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MOFD board declines to fully staff ambulance in downtown Orinda

By Nick Marnell



Photo courtesy MOFD

A split Moraga-Orinda Fire District board rejected a staffing model that would have placed a fully staffed ambulance at Fire Station 45 in Orinda, instead voting to maintain the cross-staffing model in use since 2013.

Station 41 in Moraga and Station 45 deploy both an ambulance and a fire engine on site. Station 41 fully staffs each vehicle, with a crew of three on the engine and a two-person crew for Medic 41.

It doesn't work that way at Station 45. The station maintains only a three-person crew which responds on either the engine or the ambulance, whichever is dispatched. When Medic 45 is off to a medical call, Engine 45 sits idle at the station.

According to a district staff report, when Medic 45 is out of the district, a call for service in Station 45's coverage area requires a response from either Engine 43 or Truck 44, which can result in extended response times as those units travel farther to the scene of the incident.

"I truly do not understand why we would not have staff personnel at Station 45 at all times," said Director Greg Baitx, who at the April 29 district meeting made the motion to fully staff the Orinda ambulance.

From 2007 until 2013, the ambulance at Station 45 was fully staffed. Then came the financial crisis, and the district reverted to the cross-staff model. "When our financial situation improved, those positions were to be restored," President Steven Danziger said.

But they weren't, despite the district's securing a federal grant for that purpose. Instead, the district used the grant money for floaters to cover sick days and vacation relief, permitted uses of the federal funds.

To fully staff Medic 45, the district would have to hire six additional personnel at a cost of \$1.44 million per year, or MOFD could cover the ambulance with increased overtime of approximately \$1 million.

Danziger and Director Michael Donner have long pushed for the fully staffed Orinda ambulance, but at the district meeting, their support waned, largely because of the unknown financial impact of the coronavirus pandemic. "I don't think it would be prudent for us to increase staffing now," Donner said.

"I intended to fully support increased staffing, but right now I feel it would not be responsible to direct the chief to do it," Danziger said. "In my heart, I want to do it, and if things were different I'd be right there with Director Baitx."

The motion to fully staff Medic 45 was rejected by the board 3-1, with Baitx voting yes and Danziger abstaining.

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

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