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**MOFD fire chief the impetus behind relocation of Moraga Fire Station 41**

By Nick Marnell



Next in line for an overhaul

Photo courtesy MOFD

According to local officials, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District is under no pressure from developers or the town of Moraga to move Fire Station 41, which sits on Moraga Way next to the new Town Center Homes development.

“It’s 100 percent my idea,” said MOFD Chief Dave Winnacker.

Fire Station 41 was built in 1967, and according to a district 2011 Facilities Committee report, compiled under the direction of then-director Dick Olsen, the station suffered from “health and safety, gender separation, firefighter housing and other deficiencies” and needed to be rebuilt, as did the adjacent administrative and training centers.

“Following the priorities laid out in the 2011 report I began looking at the Station 41 project,” Winnacker said. “Given that the current site has always been marginal for training activities and that the report was written before the adjacent Town Center Homes project was approved, I believe it is appropriate to explore all viable options before committing significant capital resources to rebuilding or extensively remodeling Station 41.”

With the limited number of buildable lots in south Moraga of sufficient size to house the fire station and training center, the chief’s outreach and research narrowed the list of options to two: Remain at the current location or move to a site adjacent to the Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School. Winnacker contacted Moraga School District

Superintendent Bruce Burns in the fall.

“There have been informal discussions about this for years,” said Burns, who noted that this time, the fire district was seriously interested in moving the fire station to the JM location. Burns said he will bring the topic to his school board at a December meeting.

The superintendent seconded that outsiders did not recommend that he make a land deal with MOFD. “No pressure, no lobbying from the town,” Burns said.

Moraga Mayor Dave Trotter also confirmed that neither the town nor any developer made any demands to move the station. “The Town Council gave no such directives to MOFD, in connection with approval of the Town Center Homes project or otherwise,” Trotter said.

As for the relocation of the administrative center, Winnacker spoke with John Valentine, pastor of Orinda’s Holy Shepherd Lutheran Church, on the idea of the church selling a portion of its property to the district. “It is something we are considering,” Valentine said. The church lies adjacent to Fire Station 44 on Moraga Way.

“I understand that moving a fire station is always a sensitive issue and look forward, with appropriate board direction, to working with the public to explore MOFD’s future options,” Winnacker said.

No work will begin on Fire Station 41 until completion of the rebuild of Station 43 in north Orinda, expected in the spring.

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**New assistant city manager**

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Both of Theis’ parents are Japanese, and were born in Japan. They married in Los Angeles, where Theis was born and lived until he was about 3 years old. His German name results from the fact that his father was adopted by his grandmother, who was married to a merchant marine. Theis has only limited family in the United States, but has many cousins in Japan, which he visited with his brother twice when they were younger.

Theis attended Diablo Valley College and earned a bachelor’s degree in engineering at UC Berkeley in 2000. He was hired by Caltrans, where he worked until 2002 when he was hired by Contra Costa County. He joined the staff in Orinda in 2013, and was named director of public works in September 2016, after the retirement of Chuck Swanson. He’d only been in the job for a few months before the Miner Road sinkhole happened in January 2017.

At public works, Theis works most closely with the planning department. While public works

is responsible for roads and drainage, it is actually the parks and recreation department that is responsible for maintenance of the city’s buildings.

The 2019 road paving program will be his highest priority in the new year, and he is looking forward to the completion of that massive program, as next year is its final year. Beyond that, Orinda has several bridges that require seismic retrofitting, including the bridge at Miner Road (below the site of the sink hole), and a bridge on Bear Creek Road.

Insofar as downtown development goes, Public Works will be involved with the streetscape and is currently working on parking programs. Theis will report to the city council on the city’s experience with the Brookwood Road parking program on Dec. 18, when the council is also scheduled to get an update on the easement at 53 Rheem Blvd. In addition to its other duties, Public Works is also taking over parking enforcement from the Orinda Police Department.