it's based on necessity." The board unanimously approved the purchase.

The district plans to pitch for the available county ambulance contract in 2015. If ConFire does secure the ambulance contract, it will need a fleet of at least 15 ambulances. Why then spend the money on two new squad vehicles this year?

"If we get the ambulance contract, we will still use squads for a variety of tasks," said Carman. "They can be rescue vehicles but most likely they would remain as squads with firefighters on them as opposed to the ambulances with non-firefighter paramedics."

The district will purchase the vehicles from Ferrara Fire Apparatus Inc. through the Houston-Galveston Area Council, a government-to-government procurement service. "The H-GAC program complies with all bidding rules in the county," said the chief. "It's a great system, saves a ton of money and time, and gets some great deals through quantity. It's really like the state bid process, but it's national."

ConFire expects the brand new Squad 1 vehicle to roll into Lafayette early next year.

22nd Lafayette Reservoir Run

Downtown Trick or Treat STREET KIDS & FAMILIES WELCOME Friday, October 24th Beginning at 4:00pm Come in Costume

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Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors Meetings

Next meeting:
Wednesday, Nov. 5
check website for updates
(Go to www.mofd.org as the meeting date approaches for location and more information)

ConFire Board of Directors' Meeting

Next meeting:
Tuesday, Nov. 4
check website for updates
Board Chamber room 107, Administration Building, 651 Pine St. Martinez (Agenda at <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>)

Firefighters Unhappy With Slow Progress of Labor Talks

By Nick Marnell

Decked out in black "1230 Strong" solidarity T-shirts, nearly 50 firefighters rallied at the Oct. 7 Board of Supervisors meeting to complain about the slow pace of labor negotiations between their union and the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. Talks have gone on since May, the latest contract having expired June 30.

"Instead of honest negotiating, you're treating us as a hostile work group," said ConFire engineer and Local 1230 vice president Vito Impastato, addressing the board. "Nothing can be further from the truth. Treat us as though we've done everything you've asked us to do the last six years."

Vince Wells, Local 1230 president, reminded the board that the firefighters have taken a 10 percent pay cut, they contribute a portion of the employer share of the retirement fund and they have struggled with a 25 percent cut in staff. "Provide direction to your negotiating team," he said. "We're anxious to get back to the bargaining table and restore some

of the sacrifices we've made for the community.

"Your negotiating team doesn't care," added Wells. "We are hopeful that you do."

Board president Karen Mitchoff advised the rank and file that the board had just that day given direction to its negotiating team. Mitchoff said later that she would not elaborate on what the direction was.

Wells later explained that 10 labor negotiating sessions have been held since May, with one management proposal presented Oct. 2. "And the negotiator couldn't adequately explain the proposal," he said. "It's offensive to us. We can't even get our questions answered." Wells did note that the tone of the ConFire talks has been less acrimonious than were the negotiations with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

"We continue to negotiate with Local 1230 to reach a fair contract while still ensuring that the district will have adequate funds to continue in operation," said Lisa Driscoll, county finance director and management's lead negotiator.

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