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MOFD deletes fire code traffic calming restrictions; disagreements still exist

By Sora O'Doherty

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District adopted its new fire code Feb. 15, with the exception that the board of directors agreed to remove a section clarifying the requirements for traffic calming measures. At the introduction of the ordinance, the town of Moraga and the city of Orinda had objected to the provisions, and in response MOFD withdrew them. But MOFD retains the authority to authorize, or reject, any traffic calming measures proposed by the town or city. Orinda Director of Public Works Scott Christie confirmed that "we don't believe this has a material impact on how traffic calming requests are processed."

The removed section 503.4.1 had stated that traffic calming devices shall be prohibited in all very high fire hazard severity zones. and required that all applications for traffic calming devices provide information on the volume of traffic, the posted speed limit, the number of accidents in the previous three years attributed to excessive speed, the traffic engineer's determination that the site is suitable for traffic calming, the number of citations or warnings issued, as well as summaries of education and enforcement efforts. At the Feb. 15 meeting, it was decided that, following further discussions with either the Orinda-MOFD 2x2 committee or direct discussions with staff or elected officials, one of several options could be adopted. One option would be to issue a blanket permit to the city and the town for traffic calming measures other than speed bumps, speed humps and tabletops, that is, any physical alteration to the roadway that would substantially alter the speed over which fire and emergency vehicles could travel on that road. Other options include exempting such non-physical traffic calming measures or issuing ministerial permits upon application by the city or town.

Fire Marshal Jeff Isaacs confirmed to Lamorinda Weekly that MOFD will proceed with an internal policy on traffic calming measures. Whenever the city or town wishes to approve a physical traffic calming measure, it has to submit a permit, to which, Isaacs said, the MOFD will apply language in a standard operating procedure. The MOFD is concerned about the effect of traffic calming measures on fire engines and ambulances, as well as upon evacuations during emergency situations.

Orinda Mayor Inga Miller has expressed to the MOFD board the city's belief that the ability to have traffic calming measures are important for pedestrian safety and bicycle safety. Orinda City Manager David Biggs submitted written comment to the MOFD board expressing the city's views that traffic calming opportunities are of tremendous value to the council and our neighborhoods. He wrote that the city council requested that the board consider alternatives to an outright ban and would like to engage with the fire district to ensure that there is

a shared understanding of what types of devices are covered, there is a process to consider exceptions to any type of ban, and that fire related considerations be balanced against other public safety concerns including traffic.

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