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Published February 10th, 2016

## MOFD Revives Sophisticated Planning Tool

*By Nick Marnell*

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District survived the Great Recession, a labor contract is in place and the station 46 negotiations have ended, and though the district is on its third fire chief since 2009, this one gives no indication that he is about to leave. So the district has committed to redraft its strategic plan, last updated seven years ago, at the time expected to posit as a vision and guideline for two years.

"The timing is right," said Fire Chief Stephen Healy.

The 2009 plan identified five areas of focus for the district: operational readiness, human resources, community partnerships and outreach, fire prevention and education, and fiscal responsibility. Healy noted that two of the areas cause him concern, starting with human resources.

"We have opportunities for coaching, mentoring and preparation for advancement," said the chief.

"What are the leaders of the organization doing for each other? This is an area I felt we were lacking."

Healy admitted that he has been remiss in this area. "It all starts with me," he said. "I haven't spent as much time with my chiefs as I should have, providing them career advice and career counseling. I want to help the employee who wants to be a fire chief."

He expects the same performance out of his battalion chiefs. "Once a week, at least monthly, I want them to meet with their captains on a regular basis," he said. And not only with captains who aspire to become chief officers; Healy wants as much consideration given to those who wish to remain captains, to keep their skills sharp through cutting-edge training.

"You've got to always be thinking about your own people," said the chief.

Fire prevention is another area that requires Healy's immediate attention. "This division is very stressed," he said. MOFD eliminated the assistant fire marshal position in 2013 and shifted much of the fire prevention work to outside contractors and district aides. Field work, weed abatements, plan reviews and the updating of the district codes and ordinances are all under the purview of the fire marshal, whose responsibility is to keep the public safe. Healy described the duties as technical and tedious, and with the population growth expected in the district, the work will become even more of a challenge and a concern.

"Take plan reviews alone," the chief explained. "Each structure, each neighborhood requires a specific plan review. The design of the houses, how wide are the streets, how close is each house to a fire station? This is very time-consuming work, which falls directly upon our fire marshal."

The other three areas of strategic plan focus, while always subject to improvement, Healy deemed in better shape today. Operationally, he said that the station 46 negotiations forced him to learn intricate details of the MOFD coverage area. "That was a very enlightening process for me," said the chief.

Great strides have been made in rebuilding community relationships, "particularly through the community exercises and drills we have conducted, including at Saint Mary's," he said.

And the district finances appear to be stabilized, with two straight Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports under its belt, and a 10 percent reserve reported in the district general fund. The district updates its long-range financial plan twice a year.

The chief said that work on the plan will continue through the spring, and he expects to present a draft to the board this summer.

"It will be a high quality document that will focus on things that I think we should focus on, aligned with our core values and our district mission statement," he said.

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