



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District

Board of Directors
Wednesday, June 21, 7 p.m.
Go to the website for meeting location, times and agendas. Visit www.mofd.org

ConFire Board of Directors

Tuesday, June 13, 1:30 p.m.
Board Chamber room 107,
Administration Building,
651 Pine St., Martinez
For meeting times and agendas,
visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

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MOFD approves loan to pay for new equipment

By Pippa Fisher

Moraga-Orinda Fire District board members approved a low interest rate loan to help pay for new firefighting equipment with an eye to safeguarding finances over the next five years, but not without puzzling over the pros and cons of such a loan.

The board heard the details of the loan from Administrative Services Director Gloriann Sasser who explained that of the four proposals sought, US Bancorp's 1.9 percent interest rate spread over five years was the lowest. The loan amount requested was \$2,855,000 to cover the cost of the two ambulances, two

fire engine pumpers and one ladder fire truck the district recently purchased.

Sasser noted the advantage of spreading the cost over time and of the very low interest rate. She pointed out that although MOFD has enough money available in the capital projects fund currently to pay for the purchases without issuing debt and incurring the \$151,247 over five years in interest costs, having the additional money available over the next few years would provide the district with greater flexibility.

Discussion centered on the recognition that the district re-

mains vulnerable should there be a downturn in the economy, causing property taxes to go down and therefore reducing its income. Furthermore it remains hard to predict increases in retirement costs.

Board President Kathleen Famulener called the opportunity a "great deal" noting the flexibility it would afford the district, especially with the ongoing Station 43 construction and the proposed reconstruction of Station 41.

Board Director Steve Anderson commented, "It would not be fiscally prudent to not take advantage of these extremely low inter-

est rates."

MOFD board director John Jex was definitive in his view that the board should avoid taking out the loan but director Brad Barber who questioned the wisdom of paying interest on the purchase of limited-lifespan apparatus. Barber said that he was just not sure that this is the right way to do business.

The motion to authorize the issuance of the five-year, tax-exempt loan was approved by three votes to one, with Jex against and with Barber voting yes but with reservations. Director Craig Jorgens was absent.

Firefighters 'Fill the Boot' for muscular dystrophy

By Pippa Fisher

Continuing a long-standing commitment to the defeat of muscular dystrophy, Moraga-Orinda Fire District firefighters and paramedics took to the streets of Moraga recently to raise money in their traditional "Fill the Boot" campaign.

For over 60 years the International Association of Fire Fighters have raised more than \$558 million.

The organizer of the most recent day's fundraising in Moraga, firefighter-paramedic Andrew Leach, said that they raised just over \$3,800 as firefighters passed the boots around at the junction of Moraga Road and Rheem Boulevard and greeted drivers waiting at the traffic lights.

He said that that figure combined with t-shirt sales from the recent open house brings the amount raised for the Muscular Dystrophy

Association to over \$4,500 so far this year and expects the total to increase following the June 29 Orinda Fill the Boot day. Last year, between the two Fill the Boot days and the open house they raised over \$10,000.

Leach said that he works alongside the MDA representative and coordinates the dates and locations in the district to try and get as many on and off duty personnel to participate as possible. "The more fire fighters we have out there, the more money we raise."

Money raised will sponsor kids suffering from various types of muscular dystrophy to participate in summer camps. There are two camps this year, one in the Santa Cruz Mountains and a second in Occidental. "In years past we have sent an engine company to the camp to spend a day with the kids,"

said Leach.

His favorite part of this effort? "Seeing all our firefighters out there working together to achieve a com-

mon goal which is to raise as much money as we can to send as many children as we can to the summer camps."



Firefighter paramedic Jacob Airola collecting money in Moraga.

Photo Pippa Fisher

RESCUE ONE buys extra eyes for MOFD

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"It takes a little time to learn how to fly these things," he said.

The drone was unveiled at a Moraga Fire Station 41 demonstration in April with an audience of MOFD employees, volunteers and members of the RESCUE

ONE board of directors on hand. Its infrared camera quickly located a volunteer hiding under a nearby canopy of trees. Four days later it was called into service during a search for a UPS truck driver feared injured and lost after an accident in Lafayette's Hunsaker Canyon, where, said Marquardt, "it did exactly what it needed to do."

MOFD used the resource again May 11 when a vehicle overshot the embankment on Pinehurst Road south of Canyon Road and May 12 to monitor firefighting efforts during a residential structure fire in Orinda. It has also been used during training flights over Station 41.

Healy said MOFD does not fly the drone during a vegetation fire, and neither should anyone else. "It is actually illegal," he added, explaining that Cal Fire does not fly its aircraft in an area where drones are aloft. "If you fly, we don't," Healy said.

Before takeoff Marquardt consults smartphone apps B4UFLY, AirMap and ForeFlight to learn

of possible airspace restrictions; he checks Aviation and 1-800-wx brief for weather reports.

A tablet computer controls the white with red stickered UAV with the red and green running lights and white strobe. It is capable of flying 60 miles per hour although Marquardt currently keeps it under 47 mph. It has a flight life of 23 minutes. While not waterproof, it operates with good stability in winds up to 23 miles per hour.

While FAA regulations require line-of-sight operations, a flight path under 400 feet and daylight only operations, the MOFD operator has obtained a waiver allowing flight operations after twilight.

The New York-based Center for the Study of the Drone says 347 public safety agencies nationwide use drones; 23 of those agencies are in California.

Alameda County Sheriff's office has six drones, and used one during Oakland's Ghost Ship warehouse fire in Oakland last December. Menlo Park Fire Pro-

tection District has three "large frame" drones plus a few handheld drones. Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District, and the Rodeo-Hercules Fire Protection District are in the process of designing their own programs, Marquardt said.

"This is another tool — an extra set of eyes to keep firefighters safe," said MOFD Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Dennis Rein. Marquardt agreed, adding "the possibilities are endless." And like any good pilot, he is still building flight time. He is scheduled to attend a Menlo Park Fire Protection District symposium on public service drone use June 2. "Every day there's something new (to learn) and I'm trying to stay on top of it," Marquardt said.

[Editor's note: Lamorinda Weekly reported earlier on local drone use in a November 5, 2014 story: <http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0818/Drones-in-Lamorinda-The-good-the-bad-the-unmanned.html>]

El Toyonal to lose school bus service

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The CHP denied all of LSBP's requests, leading to the cancellation or removal of a number of stops, mostly in Orinda due to the topography, a few in Lafayette and less in Moraga. Hansen added that Lafayette and Moraga and even other places in Orinda were able to adjust the routes to allow for compliant stops, but there is nothing that will help the stops on El Toyonal become compliant with the safety statute.

Loughran and Swaney said they do not believe that safety is the motivation behind the closure, citing studies that children are more 70 percent more likely to get to school safely on a school bus, and the students on El Toyonal have been safely riding the school bus for 20 years. They say that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says, "Bus is best."

One reason that these parents believe that the school bus is safer for children than transport in par-

ents' cars is that the people who live in the El Toyonal area respect the school bus; when they see it, they slow down — a courtesy not always granted to private cars. The two women said that families who planned to start using the school bus next year were not notified of the meeting. Loughran said that she would not have purchased her home but for the existence of the school bus route.

Hansen agreed that it is generally true that students are safer in buses than private cars, but noted that consultants do not necessarily believe that this is the case for El Toyonal. "Once we saw where the story was going, we tried to come up with a way to serve the neighborhood," she said, but found that there was no safe alternative. LSBP thought of Orinda Park Pool, but the driveway is very narrow and the sight distance for the left turn is insufficient. They also looked at the end of Canon or Rio Vista as

turn-around spots, but they weren't sufficient. Nor was there adequate parking on Camino Pablo for parents.

Although the goals are traffic mitigation and to provide as much service as possible, Hansen said that safety is the LSBP's foremost priority and is what is driving the closure. Hansen has met with Orinda Public Works Director Larry Theis, who will be talking to the school bus consultants.

There are also changes to other bus routes in the Orinda area, affecting Glorietta Elementary, Sleepy Hollow Elementary and Wagner Ranch Elementary to Orinda Intermediate and Miramonte High schools. The entire safety study can be read at <http://nebula.wsimg.com/0f5cb3db449c60f389e8d08cad940afb?AccessKeyId=ACBAD635E8DD86102CE4&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>

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