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## OUSD approves water tanks for Wagner Ranch, Sleepy Hollow

By Sora O'Doherty

It is a big ask, acknowledges Moraga-Orinda Fire District Chief Dave Winnacker, but he is out to convince parents of students at Wagner Ranch and Sleepy Hollow elementary schools to leave their children at school in the event of a sudden wildfire. The two schools are unique populations that are unable to self evacuate, with the largest populations and greatest exposure to risk, such as exposure to the open spaces in the Briones watershed. The fire district always recommends early evacuation when possible, but in the event of a rapidly advancing wild fire, evacuation may not be the better choice. The other choice is to shelter in place, and that option is made much more viable with a fire engine on site and an available water supply. On May 14 the Orinda Union School District board approved the purchase of two 9,500 gallon galvanized water tanks to be installed at Wagner Ranch and Sleepy Hollow. The tanks will be filled by a water tender truck and checked annually. The tanks will, according to Winnacker, create a reliable and accessible water supply that won't be impacted by anything else. He explained that East Bay Municipal Utility District reservoirs are tanks located around Orinda, fed by pumps that move water from the low-lying lake reservoirs into the tanks. The pumps are electric, and PG&E has recently announced plans to cut electricity during some wild fire events. That, coupled with some insufficient pipes, could create water shortages to fight wild fires. The tanks installed at the elementary schools would avoid any impact from the electrical and pumping systems.

The proposal accepted by OUSD is from Tanks for Less, out of Austin, Texas. The proposal provides for a 9,592-gallon tank with a 15-foot diameter and 11-foot 3-inch height at each site. The total cost for both tanks is approximately \$39,000. Each tank will also require that the district's contractor pour a concrete pad to anchor each tank. The cost for the pads is estimated to be \$4,000 per site. According to Stuart House, OUSD director of facilities maintenance and operations, bids are now being considered for the installation of the pads. House expects that the pads and the tanks will be fully installed during July, ready for the upcoming school year. The board accepted staff's recommendation to fund the purchase of the tanks with Fund 40 money, a fund of money from the Pine Grove development reserved for school facilities.

Winnacker says that if school is in session, there is no higher priority than protecting the students. Because of the location of Wagner Ranch and Sleepy Hollow, he said, there could be a fire that is so fast moving or that starts so close to the schools that evacuation would be more risky than sheltering in place. A fire engine at the school would focus on keeping one building safe. The aim would not be to put the fire out, but to protect the building and the people until the fire moves past the school. Winnacker compared it to building a sand castle at the beach. If you build up a wall to keep the waves from destroying your castle, you are redirecting the waves around it. Having students and staff in a single building minimizes the area the fire department has to protect. The firefighters would redirect the fire away from that building, protecting it as the fire continued to burn until it has passed by.

At some point in the future, Winnacker hopes to offer a demonstration at the schools to convince parents that their children will be safer sheltering in place.

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