

Published December 31st, 2014

Barber Joins MOFD Board

By Nick Marnell



Brad Barber Photo provided

As did directors Steve Anderson and Alex Evans when they joined the board, new Moraga-Orinda Fire District Division 4 director Brad Barber exudes a passion to improve the condition of Orinda roads.

"I was co-chair of Measure J, a partial solution to fix Orinda's appallingly bad roads," said Barber, speaking of the \$20 million bond measure that Orindans approved in 2014. Barber noted that while MOFD will benefit from improvements to Orinda roads, the district is partially responsible for their deterioration. "The fire trucks and ambulances need good roads in order to provide good service," he said. "In addition, the equipment is not easy on our roads, and the roads in Orinda are not very good to begin with. And they have not been well maintained."

Anderson ran for his seat after watching a citizens' group complain to the Orinda City Council that if MOFD funds were assessed and allocated equitably, more money would be available to fix Orinda roads. Evans, newly elected board president, was a founding member of the Fire and Infrastructure Renewal committee, an Orinda group that espoused a similar platform.

"It's not a question of not getting our money's worth, exactly," said Barber, who was appointed to the board in lieu of election after no challengers emerged for the District 4 seat. "There is an issue

of equity between different parts of the district. Orinda and Moraga are different places, with different needs, different topography, different property values." Many Orinda residents have long maintained that they pay well over \$1 million more for district services than they should, and that they unfairly subsidize Moraga residents.

"If we were starting from scratch, I don't think we'd fund the district this way," continued Barber. "We'd treat it as a single district, one entity. We'd treat the taxpayers in one area the same as the taxpayers in another."

Barber brings experience as a tax attorney and financial manager to the board. "MOFD has received a lot of bad publicity over the preceding few years and I wanted to see if there was something I could do," he said. "It's time to stop deferring the district's financial problems to future generations. It's time to solve these problems now." Outgoing MOFD president John Wyro promised district residents that a tax increase will not be necessary to cure the district's financial problems, highlighted by a \$40 million unfunded firefighters' pension liability. "It's too early for me to make that assessment," said Barber. "I would like to be able to solve the problems without raising taxes. But I'm not able to speak with the confidence that John has."

The new director also stopped short of a full-fledged endorsement of station 46, a proposed consolidation of MOFD station 43 and closed station 16 of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. "Financially it looks good," he said. "But how do we provide service to north Orinda to make certain that the residents aren't seriously disadvantaged? If some Orindans are more negatively affected than those affected positively, how do I weigh that? I need to learn more about

it."

Barber was sworn in at the Dec. 17 district meeting. The south Orinda resident stressed that a solution to the above problems will not magically materialize. "It will require a lot of work over a sustained period," he said.

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