



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors
Wednesday, June 21, 7 p.m.
Go to the website for meeting location, times and agendas. Visit www.mofd.org

ConFire Board of Directors
Tuesday, July 11, 1:30 p.m.
Board Chamber room 107,
Administration Building,
651 Pine St., Martinez
For meeting times and agendas,
visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

MOFD replaces its outside auditor. Again.

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District hired its third auditor in four years in May when it agreed to terms with Vavrinek, Trine, Day and Company, a national accounting and consulting firm. The district did not renew its contract with JJACPA Inc. after a three-year run.

Section 26909 of the California Government Code requires that special districts provide a regular audit of their financial records. A district ad hoc committee comprising directors Steve Anderson and John Jex, a retired auditor, interviewed auditing firms and recommended that the board award Vavrinek, Trine, Day and Company a three-year contract through June 30, 2019 worth \$52,000, over \$20,000 more than the district paid for the same services with JJACPA.

“We’ve become more sophisticated, and for what we were asking of an auditor, we think this is a reasonable price to pay,” said Anderson. “And we’ve been pretty tough on our auditors.”

The district fired its auditing firm, Cropper Accountancy Corp., in 2013 after the company failed to recognize \$2 million that should have been allocated to a special district fund. JJACPA signed off on 2015 and 2016 district financial reports that included a \$23 million incorrectly recorded prepaid item.

Since 2014, the district has produced not only annual financial records but a Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, a much more detailed analysis of district financial operations.

New job for Hoover

Former Moraga-Orinda Fire District Fire Marshal Tonya Hoover was appointed superintendent of the U.S. National Fire Academy in May. She becomes the first woman to lead the academy. “I feel so honored to serve our nation’s fire service within my new role,” Hoover said. “I also want to thank the citizens of MOFD and the members of the fire district for allowing me to serve them as the fire marshal and take those lessons throughout the rest of my career.” Hoover worked at MOFD from 1998 until 2007 and later served as state fire marshal.



Tonya Hoover in 2014
Lamo archive

MOFD to purchase four power gurneys for its ambulances

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District board accepted an Assistance to Firefighters Grant award from the Federal Emergency Management Agency that will allow the district to outfit four of its ambulances with self-loading gurneys.

“The self-loading gurneys are better for the patient, and they are better for the firefighters, too,” said Fire Chief Stephen Healy. “Firefighters won’t blow out their backs lifting so much weight from the ground.”

The gurneys operate using a battery-powered hydraulic system which supports a cot on which the patient lies, and with the push of a button, the patient is loaded into or unloaded from the ambulance.

At more than \$47,000 a piece, power gurneys had been cost-prohibitive for the district, but combined with nearly \$160,000 from the AFG award, the district will apply \$30,000 it had budgeted for two traditional gurneys to cover the total cost of the four state-of-the-art models. Battalion Chief Jerry Lee, who authored the grant proposal, said that two of the gurneys will be placed into the two new district ambulances and two into the ambulances at Station 41 and Station 44.

“Gurneys are probably the most used item in the fire district,” Lee

said. “Essentially every medical call requires the use of a gurney.”

Since he was named battalion chief in 2012, Lee has procured \$2.9 million in grant funding for the district, highlighted by a \$1.1 million FEMA Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response grant in 2013 which covered the salaries and benefits of four firefighters for two years.

MOFD had not fared well in securing grant money prior to Lee’s promotion. “Maybe it was a perception that the district was pretty

well funded,” Lee said. And maybe it was also because Lee sought out the award money from federal and regional agencies, and put in the work to obtain the funding.

Grant applications typically take Lee 20 hours to fill out. The application to FEMA for the self-loading gurneys ran 26 pages and did not contain simply a succession of yes-no and multiple choice questions. Lee had to provide detailed narratives about the structure of the fire district, its finances, the community it serves and why it

was applying for the grant in the first place. He submitted the completed application in November and FEMA notified MOFD of the award on May 19.

The Stryker power gurney pictured is an example of the equipment the district looks to purchase. With the district board — minus an absent John Jex — having unanimously accepted the FEMA award money June 7, Lee will begin the competitive bidding process, with gurney delivery expected in the 2017-18 fiscal year.

MOFD fears a fierce fire season

By Nick Marnell



The Moraga-Orinda Fire District responded to a four-alarm vegetation fire June 5 that charred over 20 acres in Orinda along westbound Highway 24. It was the first event of what fire officials fear is shaping up to be a very rough fire season, and prompted these words from Fire Chief Stephen Healy.

“With the heavy rains this past winter, the larger fuels have higher moisture contents, which is good because the chances of a conflagration from a fuel-fed fire are diminished. However, these same rains, particularly those late in the season, have contributed to an annual grass crop that is thick and tall. This is why we ask our citizens to remove dead fuel, including grass, brush and trees. Remember only to mow weeds during morning hours, when fuel moistures are higher and the winds are typically lighter. For more information about vegetation management and other community risk-reduction measures, check our website: www.mofd.org”

Photo courtesy MOFD

Canyon challenges Moraga

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Moraga was fast to answer to Canyon’s declaration of emergency, even using the Nixle emergency channel to broadcast its response. Priebe characterized Canyon’s allegations that the bridge had not been properly assessed as “gross misrepresentation of the facts.” He explained that the town decided to close the bridge following expert advice that indicated that the structure was unsafe for public use. The manager added that the town declared its local emergency pursuant to the correct government code, referencing the California Emergency Services Act.

The Canyon School Board’s president said that if the bridge is not safe, a Pioneer Bridge should be installed. The Canyon school board asked for an estimate of a 150-foot, two lane steel bridge and received a quote for \$250,000. Smith adds that if the hill is unstable, then the town should already have started to build a retaining wall.

At previous Moraga town council meetings the town engineer and public work director made a de-

tailed description of the work that needed to be done before a temporary bridge be set in place. The hill that failed continues to move and a complete understanding of the depth and span of the instabilities needs to be completed before remediation takes place, otherwise whatever is built now to contain the hill might fail again. Only then will remediation have a chance to last, and a temporary solution can be put in place.

At the beginning of June the town was notified that the Federal Emergency Management Agency denied the Town’s Public Assistance request because the Emergency Relief program administered

by the Federal Highway Administration is the lead federal agency for bridges and roadways emergency projects. The Town will focus on working with FHWA for ER program grant funding.

At the June 14 council meeting, which starts at 7 p.m., Kwan will present six alternatives and the council will decide on a course of action. The solutions range from doing nothing to constructing a permanent new bridge. Several alternatives of temporary bridges will be proposed. The meeting is opened to the public at 335 Rheem Blvd. and can also be seen online at <https://livestream.com/moraga>.

Sinkhole bid to be awarded

The town received four bids to repair the sinkhole at Rheem Boulevard and Center Street, ranging between \$1.3 and \$2 million. At this week’s city council meeting, the contract should be awarded to the lowest bidder, McGuire and Hester, if the council finds them responsive and responsible. If the council follows staff recommendation work should start in July for 77 consecutive workdays. The Rheem Boulevard and Center Street intersection will be completely closed off to motorists during construction.

DeSaulnier’s Moraga town hall

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DeSaulnier drew applause explaining why he chose not to attend the presidential inauguration. The sympathetic audience applauded again hearing their Congressman’s stance against defense spending. (DeSaulnier says the Department of Defense has wasted \$125 billion dollars in spending.) He called the administration’s new medical aid bill, passed by the U.S. House of Representatives

May 4, “one of the worst pieces of legislation I’ve ever seen.”

With his own preexisting medical condition related to a blood cancer diagnosis, DeSaulnier himself has reason to be concerned about what changes Trumpcare might bring. “You can’t change (health care) in one year,” he said, but he expects to see bipartisan support to prevent benefit cutbacks to low-

and middle-income wage-earners. Civility and passion should coexist even in disagreement, DeSaulnier said, but he admits getting information with civility today is “a real challenge.” His Moraga-based audience of 200 might beg to differ. DeSaulnier’s town hall presentation is available online at <https://desaulnier.house.gov/newsroom/power-point-presentations>

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