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Published January 27, 2016

Lafayette Station 16 Rehabilitation Update

By Nick Marnell

Firefighters assigned to Contra Costa County Fire Protection District station 16 in Lafayette likely feared less for their lives entering a burning building than they did when they returned to the station. The building suffered possible mold contamination from rodent infestation, and the county pulled out the engine company and closed the distressed fire station in 2012. An on-again, off-again joint venture with the Moraga- Orinda Fire District to build a fire station in north Orinda crumbled in August when ConFire chose to rehab station 16.

"I am almost embarrassed to say that I had been convinced that station 16 was condemned and could not be fixed," said fire chief Jeff Carman, given a report by a building contractor indicating that the 58-year-old structure was not beyond repair. Based on that preliminary information, the chief presented a rehabilitation plan in August to his board of directors, which unanimously supported the effort and told Carman to report back with a final proposal.

Not willing to be fooled again, Carman demanded a written report confirming that the Los Arabis Drive fire station was repairable, so the district hired H. D. Rueb Structural Engineers of Pleasant Hill to do the assessment. The company visited the station site four times in September and October and its report, delivered to ConFire Dec. 7, concluded, "The general structural appearance of the building appears to be adequate."

The report noted that the structure will require seismic upgrades and that the interior concrete slabs, one of them significantly cracked, should be replaced. It also recommended a geotechnical analysis on the soil below the slabs, which deputy chief Lewis Broschard said will soon be completed. "The concrete floor has sagged considerably and we need to determine why," said Carman. "So we will cut a couple of access points in the slab floor to determine soil quality and get a look at what happened to cause the sag." The rehab plan was to jackhammer up the slabs and replace them with new ones, but the chief said he must be assured that whatever happened below the floor will not happen again.

Design work must also be completed, from which the district can develop construction documents and then determine approximate costs to rehab the station. "I think before we go after design work we want to make sure there isn't something bad going on under the slab," said Carman.

Notwithstanding the unknown below the interior building slabs and the holdup in completing the station design, Carman said he still expects to present the board a financial plan for the rehab by March.

"It's an aggressive timeline, but I think we can do it," said the chief.

The initial estimate for rehabbing station 16 was \$1 million.

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