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ConFire Purchases Two Squad Vehicles

By Nick Marnell

The Board of Supervisors, acting as the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District board of directors, approved the purchase of two new squad vehicles for \$345,000 at its Oct. 7 meeting. The new vehicles will replace the two makeshift squad units currently in service.

ConFire added squad units to Walnut Creek station 1 and to Concord station 6 as a test program in 2013. The squad units respond to primarily low level medical emergencies, leaving the engines to respond to structure and vegetation fires. One reason that ConFire added the squad unit to Walnut Creek was to pick up some of the slack from the closure of station 16 in Lafayette. Including backup for rescue calls and most of the structure fire calls, Squad 1 is on track to respond to over 200 calls annually in Lafayette, according to the fire chief Jeff Carman.

"You're spending money on something that we've not even agreed to yet," said engineer Vito Impastato, because, explained Local 1230 president Vince Wells, the district has not accepted the union's terms for making the squad program permanent. "For us, squads are not the right fit," said James "Whit" MacDonald, captain at Lafayette station 17.

"You took away seven engine companies and gave us back two squads," said engineer Leslie Grundler. "It won't be the same until we have real engines. Give us our fire department back!"

"I don't agree with replacing engines with two-person squads unless there's a good reason," said Carman. "But we don't have the money to buy an engine. We've given this thought, and it's based on necessity." The board unanimously approved the purchase.

The district plans to pitch for the available county ambulance contract in 2015. If ConFire does secure the ambulance contract, it will need a fleet of at least 15 ambulances. Why then spend the money on two new squad vehicles this year?

"If we get the ambulance contract, we will still use squads for a variety of tasks," said Carman.

"They can be rescue vehicles but most likely they would remain as squads with firefighters on them as opposed to the ambulances with non-firefighter paramedics."

The district will purchase the vehicles from Ferrara Fire Apparatus Inc. through the Houston-Galveston Area Council, a government-to-government procurement service. "The H-GAC program complies with all bidding rules in the county," said the chief. "It's a great system, saves a ton of money and time, and gets some great deals through quantity. It's really like the state bid process, but it's national."

ConFire expects the brand new Squad 1 vehicle to roll into Lafayette early next year.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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