

MOFD chief discusses Shaded Fuel Break project and the coming fire season



Photo courtesy MOFD

Red Flag Warnings may come early this year.

By Vera Kochan

Due to the lack of rain this winter, the fire season and its conditions are coming much sooner this year. In preparation for Lamorinda's worst-case scenario, Moraga-Orinda Fire District Chief Dave Winnacker gave a detailed presentation during the Moraga Town Council's Feb. 23 meeting.

MOFD has firmed up the area of the Shaded Fuel Break project that was made possible by the \$6.3 million grant recently received from the California Climate Initiative through Cal Fire. The project "will start at Highway 24 near Cal Shakes, on the north side of 24 at the Wilder off ramp; and work its way down the western side of Wilder subdivision; wrap around the area known as Lost Valley by the

PG&E [Pacific Gas & Electric] substation; then around the country club running up along the high ground on Flicker Ridge," explained Winnacker. "So really, moving between Lost Valley, the country club and the community of Canyon; making its way down to Canyon Road; following Canyon Road down to the Valle Vista Staging Area; and then wrapping around the neighborhood by J.M. [Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School]; around Sanders out across to Saint Mary's [College]; and then across through areas just immediately east of the GHAD [Geologic Hazard Abatement Districts]; and terminate at Sky-Hy at the Moraga-Lafayette line." Winnacker stressed that only dead or dying trees will be removed in addition to any limbing-up of the lower portions of trees that are close to the ground.

"We will essentially put a large catcher's mitt around West Orinda and South Moraga," continued Winnacker. "We're happy to report that we have been in a collaborative manner with Cal Fire, who's been putting in for a project on this year's CCIS grant cycle to extend that work out around Rossmoor."

Additionally, the MOFD Board has two proposed new ordinances in the works. One

ordinance is to extend the very high Fire Hazard Severity Zone to districts that are Wildland Urban Interface Fire Areas where enhanced fire-safe construction has gone into affect. The second ordinance involves the expansion of fuel mitigation requirements for undeveloped parcels which currently reside within the Fire Code. The property owners must maintain fuel breaks where those parcels end so that wildfires will not spread onto the lands of another, which is a violation of the Fire Code and a state law.

MOFD is also asking residents to begin doing a fire assessment check of their yards early this year. Look for dead trees and fuel that will carry the fire such as dead brush or overgrown grass. Winnacker noted that Republic Services will provide a second green bin for free, and they will make multiple green waste pickups for free as well. Also remove mulch from within 2-feet of the house. Residents are encouraged to sign up for the Community Warning System (www.CWSalerts.com) for future evacuation exercises or in the event of an actual emergency.

For additional fire information visit MOFD's website: www.MOFD.org.

Lafayette Town Council authorizes subcommittee to pursue purchasing property for public use

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The city would hold on to this property and convert it to public use while it waits to find property more suitable for city offices and a civic center.

Three considerations were key to this discussion. First, according to the staff report, by law the city is not allowed to invest in real estate if it is not actively being used for public purposes. In other words, it is not able to "land bank" property and keep it vacant. However, choosing a public purpose incorrectly could result in the city not being able to sell the property when it identifies a more suitable property.

According to the report, "selling the asset and elimi-

nating a use to which residents have become accustomed in order to develop a civic center/city offices may prove to be unpopular ... even if we try to make absolutely clear to the public that the property is being acquired with funds from the City Offices Fund. ... This will need to be taken into consideration." An example of this type of a scenario would be turning the interim property into a public gathering space, public parking, or gallery. If, after several years of the public enjoying use of the space, the property is sold to a developer, it could be anticipated that there would be public outcry.

The second consideration involves legal constraints and timing issues the city might face when selling a property.

According to the staff report, "there are legal constraints on the city when it disposes of property, particularly property that has been used for parks." In addition, according to city attorney Mala Subramanian, it could take some time to sell the property since under current law the city would be required to go through the process of offering it up to affordable housing groups and other public agencies and possibly spend some time going through negotiations. Furthermore "should the laws change and there be certain requirements imposed on the city we'd be stuck with that and so that's something to consider."

Finally, the third consideration related to financing of the interim property. Accord-

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ing to the staff report, in addition to the initial costs to acquire the property and make it "fit and ready" for the proposed public use(s), estimates of on-going costs for maintaining and staffing the property need to be considered as well. These costs, as well as the cost of potential financing for the property need to align with the current amount the city is spending to lease its office space.

Robinson noted that extensive financial analyses have been done, adding that there "are absolutely avenues for the city to borrow money, similar to a mortgage. Net present values definitely show that over a long period of time, it's much better to be able to own than to rent."

In her report, Robinson pointed out, however, that there is a chance that "we may now be in a real estate bubble, and there is a possibility that the value of any property acquired may decrease rather than increase."

Grace Dixon and David Clark, during the public comment portion of the meeting, were both excited about the concept.

Council Member Gina Dawson said her ask would be to explore financial instruments "to make the most of the money that we do have and maximizing it as much as possible." Council Member Wei-Tai Kwok was also supportive of the activity to set this up.

Anduri said that the first thing the subcommittee will be looking for are properties to invest to hold the value of the City Offices Fund. "If in the course of doing this we locate a property, either an existing fully-built property or land that we can develop, I certainly see us looking at options to develop it and look at financing methods, and bring those to the council."

The council voted unanimously to adopt the recommendation to authorize the subcommittee, which will be coming back with a report.

WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR LAFAYETTE?



The City of Lafayette wants to hear from you to ensure that the 2040 General Plan is responsive to our community's values and the challenges of the coming years.

WHY IS THE GENERAL PLAN IMPORTANT?

The City of Lafayette's 2040 General Plan will be the blueprint for how and where the City will grow over the next 20 years and will guide the future character and quality of development.

The General Plan centers community priorities around conservation and development to define a desirable balance for Lafayette's social, environmental and economic values.

HOW DO I GET INVOLVED?

To learn more about the General Plan as well as details to attend upcoming meetings, visit www.planlafayette.org.

- **February 28:** Review of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Housing Element Update.
- **March 1, 8, & 15:** General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) meetings on sites where housing could be planned for.
- **March 7:** Public Hearing for the Draft EIR for the Housing Element.
- **March 21; April 4 & 18; May 9 & 23** Additional Meetings to Review the Draft Housing Element.



Questions? Email generalplan@lovelafayette.org or call (925) 284-1976.

Lafayette Community Conversations on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

#4 - Welcoming Newcomers to Lafayette

March 10, 2022
7:00 - 8:30pm

Lafayette Library Don Tatzin Hall
(wheelchair accessible)
Masks and proof of vax required

You are invited to join us in our **Community Conversation #4**, hosted by the **Lafayette Community DEIB Committee**.

As a City that is known for its warm community spirit, and as a place that will experience both growth and change during the next decade, we look forward to exploring ways to make newcomers feel welcome and included.

We will be joined in conversation by realtors, students, representatives from neighborhood groups and City representatives.

If you have ways your neighborhood welcomes newcomers, or ideas you think we should try, please come share them. We will also talk about how some of these ideas or others might help newcomers in apartments or other high density housing complexes also feel welcome in Lafayette.

This event is co-sponsored by the **Lafayette Homeowners Council** and **Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation**. At this time, masks and proof of vaccination are required by the LLLC.

For questions: please contact LafayetteDEIB@gmail.com