



## Fire Districts

### Public Meetings

**Moraga-Orinda Fire District** Board of Directors  
Wednesday, Nov. 2, 7 p.m.  
Wednesday, Nov. 16, 7 p.m.  
Go to the website for meeting location, times and agendas. Visit [www.mofd.org](http://www.mofd.org)

**ConFire** Board of Directors  
Tuesday, Dec. 6, 1:30 p.m.  
Board Chamber room 107,  
Administration Building,  
651 Pine St., Martinez  
For meeting times and agendas,  
visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

# MOFD Fails to Dampen Frustration of Orinda Citizens' Group Regarding Tax Differences

By Nick Marnell

Orindans dissatisfied with the allocation of resources by the Moraga-Orinda Fire District will have to wait another day for relief as the district tabled indefinitely any discussion of tax inequity and community service modifications.

In June, Orindans unhappy with the perceived inequities between taxes paid and services received by the residents of Orinda and Moraga presented their case to the MOFD board. The board set aside a portion of its Oct. 19 meeting to hear additional detail of the residents' complaints.

"It's not about tax equity or about fairness," said Steve Cohn, spokesman for the grassroots Orinda Citizens Emergency Services Task Force, which has long demanded additional district ser-

VICES for what it believes are short-changed Orinda residents. "It's about carrying through a contract between the city of Orinda and the residents of Orinda." Cohn produced no such written contract, pointing only to statements printed in a voter's pamphlet for the 1997 election in which citizens voted to form the fire district; specifically, statements made by the Orinda City Council assuring that fire protection dollars paid by Orindans will stay in Orinda.

Board president Steve Anderson of Orinda likened the discussion to the perpetuity of the undead: "It keeps arising and re-arising. We need to put a stake in it," he said.

The Orindans' demand for service equal to taxes paid has been outlined numerous times to various

public agencies over the years but has yet to effect any changes in the fire district. "It's the same old argument, offered again and again, just repackaged," said Moraga resident and past MOFD director Dick Olsen, who presented the analogy of the Orinda police patrolling neighborhoods of Orinda only in proportion to the amount of taxes that each neighborhood pays.

Orinda directors Alex Evans and Brad Barber did not agree with "putting a stake in it," as Barber insisted that the board be prepared for the inequity topic to come back again and again. "Equity problems kill partnerships," Evans explained to the two dozen or so in attendance. "We're not going to solve this problem, but we should not ignore it."

Director Fred Weil, whom Cohn urged to resign in 2015 over Weil's role in improperly funding a retiring fire chief's pension, has always relied on the level of service as the true measure of district performance and has continually refuted Cohn's argument, once referring to it as a flawed polemic. "Stop this discussion now," Weil demanded.

"This is not going to go away," warned Cohn, though despite his presentation and a task force petition signed by 129 people insisting that MOFD and the city of Orinda deal with the perceived taxation-service inequity, the board gave no direction to its staff to further analyze the Orindans' complaints and set no date for revisiting the discussion.

## ConFire Not Rattled by \$75 Million Pension Bond Downgrade

By Nick Marnell

Moody's Investor Services recently downgraded \$75 million in Contra Costa County Fire Protection District pension obligation bonds but district officials, while conceding that pension costs remain high, said the action poses no immediate threat to district finances or operations.

The credit rating company lowered the district bond rating from A1 to A2 based in part because of "the long-term challenge the district faces in addressing its rising pension costs, which are an unusually large portion of the district's operations." Indicating that the growth in short-term property

tax receipts will mitigate the risk of ConFire's pension expense, the New York firm removed its negative outlook on the bond rating.

"Pension related costs are a significant portion of ConFire's operating budget and will continue to be through fiscal year 2022-23 when the district's pension obligation bonds will be paid off," said county administrator David Twa, but he added that even the recently confirmed \$2 million increase in the pension payment to the Contra Costa County Employees' Retirement Association should have no negative impact on the district.

According to Jackie Lorrekov-

ich, district chief of administrative services, the ConFire pension obligation bonds cannot be called by the issuer nor can the interest rate be increased because of the lowered rating. She emphasized that the bonds are secured by a unique tax-intercept feature requiring the county to set aside the first annual apportionment of property taxes collected in order to cover debt service payments before ConFire receives any property tax revenue for its operations. "This, in my opinion, makes the bonds very secure from an investor perspective," Lorrekovich said.

District officials stressed that

the rating drop will have no effect on district operations. The rebuild of station 16 in Lafayette will not be impeded and ConFire should have no problem financing additional apparatus. Were the district to try to issue a second pension obligation bond, the lowered rating on the current bonds would hypothetically impact the interest rates available to the district, Lorrekovich said, but ConFire has no plans to issue more pension obligation bonds.

"I think we are in better financial shape than we have been in a long, long time. That is why the rating drop is perplexing to me," Fire Chief Jeff Carman said. "We

have sufficient reserve, more than is required by the board." Not only does ConFire recognize more than \$30 million in available reserves but in 2016, determined to add a new revenue source, the district assumed the bulk of the Contra Costa County ambulance transport contract, projected to net an additional \$2 million to the district in its first year. In part because of improved district finances, ConFire announced Oct. 25 that it will reopen fire station 87 in Pittsburg, closed since the middle of 2013.

"Barring a catastrophic economic collapse I think we are very stable where we are," Carman said.

### Lafayette

## Loss of Lease Sends Lafayette Scrambling for City Office Space ... continued from page A2

Falk insists that until the city builds and owns a purpose-built facility — such as a city hall — it must move to find a new home.

This will not be easy in a city that is experiencing robust growth, parking problems, and a shortage

of appropriate sites for the activity of civic offices, including a location that will satisfy critical emergency response time requirements. The current need is for a site of approximately 10,000 square feet because of new space requirements due to

recent developments such as the hiring of female police officers, who need their own locker room. The city has been paying about \$280,000 per year for its current space, and hopes to pay a comparable price for the new space. Mov-

ing costs are expected to exceed \$100,000, because of the technology that will have to be relocated.

This is a tall order for city staff, who will be working under tight time constraints to find a new facility, or at least a site on which to lo-

cate a temporary one. Nobody has come up with a satisfactory solution and, faced with this situation, the three members of the council present at the Oct. 24 meeting essentially did nothing more than instruct staff to keep trying.

### Lafayette

## Principal Travis Bell Takes the Helm

"I felt like the work that I was doing as the leadership teacher and the time that I was putting into developing the school culture and the program were substantial," said Bell. His goal in going back to school was to eventually teach leadership full time.

Though Bell was looking to make a larger campus-wide investment, he never pictured himself at the helm of a school. In 2012, Bell moved from teaching English and leadership at Dougherty Valley to overseeing leadership and serving as associate principal at Acalanes High School. It was a transition that was both surprising and inevitable for

the third generation educator.

Bell is who is now settling into his first semester as principal, one that has seen uplifting school spirit and the terror of a school lockdown on Oct. 13. To say it's been eventful is an understatement.

Each month he runs a Q&A during First Forum, a monthly event designed to update parents on the programs, opportunities, and general happenings at Acalanes. This month we've done a little Q&A of our own with the new captain at Acalanes.

**Lamorinda Weekly: How did you decide to go into teaching?**

Travis Bell: With a last name like Bell you don't really have a choice. My mom was a principal, so I grew up always being around schools and in classrooms and I knew at a young age that was something I was interested in.

**LW: Why take the helm at Acalanes?**

TB: I really love the Acalanes community. I think they're doing some really cool things to support students both academically, socially and emotionally. There are some big changes coming up and a lot on the horizon. I want to be there to support that work.

**LW: What unique perspective do you feel you bring to your role?**

TB: Being a communications major gave me a broader perspective on effective communication, and having taught leadership gives me insight into creating a broader culture and perspective for schools. I also think that being younger in the profession helps me to connect a little more with our students (not that you can't if you aren't, but I try to leverage that).

**LW: Is there anything you miss about teaching?**

TB: I miss teaching every day. I really miss having a smaller group of

students that you get to know really well and invest in over the course of the year. As an admin you still invest in culture and community, but it's on a larger level and you don't always feel or see the benefits as directly. You have more of a say in bigger decisions that impact students, which is cool, but the responsibility is also weightier.

**LW: How have you seen the field of education change in the past several years?**

TB: There's been a dramatic increase in the use of technology to augment and enhance the student experience and provide resources for teachers in the classroom. There's also more and more emphasis on building a school culture and community.

**LW: If you weren't a principal, what else would you do?**

TB: I have aspirations of doing lots of things. I really love the service industry—I've always wanted to be a waiter—I would also love to manage a venue and work on events. I love seeing needs and meeting them in a relational setting.

**LW: What is your stress-reducing activity of choice?**

TB: Running, swimming, and yoga are my go-to stress reducers. I love reading as well.

**LW: What are some of your particularities?**

TB: I'm a coffee snob and a foodie. I drink black coffee every day, but my go-to drink is a dry cappuccino. My all-time favorite restaurant is Pizzaiolo in Oakland. The menu changes daily so you can't get the same thing twice, which is what I tend to do that at restaurants.

**LW: What is the last thing you watched on Netflix?**

TB: I binge on "30 Rock" and I laugh out loud a lot. My most recent new show was "Stranger Things." My wife and I watched it in three or four days over the course of a week

or two.

**LW: What is something your students wouldn't expect about you?**

TB: I played Shark Boy in a weekly production at a summer houseboat camp, which is pretty much exactly what it sounds like.

**LW: If you could take one class as Acalanes, what would it be and why?**

TB: There are a lot. Right now I would take drama. The times that I walk into that class students are always up and moving and interacting with each other. I think it'd be really fun.

**LW: What is your hope for yourself and your role at Acalanes?**

TB: When I was teaching leader-

... continued from page A2

ship I created a philosophy of relational leadership, which was to befriend, encourage, model and challenge and ourselves and others to be leaders on our campus and in our community. I carry that with me. I want to befriend the students, staff, and parents of Acalanes, to know who they are and learn about what they value and what they want out of their educational experience. I want to encourage them to jump in and invest and be involved and a part of that community. I want to model what it looks like to be a part of that community and then challenge them to go deeper. Acalanes is a great school, but let's not settle for where we're at. We need to constantly be looking at what we're doing and making it even better.

## Lockdown at Acalanes High School October 13



Principal Travis Bell and local law enforcement officers responded to the Oct. 13 lockdown. Photo Gint Federas

Police officers flocked to Acalanes High School after the school was put on lockdown Oct. 13. Two auto burglary suspects were arrested after a chase from Pleasant Hill to Lafayette, and a search of the school found one suspect hiding in the boys locker room. The other suspect was found in a nearby backyard, Lafayette police Chief Eric Christensen told local news outlets. — P. Spear

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