

Firefighter takes on incumbent in MOFD Division 2 race



John Jex



Nathan Smith Photos provided

By Nick Marnell

Challenger Nathan Smith, a firefighter-paramedic with the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District, squares off against incumbent John Jex, a retired Deloitte auditor, for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District Division 2 governing board seat. The candidates answered questions about controversial district topics.

On the amount of money the district should allocate annually for fire prevention.

Smith said that the \$834,000 designated for fire prevention in 2021 is deceptive. "This figure is inclusive of prevention staff only. Hours spent by suppression personnel to plan and implement prevention efforts like fuel-reducing burns, fire trail maintenance and public education are not included," Smith said.

The challenger favors a balanced approach by the district, incorporating prevention and suppression, to reduce community risk. Smith cited the \$7.7 million in grants MOFD obtained last

year which beefed up prevention efforts. "MOFD must continue to make every effort to augment tight budget dollars with state and federal grants," he said.

Jex said that fire prevention efforts should be expanded, but it would require cuts in other areas, because the district projects a 2021 budget deficit of \$1.5 million.

"The major funding for all our services comes from property taxes," he said. "Of this amount 79% is paid to cover salaries and overtime to the employees. Over 18% goes to cover current payments on existing debt and interest incurred for past unfunded pension benefits and for other debts."

That leaves little discretionary funds for other services, Jex said.

On the recently approved three-year labor agreement for employees of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, calling for a 5% annual wage increase over the length of the contract, and how that contract may affect the MOFD labor negotiations.

"Our existing contract provided for increases for each of the past three years, which was in line with other fire districts at that time," Jex said.

He explained that increases in salary for firefighters should take into consideration projected increases or decreases in district revenue, any additional payments needed to cover district unfunded pension and medical benefit liabilities, and community requests to expand fire protection services, including support and expansion of Firewise neighborhood activities.

"I look at negotiations as an opportunity to provide the best service to the community," Smith said. He believes that the district needs to maintain short- and long-term fiscal responsibility with a sustainable and balanced budget, while providing for all aspects of fire suppression, prevention and emergency medical services.

"MOFD must balance those fiscal constraints while maintaining itself in a competitive regional job market and attracting qualified employees who meet the high standards of providing for this community," Smith said.

On a sound district general fund reserve policy.

Smith insists that a healthy reserve and being fiscally conservative are necessary to ensure the economic health of MOFD, with the district board policy calling for a general fund reserve of 17% of annual expenditures, and a goal of 50%.

"The 17% minimum needs to be evaluated annually during budgetary workshops by the board as being

adequately healthy minimum while considering the long-range outlook and economy," Smith said. "In better economic times the reserve could be built up with the understanding that challenging economic times might see a decrease in overall percentage."

Jex noted that the operating budget for fiscal 2021 results in a projected general fund balance of \$7 million. "This amount would cover expenses for only three months, requiring the district to borrow from the county to cover operations for the balance of the year," Jex said.

"Most fire districts and cities have general fund balances of more than 50% of revenue."

Jex said that borrowing to fund current operations is not a prudent fiscal policy and could result in the district having to declare a financial emergency.

Summary

"My No. 1 priority will always be to the residents of the community," Smith said. "I will work tirelessly to help MOFD provide the excellent all-risk service our towns demand."

Smith said he will draw upon his private sector and relevant firefighting experience to allow him to make sound decisions to maintain

fiscal discipline while providing facilities, equipment and programs to carry out the mission of the district. He plans to work to ensure greater collaboration across fire prevention, suppression, emergency medical services and community programs.

"Through greater balance and alignment, MOFD will become more agile and responsive to the community," Smith said.

Jex said he plans to focus more on fire prevention while still providing state-of-the-art fire suppression and emergency medical services, utilizing advanced technology to leverage MOFD's physical assets and well-trained personnel. He also intends to represent the community by obtaining the proper allocation of resources to ensure fast emergency response times and by maximizing the use of taxpayer funds.

"I will use my experience to ensure prudence and transparency in MOFD finances," Jex said. The incumbent said he will also ensure that MOFD becomes financially stronger and able to meet both the community's expanding needs, as well as the district obligation to pay its growing unfunded pension and medical benefit liabilities.

Fire District Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District

Board of Directors
Wednesday, Oct. 21, 7 p.m.
For meeting times and agendas, visit www.mofd.org

ConFire

Board of Directors
Tuesday, Oct. 13, 1:00 p.m.
For meeting times and agendas, visit www.cccfpd.org



Candidate differences define MOFD Division 5 race



Sharon Girdlestone



Craig Jorgens Photos provided

By Nick Marnell

Challenger Sharon Girdlestone, a local business owner, faces incumbent Craig Jorgens, a retired business executive, for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District Division 5 governing board seat. The candidates answered questions about controversial district topics.

On the amount of money

the district should allocate annually for fire prevention:

Girdlestone pointed out that even though the \$29.7 million district budget shows only \$834,000 allocated for fire prevention in 2021, MOFD spends much more on activities and programs, such as prescribed burns and evacuation drills that are not included in that figure.

"Fire prevention should be priority, and a thorough review of all funds should be done to determine if funds can be used for prevention," said Girdlestone, noting that the district has been successful in receiving grants from the state and private sources, and it should continue to explore those funding sources.

"This year, less than \$300,000 will go directly to fuels mitigation at MOFD's expense; the rest is for management salaries, enforcement, and education," countered Jorgens. "I think a much greater share of your tax dollars should go to actually helping remove flammable materials from every resident's property to make the entire community safe from catastrophic fires."

Jorgens noted that, in 2020 alone, the district spent \$100,000 on a wood chipper program that brought many neighbors together to become

Firewise, and in five months, 190 tons of fuel were removed at no cost to residents. "We need more chippers to serve all district residents to advance this goal," he said.

On the recently approved three-year labor agreement for employees of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, calling for a 5% annual wage increase over the length of the contract, and how that contract may affect the MOFD labor negotiations:

"Our firefighters work hard, and I firmly believe they deserve the same Cost of Living (CPI) based wage and benefit increases that are given to the hard working teachers, federal, state and city employees who live in our community," Jorgens said.

Girdlestone said she understands that the ConFire contract is an anomaly in the Bay Area. She believes that, in light of the negative effect of

COVID-19 on the overall economy and its potential effect on property tax revenue - which is the district's primary funding source - MOFD will be in a good negotiating position. "Any increase in salary or benefits should be no more than rate of inflation," said Girdlestone, stressing that MOFD needs to remain competitive with other jurisdictions in order to retain and attract the best employees.

On a sound district general fund reserve policy:

"The present policy of 17% minimum with a goal of 50% was recently approved by a majority of the board. The present reserve is approximately 30%," Girdlestone said. With the district projecting a deficit of approximately \$1.5 million in the coming fiscal year, she said that it appears to be fiscally responsible to maintain the policy as it is.

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Public Safety

Emergency response:
Emergency: 24 Hours 911
Police Dispatch: 24 Hours
925-284-5010

Nixle: Text your zip code to 888777 or go to www.nixle.com

Lafayette Police Department:
3471 Mt. Diablo Blvd. 925-283-3680
Chief of Police, Ben Alldritt
925-299-3221
Police Department Tip Line
94549Tip@gmail.com
Police Department Traffic Issues
94549Traffic@gmail.com

Moraga Police Department:
329 Rheem Blvd., 925-888-7055
Chief of Police, Jon King ext. 7049
Orinda Police Department:
22 Orinda Way 925-254-6820
Chief of Police, David M. Cook
925-254-6820
Orindatip@cityoforinda.org

Lafayette Police Department Incident Summary Report Sept. 6 - Sept. 19

Alarms	34
911 Calls (includes hang-ups)	13
Traffic	95
Suspicious Circumstances	9
Suspicious Subject	22
Suspicious Vehicle	19
Service to Citizen	37
Patrol Req./Security Check	41
Public/School Assembly Check	0
Supplemental Report	20
Vacation House Check	6
Welfare Check	19
Ordinance Violation	2
Vehicle violations	
Auto Burglary	3500 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
DUI Misd	

Moraga Rd./Brook St.
Hit And Run Misdemeanor
3600 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
Reckless Driving
Moraga Rd Twd Moraga
Moraga Rd./St Marys Rd.
Mt. Diablo Blvd./Lafayette Cir.
1100 Block Pleasant Hill Cir.
10 Block Eleven
Stolen Vehicle Recovery
3500 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
Tc - Property Damage
Deer Hill Rd./1st St.
1st St./Mt. Diablo Blvd.
Mt. Diablo Blvd./2Nd St.

Other criminal activity
Fraud Credit Card
3400 Block Woodview Dr.
Fraud False Pretenses
3100 Block Kingsley Pl.
30 Block Olympic Oaks Dr.
Identity Theft
20 Block Cosso Ct.
1000 Block Upper Happy Valley Rd.
Misc Burglary
3400 Block Hamlin Rd.
Petty Theft
3800 Block Happy Valley Rd.
3500 Block Via Los Colorados
3300 Block Las Huertas Rd.

Nuisance to the Community
Disturbing The Peace
El Curtola Blvd./Eb Sr 24
Loud Noise
Happy Valley Rd./Palo Alto Dr.
10 Block Westminster Pl.
500 Block Merriewood Dr.
1000 Block Blackwood Ln.
3400 Block School St.
3300 Block Kinchloe Ct.
Mt. Diablo Blvd./Lafayette Cir.
Loud Party
1100 Block Loveland Dr.
1300 Block Summit Rd. (2)
1000 Block Blackwood Ln.
Oliver Ct./Moraga Rd.
3500 Block Oliver Ct.
Public Nuisance
Golden Gate Way/2Nd St.

Woodview Dr./St Marys Rd.
3500 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
Vandalism
1400 Block Sunset Loop
3600 Block Bickerstaff St. (2)
Other
Brandishing Weapon
3400 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
K9 Outside Assist Request
1500 Block Kirker Pass Rd., Cla
Mentally Ill Violent
3400 Block Moraga Blvd.
Trespass
1000 Block Hunsaker Canyon Rd.
1100 Block Upper Happy Valley Rd.

Moraga Police Department Incident Summary Report Sept. 8 - Sept. 20

Alarms	5
911 Calls (includes hang-ups)	6
Traffic	10
Suspicious Circumstances	6
Suspicious Subject	2
Suspicious Vehicle	1
Service to Citizen	42
Patrol Req./Security Check	25
Supplemental Report	11
Vacation House Check	0
Welfare Check	5
Ordinance Violation	0
Vehicle violations	
DUI Misd	Bollinger Canyon Rd./Joseph Dr.
Excessive Speed	Moraga Rd./Al Ta Mesa Dr. Ascot Dr./Moraga Rd. Moraga Rd./Alta Mesa Dr.

Moraga Rd./School St.
St. Anders/Moraga Way
Morga Way/Moraga Rd.
Moraga Way/Ivy Dr.
Moraga Rd./Woodford Dr.
Rheem Blvd./Redwood Ln.

Other criminal activity
Grand Theft
Not Available
Petty Theft
3700 Block Via Granada
Safeway
Warrant Arrest
Starbucks
Nuisance to the Community
Disturbance-domestic
Not Available (2)
Police Department
Loud Music
Not Available
Loud Noise
400 Block Stonefield Pl.
1600 Block Camino Pablo
2100 Block Ascot Dr.
Not Available (2)
80 Block Miramonte Dr.
Loud Party
200 Block Paseo Bernal
2000 Block Ascot Dr.

Other
Child Abuse
100 Block Goodfellow Dr.
Coroners Case
300 Block Rheem Blvd.
Mentally Ill Commit
1400 Block Camino Peral
Public Assembly Check
Rheem Valley Shopping Center (2)
Safeway (2)
Moraga Center
Trespass
Campolindo High School
Trespass W/ Vehicle
200 Block Corliss Dr.

ORINDA POLICE

Orinda Police Department Incident Summary Report Sept 13 - Sept. 19

Alarms	11
911 Calls (includes hang-ups)	8
Traffic	10
Suspicious Circumstances	2
Suspicious Subject	4
Suspicious Vehicle	4
Service to Citizen	37
Patrol Req./Security Check	32
Public/School Assembly Check	3
Supplemental Report	11
Welfare Check	3
Ordinance Violation	0
Vehicle violations	
Accident Property	Moraga Way/Stein Way
Hit And Run Misdemeanor	Moraga Way/Orchard Rd.
Reckless Driving	Orinda Theater
Orinda Theater	Moraga Way/Orchard Rd.
Wilder Sports Fields	
Other criminal activity	
Commercial Burglary	10 Block Theatre Sq 106
Grand Theft	70 Block La Cresta Rd. 60 Block Stanton Ave.
Identity Theft	200 Block Stanton Terrace (2) 300 Block Camino Sobrante
Residential Burglary	40 Block El Toyonal
Warrant Arrest	Delaware Dr./Arizona Dr., Con Cal Shakespear
Nuisance to the Community	
Disturbing The Peace	100 Block Lucille Way Theatre Square
Other	
Evading Officer	Camino Pablo/Ardilla Rd.