



Published October 12th, 2022

MOFD board candidates discuss issues of concern at Moraga Citizens Network forum

By Sora O'Doherty

There were no startling disagreements among the candidates for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District board who took part in the Oct. 3 Moraga Citizens Network candidates' forum at Saint Mary's College. The first forum to feature MOFD candidates covered the races for Districts 1 and 3 (Greg Hasler and Chris Young - District 1; incumbent Steven Danziger and Vince Dell'Aquila - District 3). There is no election for District 2 in the November general election. Danziger and Dell'Aquila as well as District 4 candidate Michael Roemer and incumbent Michael Donner are scheduled to appear at the League of Women Voters Diablo Valley Candidates Night at the Orinda Library auditorium on Oct. 13.

The candidates each gave a brief introduction, and later a closing statement. All of them were given time to answer six questions.

Hasler, a 22-year resident of Moraga, is a certified public accountant, senior partner at Deloitte. He spoke about his work helping diverse groups with complicated financial issues, and also of his family's involvement with community and civic activities.

Young, a Bay Area native and Lamorinda resident, worked as a marketing executive, most recently in the broadcast industry. A 10-year resident of Moraga, Young noted that he has had cause to call 911 four times and described himself as the "world's happiest customer!"

Danziger was elected to the MOFD board in 2018 and is currently the board vice president, having served as president for two years, and serves on the audit committee. He mentioned that he is a fire ambassador and a trained member of a search team. Danziger has been a Lamorinda resident for over 27 years.

Dell'Aquila stressed his history of community involvement and fiscal responsibility. He has lived in the area since 1989 and was recently named Orinda Citizen of the Year for 2022.

On the first question, about the possibility of a Contra Costa County Fire Protection District merger, all the candidates agreed that this is a non-starter. Danziger claimed that the issue was misrepresented in the media last year, in that consolidation was not the intention of the director who raised the issue. However, he added that the MOFD did hear from large numbers of the public who want the MOFD to remain independent. Hasler said that the MOFD and the schools are what make Moraga a great place to live. Dell'Aquila noted that although addressed, the issue keeps coming up. With MOFD, he said, Moraga and Orinda have double the number of firefighters than under ConFire. Young labeled it a dead issue. "I have a fire truck and ambulance five minutes from my house, and I certainly don't want to lose that. Moments matter, and we need firefighters who know the area."

The second question was double barreled, addressing both experience and campaign financing. Dell'Aquila mentioned that as an athletic director at Miramonte High School he had managed 32 different budgets. His financing comes from private individuals. Danziger cited his budget experience and three decades in government, including working in administrative services for the Oakland Fire Department, as an analyst for the Oakland city manager, and at Yosemite National Park. He said his financing comes from various sources including MOFD firefighters, family members and members of the public. Young referred to his experience as vice president of Young and Rubicam for over 30 years, working on strategies and budgets every day.

(Editor's note: According to state filings of California Form 460 ending Sept. 24, the only contributions listed for Young were \$1,698.45 from the International Association of Firefighters Local 1230 Political Activity Committee; the same amounts noted in paperwork for Donner and Danziger, but individual contributions may have been received since that filing. All other candidate filings noted only individual donations.) Hasler said he financed his campaign through individual donations, and that he was perhaps his own biggest donor. A CPA for over 30 years, he has worked with multi-billion-dollar companies, setting policies and procedures for clients and practicing goal setting.

All the candidates agreed that current fire code as to exterior hazard mitigation is very important and that the requirements are not excessive, and all had a great deal of praise for the firefighters of the MOFD and Fire Chief David Winnacker.

The question of general operating costs was a bit more complex. Young said MOFD is very financially healthy, with pensions funded at 90%. "We have strong financials, we're in great shape," he said. Hasler said, "We do have issues to address; we're doing everything that we can, but more will have to be done." Danziger said that over the past four years, MOFD has been in its strongest financial situation, and mentioned that they have cash in hand to replace the elderly Station 41, and have entered into a fair and equitable contract under which firefighters got a 13% raise, in contrast to ConFire's 15% raises. Dell'Aquila also brought up the issue of future investments.

The candidates night was recorded and can viewed on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnsolvVww9k

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