



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District

Board of Directors
Wednesday, May 18, 7 p.m.
Moraga Library Community Room
1500 Saint Mary's Road
Moraga, CA 94556
For meeting times and
agendas, visit www.mofd.org

ConFire Board of Directors

Tuesday, June 14, 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.

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Send a letter to the editor:
letters@lamorindaweekly.com

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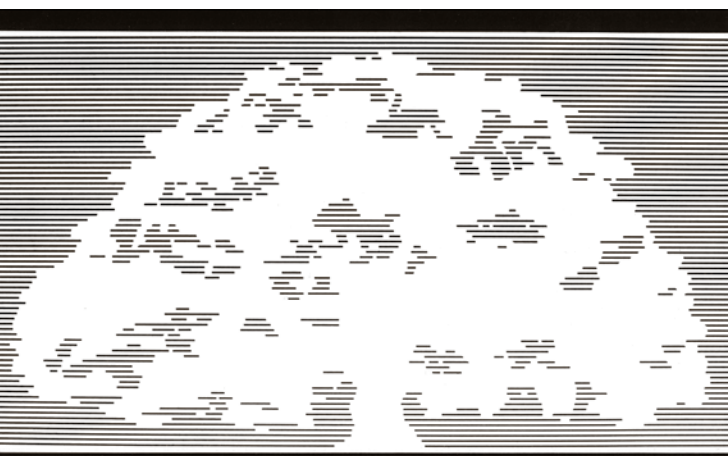
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Developer Agrees to Pay Fire Service Mitigation Charge

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District board May 4 authorized Fire Chief Stephen Healy to enter into an agreement with the Richfield Real Estate Corporation and the Bigbury Company, the developers of the beleaguered Palos Colorados project, to pay the district \$180,000 as a fire service mitigation fee within 60 days of the issuance of the first building permit. The developer acknowledged in the agreement that its proposed 123-unit Moraga development places an increased fire service burden on the district, which plans to apply the mitigation fee toward the purchase of a new fire engine.

Only director Fred Weil voted

against the agreement, citing a clause in the contract that contains an out for the developer. The out-clause will take effect if the East Bay Municipal Utility District agrees to supply water at a rate of 2,250 gallons per minute to the project, the same water flow rate that MOFD used as a standard for new development when the project was approved in 1999.

Since then, the fire codes have changed, MOFD fire marshal Kathy Leonard said. Homes are now equipped with sprinkler systems, construction rules are tougher and wildfire prevention ordinances are stronger. And no longer does EBMUD install pipes that

can transport water at 2,250 gpm at the project site; current pipes allow a water flow of only 1,500 gpm, as confirmed by Andrea Pook, EBMUD spokeswoman. MOFD firefighter Anthony Stevens told the board that 1,500 gpm was more than adequate for today's firefighting needs.

Thus, Leonard insisted that the clause Weil objected to was moot. She said the district was anxious to finalize its agreement with a development fraught with years of lawsuits, delays and failed permit approvals, including unsuccessful state and federal approvals for a golf course.

The developer will also pay

MOFD \$2,000 prior to the issuance of a building permit for each approved lot. The money will be used for vegetation inspections, maintenance of open space and the upkeep of fire trails, plus hard costs. "For each home, we have to do three plan reviews and two separate fire inspections," Leonard said.

The first building permit is expected to be issued before the end of fiscal year 2016-17, which is why the district executed the agreement now. The projected cost of a new fire engine is \$585,000, so with the board's approval of the mitigation fee agreement, the cost will be reduced to \$405,000.

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 ser-

vice 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.

ConFire Board Approves Complete Rebuild of Fire Station 16

By Nick Marnell

Western Lafayette residents moved one step closer to full fire service coverage May 9 when the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District board unanimously approved the total rebuild of fire station 16 on Los Arabis Road.

The fire station was seriously damaged in 1989 by the Loma Prieta earthquake and the crews worked out of a mobile home on the site for more than 20 years before the facility was shut down in 2012. When a proposed joint venture with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District to build fire station 46 at the Orinda-Lafayette border collapsed, ConFire determined that

rebuilding station 16 from scratch was the most appropriate solution for the western Lafayette area. The district had considered refurbishing the existing structure but decided it was not cost effective to do that.

Fire Chief Jeff Carman explained to the board why the Lafayette station was the first to be put back into service of the four stations closed by the district in 2012. "Lafayette is one of the few areas in California located in a very high fire hazard severity zone," he said. "If we had a fire in those hills it would be similar to the Oakland Hills fire. Property values are extremely high and egress routes

are extremely limited." Carman stressed that the county could be devastated economically if the Lafayette area remains without adequate fire protection.

"We stand behind the chief," Lafayette fire commissioner Bill Granados said. "Rebuilding station 16 is the best thing for the district at this time."

Deputy Chief Lewis Broschard told the board that the construction estimate ranges from \$3.5 to \$4 million, including design, engineering and other soft costs, with completion likely in 18 to 24 months. ConFire will staff the station with transferred firefighters

from station 1 in Walnut Creek and an additional captain, which will increase district operating costs \$1 million a year.

"I would have been fine with station 46, but we will end up with better coverage for Lafayette," board chair Candace Andersen said.

The city of Lafayette planning department and ConFire will hold a joint public meeting to receive feedback from the neighborhood on the design of the new station at 7 p.m. May 25 at the Lafayette city offices, 3675 Mt. Diablo Boulevard, Suite 240.

EBMUD Drops Water Use Restrictions

By Nick Marnell

Water – arguable the world's most valuable resource – will soon become more affordable.

The East Bay Municipal Utility District board unanimously

approved the suspension of mandatory restrictions on water use effective July 1. The board declared the drought stage at zero, meaning water supplies were normal and the water emergency is over. The 25 percent drought surcharge also ends, though a 7 percent rate increase approved by the board last year goes into effect July 1.

"We asked our customers to cut back 20 percent. This April, customers saved 26 percent compared to 2013. Our community stepped up and exceeded those goals," board president Frank Mellon said in a statement. "We want to thank

both our customers and our staff for this tremendous effort."

Director Marguerite Young, whose Ward 3 includes Moraga and Orinda, praised the communities for their response to the water emergency. "Our customers knocked it out of the park," she said. "For 2015, Orinda reduced overall water consumption by 34 percent and Moraga by 36 percent compared to 2013, saving an impressive 890 million gallons of water."

Ward 2 director John Coleman, serving the city of Lafayette, would not single out a specific area for its

conservation efforts.

"Without the effort of all our customers, regardless of where they live, conservation far exceeded goals that we established," he said. "These strong results clearly demonstrated that residents in Lamorinda are as committed as any other customer achieving water savings. On behalf of EBMUD, I would like to personally thank everybody for stepping up to save water."

"As the governor has said, we are in for a drier climate and more frequent droughts," added Young. "It just makes sense to continue these wise water use practices."

Orinda

Proposed Half-Cent Sales Tax ... continued from page A7

The CCTA is currently stumping for city support. After the meeting, Chittenden told the Lamorinda Weekly that funds generated by the tax hike would be poured into three buckets: transit support, state highways, and local streets and roads.

Chittenden said that for the measure to go on the November ballot, the statute requires approval by the majority of the cities that represent a majority of the population, plus the County Board of Supervisors. In reality, Chittenden said, all the municipalities and the county need to be on board for the ballot measure to succeed, so the CCTA is hoping for unanimous support.

The CCTA is separate from the county, although it is a countywide agency, explained Chittenden. As a revenue-generating proposal, the proposed sales tax hike would require a two-thirds majority vote to

succeed. Orinda will be one of the first cities to vote on whether or not to support the issue, with other cities getting their chance to say yay or nay later in June and early July, Chittenden said.

Not to be confused with Measure L, Orinda's proposed sales tax measure which is on the June ballot, the CCTA proposal would be directly tied to transportation projects, and follows Measure C, adopted in 1988, and Measure J, adopted with 71 percent voter approval in 2004. Under the earlier measures, the CCTA provided the extension of BART to Pittsburg and Antioch, made improvements to the Caldecott Tunnel, widened Highway 4, added better bus service, bicycle facilities, and enhanced services for students and seniors.

BART may also be placing a bond issue on the November ballot. When Measure J passed in 2004,

a BART bond on the same ballot also passed. BART wants to improve service by providing a new train control system and new cars that would result in greater capacity and shorter wait times, with more 10-car trains able to run more continuously than the current shorter trains.

Other improvements planned by the CCTA include a mobility manager for seniors to provide transportation for them from their homes to their destinations, six additional school bus routes under the Safe Route to School program, and innovative technology to improve the flow of traffic.

The matter of TEP will return to the council on May 31 for a vote. The council meeting was originally scheduled for June 7, but was cancelled due to the California Primary Election, and a special meeting called for May 31.