



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

MOFD Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors
 Wednesday, Jan. 21, 7 p.m.
 Go to www.mofd.org as the meeting date approaches for location and more information

ConFire Board of Directors
 Tuesday, Jan. 13
 Board Chamber room 107, Administration Building, 651 Pine St., Martinez
 For meeting times and agendas, visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

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Supervisors Approve ConFire Labor Contract

By Nick Marnell

The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors, acting as the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District board of directors, approved a new labor agreement between the district and Local 1230 of the firefighters' union at a special Dec. 19 meeting. The highlights of the new contract include a 7.5 percent pay increase, the gradual elimination of the 9 percent firefighters' subvention of the employer portion of retirement costs and beginning in 2016, an equal split between the district and the firefighters for any increase in their medical benefits premium. The contract term runs July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2017.

"The contract maintains a balance between how much we bring our firefighters up in wages

and what we need to do for the organization after not allocating any infrastructure money over the last few years," said Fire Chief Jeff Carman. The board recently approved a \$10 million purchase of fire apparatus for this fiscal year, with a similar purchase expected next year. Carman stressed that his goal for 2015 is to be able to maintain the district's 24 companies and two squads as they are currently assigned.

"Based on the current circumstances – coming out of a recession and trying to rebuild our district – I think it's a fair contract," said Vince Wells, Local 1230 president. "Our firefighters have not had a pay increase since 2008. In fact, we lost 10 percent. We tried to get some of that money back

and get it back in a timely fashion."

The contract is cleverly constructed to give the rank and file a bump of some sort every six months beginning Jan. 1. A 2.5 percent wage increase kicks in then, followed by another 2.5 percent July 1, with a final 2.5 percent raise July 1, 2016. Three percent of the subvention of the employer retirement contribution discontinues Jan. 1, with a further 3 percent reduction Jan. 1, 2016 and a final 3 percent decrease exactly one year later, at which point the entire 9 percent subvention disappears.

"In the long run, the 9 percent retirement contribution going away was the biggest thing for us in the contract," said Wells.

Barber Joins MOFD Board

Three for the roads

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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Happy New Year!