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MOFD adopts same fire flow tax, despite objections from one Orinda resident

By Sora O'Doherty

Orinda resident Steve Cohn has been campaigning for some time to have the annual fire flow tax rate of Moraga citizens raised. Cohn had asked the Moraga-Orinda Fire District board to raise the fire flow tax on Moraga residents from six cents to 30 cents. Cohn was unhappy that the board adopted the same six-cent fire flow tax rate for both Orinda and Moraga that has been in effect for since 2013.

At the MOFD Board meeting on June 21, MOFD Vice President Mike Roemer addressed the issue. "It is my position that legally and morally and politically we have an obligation to keep this community united," he said, "and it seems to me that it is a fundamental matter of fairness that if we were considering doubling or tripling or quadrupling the taxes of Moraga citizens we ought to reach out to them and see how they feel about that." Roemer added that he had spoken to many taxpayers in various MOFD districts who told him that they consider the present structure to be fair.

The board voted unanimously to keep the fire flow tax rate at six cents for both Moraga and Orinda residents.

Cohn later wrote to the board members objecting that Roemer had misrepresented the facts concerning the fire flow tax, particularly by stating that the tax was assessed at six cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Cohn says that the tax has nothing to do with assessed value but is based on the "fire flow" required to extinguish a structure fire and is based on the square footage of the structure and whether or not it has a fire suppression (sprinkler) system."

Given an opportunity to respond to Cohn's email, Roemer said, "The fire flow tax rate is six cents for Orinda and six cents for Moraga and brings in roughly the same revenue from each municipality, and it seems to me that that is fair." Roemer added that the board can't control major portions of the revenue that it receives, which is governed by Proposition 13 and that the fire flow tax represents only about 3% of MOFD's revenue.

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