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MOFD to add firefighters, but no full-time ambulance for Orinda

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District accepted a federal grant in September that will allow the district to add four firefighters over three years, but the district will not use the funds to restore a full-time, dedicated ambulance to Fire Station 45 in Orinda.

The \$1.4 million Staffing for Adequate Firefighter and Emergency Response grant, authored by Interim Fire Chief Jerry Lee, covers 75 percent of the costs for years one and two and 35 percent for year three for the additional firefighters.

Lee requested in the grant application that the money be used to fully staff Medic 145, which is currently cross staffed by the Station 45 engine company when the two principal district ambulances are deployed. He explained that adding the ambulance to Orinda will help reduce the city's overall response times, which lag those in Moraga by two minutes or more, and will help address the tax equity situation of Orinda residents paying the district a higher share of property tax than do the residents of Moraga.

By using the grant money, should the district have restored full-time Medic 145 service into Orinda, MOFD costs would have increased \$344,000 for two additional daily staffed positions over three years. With the district maintaining its current daily staffing level of 17 over the same period, expenses will drop by nearly \$1 million.

Capt. Mark McCullah, newly elected district union representative, pushed for restoration of the full-time ambulance. "The grant was written for a reason, and should be accepted for that reason," McCullah said. Acceptance of the award does not lock the district into how it uses the money.

The board voted unanimously to accept the SAFER grant but the district will maintain its current staffing model, eschewing the additional full-time ambulance for now. The chief said he will return to the board with an updated staffing analysis for 2018, likely when MOFD places its new truck into service in the spring or summer.

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