



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District

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

ConFire Board of Directors

Tuesday, April 10, 1:30 p.m.
Board Chamber room 107,
Administration Building,
651 Pine St., Martinez
For meeting times and agendas,
visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

Share your thoughts, insights and opinions with your community. Send a letter to the editor:
letters@lamorinda-weekly.com

Lafayette officials react to the approval of Fire Station 16

By Nick Marnell

When the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District board of directors unanimously authorized the execution of a \$3.4 million contract for the rebuild of Lafayette Fire Station 16, there may not have been a more relieved human being in the county than Fire Chief Jeff Carman.

"The hurdles we had to jump through to get to where we are today were ridiculous in my opinion, but Chief (Lewis) Broschard had the perseverance and tenacity to stick with it and bring this to fruition," Carman said.

Not the least of the hurdles was convincing the city of Lafayette that the fire district was deserving of its business in the first place, after the county closed Fire Station 16 in 2012. Many a meeting of the city's emergency services task force – which did a top-to-bottom assessment of the delivery of fire and emergency medical service in the city – devolved into accusations that Carman was stonewalling the station rebuild in order to save the county the money.

Then surfaced the option of Fire Station 46, a joint venture between

ConFire and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District to combine stations 16 and 43 into one fire station at the Orinda-Lafayette border. But the project never got off the ground, most likely due to philosophical differences between the two agencies. "It took a lot of thought to make the decision to back away from that concept, and the decision to do this on our own was not an easy one," Carman said.

"I always felt that a new Station 16 would be the only way to go," said former Lafayette fire commissioner Bill Granados.

Slowly, the tables began to turn in ConFire's favor. "I was mayor when Chief Carman sat down with me and the city manager, and told us that the joint station on the Orinda border was not going to work, but the fire district had the commitment and the money to reopen Station 16. He was as good as his word," said former Lafayette emergency services task force co-chair Brandt Andersson. "It took longer than we'd hoped, as it nearly always does, but I always felt confident that Station 16 would be rebuilt."

The firefighters union did not

support the combined station and heralded the March 13 action by the board. "It is great to see that the plans to rebuild and staff Station 16 have finally cleared all hurdles and are moving forward," said Local 1230 President Vince Wells. "This will be a significant improvement of service in the area."

Former emergency task force co-chair Traci Reilly concurred. "When it's all said and done, most people will not remember how many hours were spent discussing and debating the merits of rebuilding Station 16, because in the near future we will once again have an operational fire station in the west end of Lafayette," Reilly said.

"It has been a long road with many a winding turn," said Peter Clark, who relentlessly pushed the fire district to action. "I and the other task force members have been frustrated by the leisurely pace of progress toward better response times in western Lafayette – arguably the highest fire danger zone in the county. So (the March 13) vote is cause for serious celebration."

Lafayette Mayor Don Tatzin and Vice Mayor Cam Burks both

termed the board's approval a milestone, with Tatzin expressing cautious optimism. "Let's hope that construction proceeds quickly and without any alarms," he said.

ConFire director Candace Andersen, who had smiled from ear-to-ear as she made the motion for the approval of the fire station contract, sounded as excited as the No. 16 seed UMBC Retrievers who upset No. 1 Virginia in the NCAA Tournament. "Stating that I am delighted to see us reach this point would be an understatement," Andersen said. "We did it!"

Carman finally had a chance to exhale. "The relationship between the fire district and the city of Lafayette (and the emergency services task force) was pretty contentious when I first got here, but they too eventually gave us a chance and the relationship that has formed between us now is strong and trusting, which is important to me. Right to this point some people still questioned whether we would follow through, and I hope our actions have proven we are truly a partner in the public's safety."

ConFire beefs up ambulance service with ALS interfacility transport capability

By Nick Marnell

The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District added a new service as part of its contract as ambulance provider in most of Contra Costa County when it began offering its patients advanced life support interfacility transport service. The service is provided for patients who do not meet critical care transportation requirements but who need more than basic life support.

ConFire and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District transport patients

who call 911 to hospital emergency rooms, if necessary. That does not change. What has changed is that ConFire, through its American Medical Response ambulance subcontractor, can also provide transport between hospitals, or from another medical facility to a hospital, for a Lafayette patient who needs advanced life support care and observation. Examples of advanced life support include administering continuous positive airway pressure for patients with breathing problems

and thoracostomy, inserting a thin plastic tube into the pleural space between the lungs and the chest wall to remove excess fluid or air.

"We have been working on this for the past 15 months with AMR and our local emergency medical services agency," said ConFire Assistant Chief Terence Carey. The county LEMSAs is Contra Costa Health Services, whose medical director must approve the medical facilities for transport.

ConFire deploys up to 40 am-

bulances daily, all staffed with a paramedic and an emergency medical technician. The ambulances are stationed dynamically, and Carey said that if the demand for the interfacility transport is high, the district may have to add even more resources.

"MOFD does not have a similar program and I do not believe it is feasible in our service area," said Fire Chief Dave Winnacker. MOFD currently staffs a single dedicated ambulance from Sta-

tion 41 in Moraga with a second cross-staffed ambulance responding from Station 45 in Orinda. The chief explained that, because of the limited size of the system, taking a unit out of service for non-emergency transport would significantly degrade the district's ability to respond to emergencies and would result in delays for both response and transport.

ConFire began its ALS-interfacility ambulance transport service March 6.

Fire chiefs want extra staffing up front to fight major wildfires

By Nick Marnell

The state mutual aid system is unable to keep up with the unprecedented demands caused by larger and more frequent fires that have devastated California in recent years, according to Contra Costa County Fire Protection District Chief Jeff Carman.

Speaking at a Feb. 27 hearing in Sacramento, Carman, as president of the California Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association, asked a senate committee for \$100 million to beef up the California mutual aid system, an interagency agreement to provide emergency assistance when requested. The funds would go toward increased staff-

ing of overloaded dispatch centers, upfront deployment of resources during predictable weather events and an upgrade to the cumbersome state tracking system with newer, quicker software.

"We're operating under a 50-year-old system. Things have changed in the last 50 years, and before, we depended on mutual aid to get us mutual aid in the first 12 to 24 hours. Now we need them in the first minutes to hours," Carman said.

The chief said that at the start of the Napa and the Southern California wildfires, ConFire had resources ready to go, but the district was

unable to send crews or engines for hours because it had not received an official order. "That was as frustrating as you can imagine," Carman told the committee. "The system became overwhelmed."

Carman often kidded that each year, he would predict the worst fire season ever. But he wasn't joking in Sacramento. "How long are we going to call these fires unprecedented, when we continue to have them year after year after year? Soon they will become the norm," the chief said.

Under Carman's proposal, local agencies would put together strike teams in advance of major, predictable weather events, rather than wait for resources to be assembled and deployed after a fire starts. Should a major wildfire roar over the Lafayette Ridge into Upper Happy Valley, or jump Bear Creek Road into north Orinda, local agency strike teams would be able to deploy instantly, without overwhelming the dispatch and ordering systems. Fire chiefs would be able to pay the local strike teams without relying on local funding, which doesn't exist, according to ConFire Deputy Chief Lewis Broschard, the system's operational area coordinator.

The \$100 million to pay for this upfront staffing would come



ConFire Chief Jeff Carman testifies in Sacramento. Photo provided

through the state cap and trade program, which charges penalties to companies that exceed allowable greenhouse gas emissions. Carman drew a connection between cap and trade and wildfires in that the amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere from the Napa and Southern California fires equals what every car in California emits in two years. The sooner a fire is put out, the fewer pollutants in the air.

In 2017, Cal Fire received \$200 million from the greenhouse gas funds through the Governor's Office of Emergency Services, which manages the state mutual aid system. Local districts received \$25

million. But most of the mutual aid comes from local agencies, like ConFire and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, which regularly send out engine companies in response to mutual aid requests. Carman said that state officials were unaware of how little money trickles down to the local agencies.

But hope appears on the horizon, as Carman said that Gov. Jerry Brown wants to meet with local fire officials. "So after eight years of totally ignoring local government fire agencies, and after two years of giving us a fraction of our ask, we at least have his attention," Carman said.

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Firefighters lobby Washington

Firefighters traveled to Washington in March to lobby Congress on various industry issues, including the continuation of federal grants for emergency personnel. From left, Local 1230 President Vince Wells, U.S. Rep. Mark DeSaulnier and MOFD engineer Dan Elbanna, a member of the Local 1230 executive board. —Nick Marnell



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