

# Tough Decisions Ahead

By Nick Marnell

Director Steve Anderson was determined to keep the tone of the Oct. 2 Moraga-Orinda Fire District public workshop positive. He accomplished his goal by delivering a negative exhortation.

"The purpose of tonight's public comment period is not for you to get up and pontificate about a litany of woes from the past," he said. "I don't want to hear about (the old pension formula) - what if we hadn't done that? That's old news. I'm looking for new information." And though the board relaxed Anderson's demand and allowed anyone in the Moraga audience to pontificate without restriction, the public did offer several positive suggestions for changes to district operations.

But first Stephen Healy, interim fire chief, conducted a presentation on possible new staffing models. He discussed two options, both of which reduced the number of on-duty personnel from 19 to 17 among the district's five fire stations. Healy clearly favored the model that included keeping all five stations open, including five fully-staffed engines, one full-time ambulance and three cross-staffed ambulances. That option requires the district to purchase an additional ambulance for \$160,000.

The district currently operates five engines, two full-time ambulances and one cross-staffed ambulance. A cross-staffed ambulance shares personnel with the station's fire engine, whereas a full-time ambulance has a dedicated, two-person crew on duty at all times.

Dick Olsen, Moraga resident and past MOFD director, praised Healy's presentation, noting that it was the same model that he put together in 1997 when the district was formed.

"If you reduce service, you hurt the taxpayers," he cautioned the board. "If you cut salaries and benefits, you hurt the firefighters. A

combination of those two alternatives will share the pain. That seems to be the fairest approach." Olsen also advised that the district could contract with Cal Fire, or even with a private fire and emergency services provider.

A tax increase was proposed, albeit with an interesting twist.

Moraga resident William Dick offered that, if there are service reductions in the district, property owners may be faced with higher insurance premiums. Find out what that premium increase would be, he said, and place a parcel tax on the ballot for that same amount instead. "At least the tax would be deductible," said Dick.

The district called the workshop because it is considering cuts to district operations and it requested cost-saving ideas from the public. MOFD has run at an operating loss each of the past two years and forecasts a loss of \$950,000 for fiscal year 2013-14. Retirement costs, \$5.8 million this year, are scheduled to rise to \$8 million in 2014-15.

"This board doesn't like the fact that we have to make hard choices. But we're prepared to do that, to maintain the sustainability of the district as well as the sustainability of the excellent service that we do provide," said director Fred Weil who acknowledged, "Something has to change."

The next public workshop is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Oct. 16 at the Orinda Community Center, 28 Orinda Way.



**Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors Meetings**

**Next meeting:**

**Wednesday, Oct. 16 at the Orinda Community Center**

(Go to [www.mofd.org](http://www.mofd.org) as the meeting date approaches for location and more information)

# Lamorinda Fire News Briefs

By Nick Marnell

Supervisor Candace Andersen appointed Erling Horn to fill a vacant seat on the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District's Advisory Fire Commission. Horn will be the District 2 alternate to commissioner Bill Granados.

"He's a knowledgeable guy, and he's been around," said Granados. Horn's public service resume includes membership on the Lafayette City Council, and for the past five years he has been Lafayette's representative on the County Connection board of directors, where he worked with Andersen. "I was delighted when he accepted my request to serve," she said.

The commission consists of seven members and five alternates. It reviews and mentors ConFire operations and advises the Board of Supervisors as needed.

One of the reasons the previous alternate resigned was because he was not permitted to sit at the main table at the board meetings, said Granados. Horn, who helped write fire standards for the National Fire Protection Agency, voiced no such trepidation.

"I've been an alternate before, and I know the rules," he said. "I'll try to contribute what I've learned from my fire experience."

His first opportunity to do so will be at the Oct. 14 Advisory Fire Commission board meeting. **"Safe Places" at ConFire Stations**

The county Board of Supervisors extended an agreement between the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District and the Northern California Family Center, designating each fire station as a "Safe Place" where homeless, in-crisis and runaway youth can turn for help. The district has supported the NCFC Crisis/Runaway Program since 2004.

"The fire district clearly pro-

vides the most public presence that we have," said Tom Fulton, NCFC executive director. Each fire station displays a yellow and black diamond-shaped sign with the words "Safe Place" clearly visible.

Out of the 60 young people the center engages each year, between three and five use a ConFire station as the first point of contact, said Fulton.

Supervisor Candace Andersen strongly supported the joint effort. "It's through partnerships with non-profit groups such as the Northern California Family Center, working together to designate our fire stations as "Safe Places," that we are able to change lives for the better and protect one of our most vulnerable populations - our youth."

**Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force**

Council member Traci Reilly, co-chair of the Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force, summed up the entity's plight at the start of its Oct. 1 meeting.

"We're going to need professional help," she said.

The task force was created in June to investigate alternative delivery of fire and emergency medical service to Lafayette residents, who were displeased with the performance of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District; specifically, the closure in 2012 of fire station 16 in northeast Lafayette.

Whether the city decides to contract for its fire and emergency service, join with another district, or form its own department, it first must detach from ConFire. The detachment - which must be approved by the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission - and its subtleties dominated the evening's discussion.

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