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Moraga audience presses MOFD chief over his proposed fire code

By Nick Marnell



MOFD Chief Dave Winnacker outlines new fire code Photo Nick Marnell

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Chief Dave Winnacker spelled out the rationale for his proposed fire code, which will affect district parcels, remodels and new construction, to an audience of nearly 100 at the Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School auditorium Jan. 28. The chief covered many of the regulations that would take effect upon adoption of the new code, but most of the audience questions focused on two elements: the ban on the use of combustible ground cover within 2 feet of each district structure, and that all vegetation must be trimmed within 2 feet of each structure.

Winnacker explained that in the '70s, '90s, and 2010s, the area adapted to a changing environment as drought forced people to rethink the suburban ideal from expansive green lawns to lava rock or drought tolerant native plants. "Now the environment is changing again as a series of major fires since 2017 have made clear," the chief said. "To adapt, now is the time to rethink our landscaping to create fire resistant space around our homes with particular emphasis on the last 2 feet."

Attendees asked Winnacker for a list of approved materials to surround district structures. "We need pictures and diagrams so we know what we are trying to accomplish," said one audience member.

"If it will burn, or if it drops things that will burn within 2 feet of a structure, it is not allowed," explained the chief, noting that succulents, aggregate, river rock and bare mineral soil were acceptable ground covers within the 2 foot perimeter of a structure. Winnacker acknowledged that the regulation will result in major changes to landscaping.

"You've hired me to worry about this problem," the chief said. "I understand this is a big ask. If you agree, let your elected officials know." The fire code ordinance will be presented to the district board, the district municipal boards and the Board of Supervisors for approval, likely in February or March, and the ordinance will go into effect immediately upon adoption.

A link to a draft of the entire fire code can be found on the home page of the district's newly redesigned website at mofd.org.

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