

Published March 15th, 2023

## MOFD awarded \$800K grant for three-year pilot program

By Jennifer Wake



New Fuels Mitigation Specialists will be involved in work such as this controlled burn as part of three-year pilot program funded by a new state grant. Photo Vera Kochan

In what the Moraga-Orinda Fire District Chief Dave Winnacker described as a "Hail Mary," the governing board at a special meeting on Feb. 22 unanimously moved to accept an \$800,000 Grant Subaward from the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services for a three-year pilot program that would fund two Wildland Fire Specialists to work with residents to mitigate fire risk. The motion also authorized a \$60,000 General Fund budget adjustment revenue increase and authorized the FY2023 General Fund Expenditure Budget Adjustment Increase in the amount of \$60,000.

Winnacker worked under the leadership of Orinda City Manager David Biggs in conjunction with Moraga's town manager, as well as with Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, to secure the grant. Winnacker made special note of the role both Biggs and Bauer-Kahan played in helping secure the grant, which is part of a new State of California grant program.

Director Craig Jorgens asked if the plan was to have these people trained in chipper or inspections or both? Or will they all be trained on everything? he asked.

"We plan to approach this as a pilot to try things out," Winnacker said. "It will be a real benefit to us to have a plug and play training. We do plan to refine and optimize the use of fuel mitigation specialists."

In his staff report, Winnacker noted that it is unknown at this time if the grant will reimburse for additional costs related to the pilot program or if the grant will allow for a district administrative fee. "Additional costs related to two additional Fuels Mitigation Specialists would include items such as uniforms, vehicle usage, equipment, etc.," Winnacker stated in his report. "The grant funds are sufficient to cover the cost of a three-year pilot program. Staff will work with the state to determine if any costs related to the pilot program in addition to salaries and benefits are reimbursable in order to maximize District reimbursement."

Winnacker noted that MOFD had several qualified candidates in the pipeline and was grateful for the board's quick response regarding this matter. As part of the unanimous vote to authorize entering into the grant subaward agreement, adding the fire prevention specialist positions and making the budget adjustments, the governing board planned to send a letter from MOFD thanking Bauer-Kahan for her assistance and her efforts on behalf of this grant.

"We're tremendously grateful to Assemblymember Bauer-Kahan for her leadership in this area," Winnacker said.

"My memory was back when we were applying for this it was a super long shot," Jorgens said, "but it worked."

"Definitely a Hail Mary on what a long shot we thought [receiving this grant] was," Winnacker said.

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