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Station 16 permit approved and ConFire ready to build

By John T. Miller

After a wait of nearly six years since the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors closed down Station 16 in Lafayette, plans to rebuild are currently going through the permit process, and the station at the corner of Upper Happy Valley Road and Los Arabis Drive is about to be rebuilt.

Lafayette residents in the area will likely be relieved to hear the news, as their homes are surrounded by the same type of brush that led to the 1991 Oakland Hills fire.

The station will cover approximately 3,800 square feet and reopen on the same site as the previous one. It will have three bedrooms instead of one, and will include a workout area, an extractor machine to remove carcinogens from the firefighters' gear, and other more modern amenities.

Contra Costa County Fire Protection District Deputy Fire Chief Lewis Broschard, at the Oct. 18 Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force meeting, said, "With the improved economy and the current finances, we no longer have to look at having to borrow to finance the building. We've got the capital to build it right now." Plans were approved last week by the building department and the permit was issued. Broschard and the construction management firm met last Wednesday to start the bidding process.

"There are five contractors already prequalified to bid," said Broschard, "so it should happen quickly. We can then take it to the board and get some shovels in the ground."

The demolition of the existing building should take place soon and be completed by the end of the year.

The station was originally slated for closure when mold contamination resulting from rodent infestation was discovered, and in December 2012, the county board closed Station 16 along with stations in Clayton, Martinez and Walnut Creek, saving the district \$3 million a year at a time when ConFire was \$17 million in debt with no reserves.

In 2012, voters struck down Measure Q, a \$75-per-parcel bond issue, so the station never got the anticipated rebuild.

At one point the city of Lafayette threatened to detach from ConFire and join the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, but ConFire Chief Jeff Carman explained that the resources of ConFire, a much larger district, were far superior to MOFD.

Broschard met with the construction management firm Kitchell, which will manage the project from the bidding process through closeout. It will take until January to finish specifications and documents before going to bid, and the construction should be completed, barring unexpected delays, by February of 2019 at the earliest.

At the Task Force meeting, City Manager Steven Falk said, "The city will work very closely with ConFire to make sure the station gets built as soon as possible. We'll do everything in our power to expedite the process."

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