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Orinda Residents Demand Fair Shake from MOFD

By Nick Marnell

Orinda residents, including a district director, disrupted the Moraga-Orinda Fire District finance committee meeting May 8, demanding that perceived inequities of the tax bill allocation between the two district municipalities be rectified. "It's time the district looked at this, and made it an agenda item that can be discussed," said Steve Anderson, board president, speaking as a private citizen.

"The deal is not being played out as promised 19 years ago," said Orinda resident Steve Cohn, speaking about the terms of the 1997 Orinda Fire District and Moraga Fire District merger. "The funding paid by Orindans not going to service in Orinda is not meeting Orindans' needs." According to Cohn, in the current fiscal year Orinda residents pay \$13.8 million in taxes to MOFD while those in Moraga pay \$7.5 million. "The bottom line is, Orindans pay 65 percent of the taxes and their service costs are only about 53 percent of the total," he said, basing his service cost estimate on a total of 17 responders per shift - nine in Orinda and eight in Moraga.

Orinda resident Craig Jorgens blamed much of the inequity on the fact that property tax rates have stayed the same since the district inception but property values in Orinda have increased more than in Moraga. "It has grown over time and will continue to get worse," he said.

It is not the first time the district has heard these complaints. In 2012 an Orinda grassroots organization claimed in a presentation to both MOFD and the Orinda City Council that Orinda was paying too much for its emergency services. "In fact, a lot more money has been spent in Orinda than in Moraga," director Fred Weil said at the time, who called the group's report a fundamentally flawed polemic.

Anderson was elected to the board in 2012 and he promised to oversee frugal spending of district tax dollars, with the expectation that money saved could be used to fix Orinda's dilapidated roads. Alex Evans, MOFD Division 5 director and a founding member of an Orinda citizens' committee that pushed for the fair funding of MOFD by Orinda and Moraga, said in 2012 that any efficiencies he could find in the MOFD budget should go to fix the Orinda roads and infrastructure.

Director Brad Barber, also of Orinda, told Fire Chief Stephen Healy - who declined to comment on the claims made by the citizens - to present updated information on revenue received from and services rendered to each municipality at a future board meeting.

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[back](#)

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