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Lafayette delay equals Walnut Creek gain

By Nick Marnell

Because of delays in the completion of Lafayette Fire Station 16, the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District plans to shift the nine positions it had budgeted for Lafayette to staff an additional engine company in Walnut Creek at Fire Station 1. The Walnut Creek engine company was destaffed in 2011 amidst budget cuts due to the Great Recession.

The reopening of Station 16 was originally scheduled for this March, but the construction will not be completed until March 2019. The staffing for the rebuilt station was to have come from Academy 51, comprising 25 recruits who are scheduled to graduate Feb. 23.

"So now, the Academy will staff an additional company at Station 1 in Walnut Creek," Fire Chief Jeff Carman told his board Jan. 16. A ConFire engine company consists of a captain, engineer and a firefighter, one of whom must be a licensed paramedic. The nine positions cover three rotating shifts. The nine additional personnel for Station 1 will come from within the ConFire ranks, via promotions or reassignments; the 25 recruits will become probationary firefighters assigned to regular companies throughout the district.

The chief said he uses 10 daily calls as a benchmark for the addition of an engine company and according to the latest published district records, Station 1 responded to 10.23 calls per day in October.

Carman warned the board that the additional staffing at Walnut Creek would put pressure on next year's district budget. The estimated cost of the additional staffing is \$688,000 for the four remaining months of this fiscal year and \$2.1 million for 2018-19. But the chief added that, should finances preclude the addition of personnel in 2019, the engine company will move from Walnut Creek to Lafayette Station 16 once it opens.

The addition of the engine company will increase the fire and emergency medical response capacity for Walnut Creek and the surrounding cities and communities, including Lafayette. According to Assistant Fire Chief Ed Gonzales, Fire Station 1 provides coverage into the Lafayette area when stations 15 and 17 are on calls. ConFire Station 3 on Rossmoor Parkway also provides backup coverage into Lafayette, as do Moraga-Orinda Fire District stations 43 and 42.

The district expects to staff the additional Walnut Creek company by mid-March.

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[back](#)

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