



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District

Board of Directors
Wednesday, Dec. 20, 7 p.m.
Go to the website for meeting location, times and agendas. Visit www.mofd.org

ConFire

Board of Directors
Tuesday, Dec. 12, 1:30 p.m.
Board Chamber room 107, Administration Building, 651 Pine St., Martinez
For meeting times and agendas, visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

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MOFD 2017 financial report shows mixed results

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District presented its 2017 audited financial report to the board Nov. 15, and though the numbers show the district general fund in its best position in MOFD history, the district still reports a \$42 million deficit in its net position.

Thanks to higher than expected property tax revenue and an increase in ambulance fees, the district general fund revenue increased 6.9 percent for the year ending June 30, increasing the

general fund balance by \$1.6 million to \$4.9 million. The general fund balance sits at 23 percent of revenue, higher than the 17 percent minimum required by district policy.

Because of strong investment returns delivered by its pension manager, the district net pension liability fell to \$32.5 million, technically measured as of Dec. 31; the same figure from the previous year was \$39.7 million. Combined with the outstanding balance of its

pension obligation bond, MOFD recognizes \$49 million in pension obligation. The district reported a net liability of \$15.3 million for other post employment benefits, nearly identical with the previous year.

The district board continues to push for financial sustainability, and in the 2017 fiscal year took steps to reduce its negative net position by adopting a balanced budget, committing to significant contributions to its pension stabi-

lization fund and OPEB trust account and increasing the minimum percentage of general fund balance to revenue. In the current fiscal year the district raised the contributions to its OPEB trust account and its pension stabilization fund and cut \$400,000 in expenses from its operating budget.

"We're still in a hole," said director John Jex, speaking of the district's negative net position. "That's still a big liability that we have to focus on."

MOFD chooses 'leader for the new generation' as fire chief

By Nick Marnell



Dave Winnacker Photo provided

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District board selected Dave Winnacker as the sixth fire chief in the history of the district. Winnacker, who was chosen unanimously Nov. 20 by the board members, joins the district from the Alameda County Fire Department, where he was Di-

vision Chief of Special Operations.

"I am thrilled to come to work in a community that takes pride in their fire district, and I look forward to engaging with the people," Winnacker said. "And I am very happy to be working for an exceptional organization with very talented members."

Winnacker takes over a fire district that has struggled financially for much of the decade, and even with recently improved economics, still faces hard decisions on its financial sustainability. "I have a good idea of what I'm getting into," said Winnacker, who managed budgets in his role with Alameda County Fire. "It is imperative that MOFD remains capable of responding to all emergencies and is able to provide the service levels the community expects, while operating as a lean organization that is fiscally sustainable."

A large majority of MOFD

calls are medical, and the new chief comes from a fire department that relied on an outside contractor to handle its ambulance calls. "Everyone can always learn. I will reach out to those who have been doing it - both internally and externally," the new chief said, adding that he appreciates the flexibility of local control of the district ambulance service.

Winnacker leaves a fire department where he reported to a chief and comes to a fire district where he will report to a governing board - a board that has been demanding of its fire chiefs. "I am very excited about the opportunity and look forward to establishing collaborative working relationships with all stakeholders to ensure the best possible outcomes for the citizens of the district," said Winnacker, a 23-year Marine Corps veteran and a reservist since 2001.

The board did not use a recruiting firm to screen candidates, but

relied on industry advertising and referrals plus feedback from residents at a public forum. In addition to the board members, a panel including Interim Fire Chief Jerry Lee and two captains interviewed the final candidates. "We believe we have found a real leader for the new generation," board president Kathleen Famulener said.

Winnacker, 42, has worked in the fire service for 13 years, including positions with Fresno City Fire and Newark Fire before joining Alameda County Fire in 2010. Born in Tokyo, Winnacker was raised in Berkeley and graduated from UC Santa Barbara. He lives in Albany and is married with two young daughters.

Winnacker's appointment is subject to a background check and the negotiation of his contract, which Lee expects to be wrapped up by the end of the year.

ConFire recruit training covers a lot of ground

By Nick Marnell



Recruits discuss strategy with Capt. Xon Burriss, right, at the ConFire training center. Photo Nick Marnell

When the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District realigned its management structure in August, it named Lon Goetsch, a 15-year ConFire veteran, the Assistant Chief in charge of Training and Safety. It is the first time an assistant chief has run the training division.

Prior to this change, rotating

battalion chiefs supervised the training division, but Goetsch said the job had become too complex for rotating personnel. In addition, the district is loaded with young firefighters, the youngest staff that Assistant Chief Ed Gonzales said he has ever worked with in the district. Superior training and contin-

ued education are paramount.

Goetsch led a tour of the 12-acre ConFire Training Center in Concord, as recruits from Academy 51 went through their exercises. They repeatedly practice two essential maneuvers: carrying and throwing a ladder and hose lay, both on the ground and aside a mock-up building and drill tower. Later they would be purposely disoriented into a smoky, confined space and have to find their way out. "They cannot panic in that situation," Goetsch said.

Nearly every imaginable rescue operation is practiced during recruit training, from disentanglement to sewer rescue. A hosed-down skid pad is used for practice in pulling a fire engine out of a skid. Goetsch said that the most dangerous calls for firefighters are those on the freeways, and the firefighters at stations 15 and 17 in Lafayette respond to a number of calls on Highway 24. As such, a simulated highway, complete with donated wrecked cars on which the recruits practice extraction, lies at the rear of the center.

The academy lasts 20 weeks, into February, after which the 28 recruits become probationary firefighters for one year and are assigned to an engine company. "We expose them to different people and different areas," Goetsch said. "Five months with one captain, five with another. Maybe five months at Station 15 in Lafayette, then five at Station 88 in Antioch."

After 10 months, their skills and knowledge are evaluated. The firefighters have two months to catch up in areas they are weak. "Probationary firefighters can be

released without cause. But we invest an enormous amount of time, energy and expense in them to be sure they make it to the field. About \$40,000 per recruit," Goetsch said.

Some firefighters fail because they cannot perform the physical tasks. Some cannot handle the academics. Others cannot deal with the pressure. "In training, everything is simulated," Goetsch said. "When they see the realities of what the firefighters have to deal with - from seeing serious injuries, the lack of sleep, the stress of being away from their families - some drop out."

Responding to many of the challenges unique to the Lafayette area is practiced outside the training site, most notably wildland training. For that, ConFire trains on East Bay Regional Park land, and some private property owners allow wildland training with the Type 3 engines - smaller, more nimble four-wheel drive vehicles.

"We do driver training on fire trails around Lafayette - near the ridge and the reservoir. The trail between Rossmoor and Lafayette we use for hose lays and to practice mobile attacks on a wildfire," Goetsch said.

ConFire responds to BART emergencies at the stations, on the tracks and in the tunnels, and the districts train together in the Lafayette-to-Walnut Creek tunnel. "In the middle of the night, when the trains aren't running, we train on rescue cars. Evacuation training is the key. People are stuck in a train, we send a rescue train, park it parallel and set up bridges for evacuation," Goetsch said.

The district is the closest responder to incidents at the Lafayette Reservoir, where ConFire coordinates with the regional park district. Goetsch said that fire stations 15 and 17 in Lafayette both house Type 3 engines for use on the trails around the reservoir.

As for a dam breach? "We respond to pretty much any emergency," Goetsch said. "But that type of emergency would be difficult to respond to."

The new training chief oozes passion for his new position. "I love it," Goetsch said. "I get to lead, advise, support and influence the future generation of ConFire firefighters."

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