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Lafayette Fire Station Construction Tops ConFire Capital Plan

By Nick Marnell

The remodel of Lafayette's fire station 16 is front and center as the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District unveiled its five-year, \$36 million capital improvement plan earlier this month. The plan, unveiled on March 8, includes fire station construction, infrastructure upgrades and additions to the apparatus fleet. The district also plans to acquire, in partnership with the Contra Costa County Office of the Sheriff, the 85-acre site of the former Concord Naval Weapons Station, which will house an emergency responders complex, a regional training center and the ConFire administrative campus.

Project No. 1 in the report is the remodel of Lafayette fire station 16, severely damaged by the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. The county added temporary living quarters in 1992 but by 2012 the living conditions were untenable and the county de-staffed the station. ConFire plans to reopen station 16 in January, but deputy chief Lewis Broschard cautioned the district board that the original \$1 million project estimate could rise due to the high increase in construction costs. Similarly, fire chief Stephen Healy of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, planning to rebuild Orinda fire station 43, recently warned his board of a 33 percent rise in construction costs since an estimate three years ago.

While the ConFire capital plan identifies the needed district improvements, it identifies only \$27 million from the general fund with which to accomplish them. The district plans to bridge the gap via grants and alternative revenue sources. For example, fire chief Jeff Carman said that the district has hired a consultant to figure out a way to increase development impact fees for the district, and will seek board approval to have all nine cities under the ConFire jurisdiction adopt these fees.

"We keep adding homes and adding companies," said Carman. "What does the public think is going to happen to their fire service? If you're going to add 1,500 homes, that is an impact, and that has got to come with some sort of impact fee." Lafayette does not pay the district a development impact fee.

The capital plan includes fire apparatus acquisition, which the district initiated last year with the purchase of nine fire engines, three ladder trucks and one rescue truck under a 10-year, \$10 million lease-purchase agreement.

"This year, our oldest apparatus will be 10 years old. And there will be only one of them," Carmen told his advisory fire commission in February. ConFire has not decided if any of the new engines will be deployed at stations 15 and 17 in Lafayette.

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