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Firefighters' Union Balks at Station 46 Joint Venture

By Nick Marnell

Frustrated with the drain on district resources in other parts of the county, Vince Wells, president of Local 1230 of the firefighters' union, questioned whether the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District board should approve a joint venture with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District to build a new fire station in western Lafayette. Based on preliminary discussions, ConFire would front \$6 million to build fire station 46 and would share the estimated annual \$2 million operational costs equally with MOFD, which will own the new station.

"Rather than just looking at the terms of the contract, check to see if this whole thing is worth the money," he told the board July 21. Wells argued that the district answers far more calls on the East County border than it does in Lafayette, "and there are no costs shared, and no fire stations being built to address that." The East Contra Costa County Fire Protection District recently closed two fire stations and relies on outside assistance, mainly from ConFire, which supports the struggling district through automatic and mutual aid agreements.

"Where are the priorities?" Wells said later. "Why are they just looking at Lafayette? You can't do a project like this based on politics alone."

Wells also suggested that Lafayette may not be receiving what it thinks. "If they want to pay for a faster response time, they should get a station dedicated to their area," he said. "Paying a 50-50 split for a fire station that isn't yours is not mutually beneficial." He proposed that a more equitable financial arrangement might be for ConFire to pay MOFD for the number of calls it responds to in western Lafayette, as the district does with Richmond.

"I was initially never supportive of this," said Director Karen Mitchoff. "I would like an updated perspective. We have concerns in other parts of the county, and Lafayette continues to be served with two fire stations and mutual and automatic aid."

Vice Chair Candace Andersen said she was disconcerted to hear that labor was potentially going to object to the station 46 venture. "I understand that Vince Wells is frustrated by the fire station closures in the East County Fire Protection District," said Andersen, whose district includes Lafayette. "ConFire is doing what it can to help East County Fire through our auto aid and mutual aid agreements. However, Vince should not expect the citizens of Lafayette to forego their appropriate level of service to solve that problem in another fire district."

"We believe the carefully articulated agreement between the two fire districts to build and operate station 46 is still on track for approval," added Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force co-chair Brandt Andersson.

The station 46 contract is expected to come before the ConFire board of directors for approval at its Aug. 18 meeting.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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