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MOFD Station 41 rebuild will not happen this fiscal year

By Nick Marnell

Though its 62-year-old Fire Station 41 was cited for replacement eight years ago, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District will not begin the station reconstruction until the 2021 fiscal year, despite the work having been scheduled for this fiscal year in the latest district long-range financial forecast. Also part of the postponed capital project is the rebuild of the district administrative offices, which sit adjacent to Station 41 on Moraga Way.

The fire station has been a target for rebuild since 2011, when the district Facilities Committee said the building suffered "health and safety, gender separation, firefighter housing and other deficiencies." Its report was issued before the approval of the Moraga Town Center Homes project, a development of 36 townhomes under construction next to the MOFD facility.

Because of the proximity of the townhomes to the MOFD training center, which has long been considered marginal for training activities, Fire Chief Dave Winnacker looked into not only the fire station rebuild but also station and administrative center relocation. One possibility was a land swap between MOFD and the Moraga School District for property adjacent to Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School for the fire station. But that concept has gone nowhere.

"I brought this matter to the board over a year ago, not to ask permission, rather to ensure that the public was aware two public entities were going to discuss, not negotiate, the possibility of a land swap," MSD Superintendent Bruce Burns said. "The MOFD chief and I last spoke in January, as I recall, and have had no conversations since. For MSD, and I suspect MOFD, there are far more pressing matters, such as MSD's reduction of \$1 million in revenue due to an expiring parcel tax and our work to reduce expenses for 2020-21."

Winnacker concurred that the district has more critical priorities in 2019. "With our limited resources, we are focused on vegetation mitigation and the completion of the North Orinda Shaded Fuel Break," the chief said. Admitting that the fire station is on its last legs, the chief said that in fiscal year 2021, the district may be in a better position to rehab Station 41. "It is a district goal," Winnacker said.

The district estimates \$7 million dollars to rebuild Station 41, and \$1 million for the reconstruction of the administrative center. The last of the five MOFD fire stations to be rebuilt this century will be Station 45 in Orinda, scheduled for a \$5 million facelift in 2022, per the district long range financial plan.

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