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## MOFD Continues To Narrow the Field of Prospective Fire Chiefs

*By Lucy Amaral*

Six prospective Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) Fire Chiefs finished the first round of interviews on September 2 after a day-long meeting with a panel made up of area fire chiefs, Moraga's police chief, MOFD staff and community representatives. The stakeholder panel then noted comments and recommendations which were delivered to Dr. Lawrence Bienati, who is assisting executive recruiters Avery Associates. Bienati said at MOFD's Board Meeting held later that night that he should be able to narrow the field of candidates to four and then present them to the Board. On September 10, MOFD Board President Pete Wilson said that the Board would be given the list on September 14 at a special closed-session meeting, at which time they would review the candidates and decide a time and place for final interviews before making their decision. Several union contracts were also discussed and ratified during the Board meeting. Interim Fire Chief Pete Nowicki stated that in an offer to help with the current financial difficulties, the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees Union's Local 2700 offered to extend the contract of its members without contract improvements. The MOFD members of local 2700 currently consist of the district's four administrative assistants. Jo Bates, Business Agent for Local 2700, said in a letter to Nowicki that the union will agree to wage freezes, no enhancement of current level of health and welfare benefits and dental care, and it agrees to extend the current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) though June 30, 2012. The Board agreed to amend Fire Marshall Michael Mentink's MOU by adding two paid holidays (which brings him on par with battalion chiefs), and formally make him eligible for 'strike team pay,' which would allow MOFD to be reimbursed by outside fire departments if Mentink is sent elsewhere for duty. Nowicki said that these amendments do not count toward retirement calculations and that allowing for 'strike team pay' will save the district money. The Board also approved an amendment to the Battalion Chief's agreement regarding 'backfill' hours. Nowicki said that by allowing certification class instruction time to be considered part of a Battalion Chief's backfill obligation, the district will save much needed funds. Nowicki said that bringing in outside instructors can cost between \$100 and \$300 per hour and using MOFD Battalion Chiefs to teach classes in-house to its firefighters would cost closer to \$63 per hour. Last year, Nowicki said that eight classes were taught at MOFD that fell into this category. "MOFD Battalion Chiefs are qualified to teach a majority of the classes that are appropriate for our District," said Nowicki. "We will be saving a great deal of money by using our own Battalion Chiefs as instructors."

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