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Opposing Forces Unite Against MOFD Station 43

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District took the first official step in the reconstruction of station 43 Oct. 21 by authorizing Fire Chief Stephen Healy to spend over \$200,000 on document reviews and updates and to purchase and install a mobile home to serve as a temporary fire station. Director Steve Anderson voted against the authorization, and he was joined by an unlikely ally in the firefighters union.

"I don't want the district to start and then stop," said Healy. "If we're going forward with the rebuilding of the fire station and the purchase of a mobile home, authorize me to do it now. I will not purchase anything until the board has seen a total cost estimate."

The chief said that the district will require a double-wide mobile home as the temporary station, which has to be purchased and cannot be rented. The home will have some salvage value, said Healy, "Something more than worthless, but less than \$95,000." Tentative plans call for the placement of the temporary station in the St. Stephen's Church parking lot.

"For the taxpayers and residents of MOFD, station 46 was an outstanding opportunity," said Anderson. The joint venture with the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District to build and operate a station in western Lafayette was estimated to save each district more than \$1 million annually in expenses.

"Once we go down the 43 road, it removes any opportunity for MOFD and ConFire to collaborate on a joint station," continued Anderson. "And it removes leverage for ConFire to do what they say they're going to do." ConFire Chief Jeff Carman presented a plan to his board to rebuild station 16 in Lafayette but he has not yet received official approval. If station 16 remains closed, emergency calls in that area will most likely continue to be handled through an automatic aid agreement with MOFD.

"I received unanimous support from our board for reopening station 16 and to report back when we have received a final proposal," said Carman. "We are forging ahead with those same plans we presented to our board."

Mark DeWeese, the district union representative, asked the board to put the station 43 reconstruction temporarily on hold. He appealed from a different perspective than Anderson, the only board member to vote against the current labor contract, fearful of the automatic wage increases it earmarked.

"The financial challenges in recent years have been addressed through salary and benefit restrictions and reductions on current Local 1230 employees," said DeWeese. "Now that the financial picture is looking positive, restoring these salaries and benefits should be the first thing this board addresses, not excessive capital spending on rebuilding station 43.

"It's not expensive buildings that put out the fires and deliver the high quality emergency medical response that MOFD is known for, it's high quality people."

The motion to authorize Healy to commence the station 43 project passed 3-1, with director Kathleen Famulener absent. Representatives of investment bank Brandis Tallman plan to address the board Nov. 18 on financing options for the primary building construction.

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