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MOFD projects a strong fiscal year ahead

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District board approved the 2018-19 district budget at its June 20 meeting, and continuing along the same healthy financial track as many Lamorinda public agencies, MOFD projects a general fund balance of \$5.9 million, the highest number in its history. The projected general fund balance of 24 percent of 2018-19 general fund revenue exceeds the 17 percent board policy, though the district goal is to achieve a 50 percent reserve.

The most controversial budget item was the funding of the district retiree health care and pension stabilization trusts. The district set up the two trust funds in order to mitigate the fluctuations of payments demanded by its pension fund manager, the Contra Costa County Employees Retirement Association.

In 2018, each trust was funded at \$374,000. For 2019, the board recommended a funding increase in the retiree health care trust to \$440,000 and in the pension stabilization fund to \$1.1 million. The strategy was vilified by the firefighters and Director Kathleen Famulener, who questioned the timing of the increased expenditure with labor negotiations ongoing. The district contract with its firefighters expires on June 30. Fire Chief Dave Winnacker stressed at the meeting that the \$1.5 million, though budgeted, will not be immediately transferred into the trust funds. "This projection is tentative," the chief said. "The actual amount of the transfer will be determined by a later board action, and the transfer of funds may only occur after the board makes that determination."

The basic numbers read this way: general fund revenue up 8.7 percent to \$24.6 million, primarily due to a 6.1 percent projected increase in property tax revenue. General fund expenses are projected to rise 7 percent to \$23.4 million.

The district also expects to complete the construction of Fire Station 43 in north Orinda in the next fiscal year.

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