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MOFD, Orinda, and Moraga Meet Again to Discuss F.A.I.R. Proposal

By Andrea A. Firth

The debate surrounding a proposal by a group of Orinda residents known as F.A.I.R. to reorganize fire service delivery and redirect tax revenue currently going to the Moraga Orinda Fire District [MOFD] back to Orinda to address the City's \$100 million plus roads and water pipe problems, has been ongoing for months and has now entered a new phase of discussions.

The newly named Tri-Agency Ad Hoc Committee for MOFD Fire and Emergency Medical Services held its first meeting on Friday, April 16th. The Ad Hoc Committee (with an exceedingly long name) is a spin off from the meeting held between the MOFD, the City of Orinda, and Town of Moraga in early March. At that time, the three agencies reached no specific conclusions and charged a subset of the members, consisting of MOFD Governing Board members Frank Sperling and John Wyro; Orinda City Council members, Mayor Tom McCormick and Amy Worth; and Moraga Town Council members, Mayor Ken Chew and Mike Metcalf, to conduct further fact finding and report back to their respective agencies.

The first item on the Ad Hoc Committee's agenda was to establish goals and objectives for its effort and set a plan going forward. While all members seemed to support the overarching goal of maintaining the current high quality of fire and emergency service delivered by the MOFD, reaching agreement on the group's marching orders revealed their divergent perspectives on the situation.

Orinda's Mayor McCormick acknowledged that F.A.I.R.'s proposal was a catalyst for these discussions but added that the committee's focus must address the overall impact of Orinda's infrastructure issues on the delivery of fire and emergency service in the area. He also suggested that a directive by LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission) required the agencies to meet, discuss the issues, and report back.

Representatives from the MOFD and Moraga believed it was an Orinda issue that brought the three elected bodies to the table. While both the MOFD and Moraga were willing to review the fire district's operations and finances as part of the subcommittee's process, neither group supported any significant shift in the status quo.

"My understanding is that the charge [for the ad hoc committee] is to evaluate the F.A.I.R. proposal," stated Wyro of the MOFD Board. "I want to give the two members of the Orinda City Council as much data as possible," he added.

"If it's not broken, you don't need to fix it," stated Metcalf of Moraga regarding his view of the proposed reorganization of the MOFD. Mayor Chew concurred, stating that he had not received feedback from any Moraga residents who wanted to see a significant change in the way the MOFD is to operate. "We are not interested at all in breaking up the MOFD," said Chew. "...this is about the F.A.I.R. proposal," added Metcalf. "It's the Orinda Council that has the action item. This group [the ad hoc committee] is about helping the Orinda Council come to some good decisions."

In the end, Worth of the Orinda City Council outlined the items to be reviewed by the ad hoc committee going forward: MOFD operations, the District's current financial position and funding sources, and the District's future financial picture. At the next meeting of the ad hoc committee, MOFD Fire Chief Randy Bradley will present to the group and answer questions regarding the District's operations.

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