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**Supervisors Provide Lukewarm Support for ConFire/MOFD Collaboration**

By David Killam

A sense of urgency permeated the Feb. 13 meeting of the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors. At issue was a request from Chief Daryl Louder of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District to "conduct formal discussions with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District to enter into a partnership to jointly build and operate a single fire station to replace fire station 16 in Lafayette and fire station 43 in east Orinda."

The urgency came from the fact that MOFD already met with contractors to bid for construction of station 43 but stopped the process when this collaboration opportunity arose. MOFD Fire Chief Randy Bradley wanted to move quickly to obtain bids because he felt that the construction industry was ramping up again. With more opportunities for the construction industry, future bids might be much more expensive. Bradley said he was willing to take that risk and put the project temporarily on hold because he felt that the collaboration was in the best interests of both fire districts.

"The Moraga-Orinda Fire District would not build a fire station in its current location; we would move it to the border of Lafayette and Orinda," said Bradley, who favors an agreement under which Con Fire would not provide equipment or employees, but simply pay MOFD for service area coverage.

Louder estimated that each district would save about \$500,000 per year in operating costs which would recoup the \$5-6 million cost of the new station in three or four years.

Community support for collaboration between the districts was strong.

John Wyro, vice president of MOFD's board of directors, called it "an opportunity we don't want to lose."

Lafayette resident George Burt, of the Acalanes Valley Homeowners Association, asked that the board allow Louder to continue discussions with MOFD.

Reaction from the supervisors was lukewarm at best. Supervisor Karen Mitchoff felt that the proposed

meetings with MOFD could provide "heightened expectations" and that she could not support the idea because the station would involve county administration without county ownership.

Supervisor John Gioia said that although he found the proposal interesting, the county needs to "have our own comprehensive discussions and meet with other districts as well for strategic discussions."

Supervisor Mary Piepho supported the collaboration stating, "We may not have an opportunity for a comprehensive study. It's a conversation we need to support," she said.

The strongest support came from Supervisor Candace Andersen, who said: "In a perfect world we would do a more comprehensive study. Long term savings for both stations can be \$1 million a year. It makes sense to move forward."

The board eventually agreed to allow Louder to explore a potential partnership. He will meet with Bradley and report back to the board by mid-March.

**MOFD Board Not in Concert**

*Board president Frank Sperling censures fire station consolidation plan*

By Nick Marnell

An idea that many Lamorinda residents supported as financially logical appears headed to the recycle bin. At the Feb. 20 meeting of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District's board of directors, that was the tone of district residents and a divided board regarding the potential consolidation of MOFD station 43 and Contra Costa Fire Protection District station 16.

Station 43 is scheduled to be upgraded in 2013. "Two days before the bids went out," said MOFD Fire Chief Randall Bradley, "ConFire approached MOFD." Bradley said that ConFire Chief Daryl Louder requested a partnership with MOFD to build a new fire station, after his station 16 in Lafayette was closed due to the district's financial problems.

Bradley again updated the board

on the benefits of the proposed consolidation. He outlined how a new station built near the Orinda/Lafayette border, with its cost and operation split by both fire districts, will result in potential savings to the MOFD of nearly \$1 million annually. Division Chief Stephen Healy conducted a slide presentation on resultant response times. If the new station 46 was located at a proposed site near El Nido Ranch Road, he explained, more addresses will experience decreases, rather than increases, in travel time.

Bradley made one final appeal for acceptance of the plan. "It will save (the two districts) \$60 million over 30 years," he said. "This is something we should pursue."

The small but passionate crowd did not agree.

"Does the MOFD want to be part of ConFire's problems?" asked Gordon Nathan, former MOFD director. "This is not the thing to do. This is not the way to go."

Moraga's Dick Olsen, along with two Orinda residents, questioned the response times outlined in Healy's presentation. Others raised political issues. "The Contra Costa Board of Supervisors will not support this," said Ellen Dale of Orinda. John Robertson, president of the Canyon Ranch Homeowners' Association, did not support the consolidation either. "This is more Lafayette's problem than Orinda's," he said.

Art Haigh, a member of FAIR (Fire and Infrastructure Renewal) - an Orinda group critical of the city's financial arrangement with the MOFD - favored the pursuit of the consolidation, mainly for financial reasons. "But I'd like to see the idea explored of a Lamorinda fire district," he said later.

Nor could the directors reach unanimous agreement.

Director John Wyro said that he believes the Contra Costa County

Board of Supervisors will approve the consolidation, and he, too, will vote for it. Even if ConFire went bankrupt in five years, he said, MOFD would have gained a new fire station, and \$5 million. So he pushed to move forward.

The \$1 million annual savings is the main reason director Fred Weil cited for his support of the consolidation. But he insisted that the new property be owned by the MOFD, and that the new station be staffed and controlled by the MOFD. He sought assurance that the county money will not disappear in a year. "How do we secure a long-term commitment?" he asked.


Though he believes that the supervisors will not approve the idea, director Steve Anderson said he wants to pursue the consolidation because he thinks it is financially sound for MOFD.

But speaking as a private citizen the following evening at the Moraga, Orinda and Lafayette tri-city meeting, Anderson stated that the best solution, both financially and from a service standpoint, is for MOFD and Lafayette to merge into one fire district.

Frank Sperling, board president, took the most vigorous stand of the evening. "This is the same institution that we wanted to get away from in 1997," he said, referring to Contra Costa County. "I look at this as pure folly," he said, "and I don't want to spend another dime on a folly."

On a 3-1 vote the board passed a motion authorizing Bradley to begin negotiations to secure a piece of property for the proposed station, without, however, one cent to be spent on the process. Sperling voted against; director Alex Evans was absent.

With two divided boards involved - the board of supervisors voting 3-2 in favor of exploring the idea - the consolidation plan is either one key-stroke away from permanent deletion or one "Undo" away from resuscitation.



**Moraga Orinda Fire District**  
**Board of Directors Meetings**  
The Moraga-Orinda Fire District holds Board Meetings on the first and third Wednesday of every month at 7 p.m. Any exceptions will be posted in advance.  
**Please note new meeting location:** Hacienda de las Flores, Mosaic Room, 2100 Donald Drive, Moraga, CA 94556

(go to www.mofd.org as the meeting date approaches for more information)

**Next meeting:**  
**Regular Board Meeting**  
March 11, 2013, 7 p.m.