



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District

Board of Directors
Wednesday, May 6, 7 p.m.
Moraga Library Community Room
1500 St. Mary's Road, Moraga
For meeting times and agendas,
visit www.mofd.org

ConFire Board of Directors

Tuesday, May 12, 1:30 p.m.
Board Chamber room 107,
Administration Building,
651 Pine St., Martinez
For meeting times and agendas,
visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

Emergency response information
and training:

Lamorinda Community
Emergency Response Team (CERT)
www.lamorindacert.org

Better Year Ahead for ConFire

But district continues to face significant fiscal difficulties, per county report

By Nick Marnell

Contra Costa County Fire Protection District chief Jeff Carman warned his advisory fire commission in February about the precarious situation the district was in. "We're at a tipping point," he said. Carman explained that the district did not have enough apparatus to keep all of the companies in service. Fire stations were starting to crumble; Lafayette's station 17 was closed for two weeks in late March while a main water line was repaired. Equipment was failing. Firefighters needed additional training. "For the number of fires our firefighters fight, they should not be doing it without proper equipment," said the chief, who confronted many of these district deficiencies head-on when he constructed the ConFire 2015-16 fiscal year budget.

Personifying his ailing district,

Carman fought through cold symptoms as he presented the budget to the Board of Supervisors at its April 14 meeting. ConFire will pay \$1 million next year as part of a 10-year lease-purchase agreement for nine new fire engines, three ladder trucks and one rescue truck. The number of district full time employees increases to 336, to provide support in long neglected areas like training, telecommunications, information technology and facilities management. The budget includes the one-third installment of a 7.7 percent wage increase for firefighters and also the elimination of a portion of their 9 percent subvention of district pension costs. ConFire will operate 24 fire stations, including 24 companies and three squads, up from 23 stations and zero squads proposed in 2014-15.

The district will also meet its revenue requirement of 10 percent of general fund expenditures, and though it will require more than \$4 million of the fund balance to achieve that goal, it is far less than the \$9.5 million needed the previous year.

District revenue is budgeted to increase for the third straight year. Property tax revenue jumps from a projected \$95 million to more than \$101 million. ConFire will receive the second half of a two-year federal staffing grant of \$9.6 million. And the district expects to recognize \$1.7 million in first responder fees, charges billed to insurance companies for emergency medical treatment provided at the scene by firefighters.

Not included in the budget presentation were potential cost savings of the proposed station 46 joint venture

with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, nor the potential revenue increases should ConFire assume control of the available Contra Costa County ambulance contract in 2016.

"In view of increasing revenues and a sustained economic recovery, this budget attempts to address some of (our) needs while still maintaining practical fiscal controls," Carman wrote in a letter to the advisory board. The county, in its budget document, acknowledged that ConFire has had to balance its fiscal difficulties "with maintaining a system that ensures the health and welfare of residents within the district."

The Board of Supervisors will approve ConFire's budget, along with the budgets of all of the county departments and certain special districts, at its May 12 meeting.

Please submit
Letters and Opinions:
letters@lamorindaweekly.com

MOFD to Hold Public Workshop

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District finance committee will conduct a public workshop this month to determine the investment mix for the district's other post-employment benefit trust account.

In March, the district approved the pre-funding of its OPEB costs, which include the cost of retiree health benefits. It set up a trust account and hired Public Agency Retirement Services to manage the trust. MOFD will fund \$84,000 into the account this fiscal year.

"The investment company will make a recommendation on the investment mix," said committee

chair Steve Anderson. But he stressed that the committee also wants public input on what the investment strategy should be. "Will we listen to what the public has to say? I answer that with an emphatic yes," he said. Various investment objectives will be up for discussion, ranging from conservative portfolios of more than 80 percent fixed income to a 72 percent equity capital appreciation portfolio.

The finance committee will evaluate the investment objective strategies that come out of the workshop and will present its recommendation to the full MOFD

board.

District administrative services director Gloriann Sasser said that pre-funding OPEB costs strengthens the district's financial position by lowering its net OPEB liability, and using the earnings on investments will reduce future employer costs. MOFD carries both a \$17 million unfunded OPEB liability and an estimated \$40 million unfunded pension liability.

The finance committee scheduled the workshop for 5 p.m. Monday, April 27 in the Sarge Littlehale Community Room at Orinda City Hall, 22 Orinda Way, Orinda.

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Unanimous Vote for Comprehensive Sex Ed

By Cathy Tyson



Protestors held up signs during a discussion about sex education at the April 15 Acalanes Union High School District board meeting.
Photo Cathy Tyson

The packed house at the Del Valle Theater – and the pair of police officers posted out front – was a heads up that the Acalanes Union High School District meeting to adopt their updated, clarified policy on sexual health and HIV/AIDS prevention could get heated.

After listening politely to 56 public speakers, both in favor and against potential policy changes, school board members voted unanimously to establish recommended comprehensive and medically accurate policy and guidelines for the district.

Right up front, Superintendent Dr. John Nickerson calmly explained that the AUHSD follows the California State Standards and the district has a responsibility to provide age-appropriate objective scientific information as part of its educational program. He also explained that "abstinence only" education alone is prohibited in the state of California, due to academic research that demonstrates higher levels of sexually transmitted infections and a higher level of teen pregnancy. It is, however, included in instruction along with other information about the effectiveness and safety of all federal FDA-approved methods of reducing the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, along with contraceptive methods.

To address many opponents who requested the instruction provider consultant would not be Planned Parenthood, Nickerson explained there are strict criteria for providers. He said the AUHSD has examined a number of potential consultants including the American Red Cross,

Teen Esteem and the Contra Costa Office of Education – all of which "don't fulfill the criteria."

"We value parents participation and want parents to be aware," said the superintendent. He went on to explain that principals at the district high schools have said "no" to parents attending classroom sex education discussions because parents would affect the discussion, and student privacy issues would be problematic.

Instead, parents were invited to a parent education night to see instructional materials prior to student instruction, but no one showed up. Lengthy comments were all over the map. One particularly memorable one came from an Acalanes graduate, class of 2005, who said, "I still remember facts that I learned in my ninth grade class that were relevant and medically accurate."

Garnering a standing ovation, a transgender parent spoke of her painful journey, fearing for her life, and living with depression. "I don't want my daughters to be bullied," she said. She was in support of the program. Over 1,000 signatures were gathered on a Change.org petition in support of continuing the program throughout the AUHSD.

Opponents included Camille Giglio of NOISE, No to Irresponsible Sex Education, who called it "nothing more than a charade." Several speakers felt Planned Parenthood is promoting its agenda and has a political bias. Wendy Lack said, "Planned Parenthood is on the leading edge of opposing religious freedom."

Explaining her decision, longtime

school board member Kathy Copper-smith expressed her frustration. "The bigger issue that I've never seen before is our district being used as a forum for a cause by people from mostly outside our community. This has nothing to do with right to life or pro-choice." The audience responded with shouts of "Thank you!"

School board member Richard Whitmore pointed out that the data matters a lot, parents have the right to opt-out, and in reality very few students opted out of the program – a strong signal it's supported. He was "increasingly disappointed" at the lack of civil discourse, especially the online stalking of instructors. Whitmore voiced his whole-hearted support of district staff in their tactful response to parent concerns and said that tolerance matters, and that LGBT students deserve a safe and welcoming environment.

Newest school board member Bob Hockett reviewed the language of the policy. "The board recognized that the purpose of the district's sexual health and HIV/AIDS prevention instruction is to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to protect them from unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, and to encourage students to develop understanding and healthy attitudes concerning adolescent growth and development, body image, gender, sexual orientation, dating, marriage and family." He concluded: "I find it difficult to think that anyone wouldn't support that."

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