



## Fire Districts

### Public Meetings

#### Moraga-Orinda Fire District

Board of Directors  
Wednesday, May 17, 7 p.m.  
Go to the website for meeting location, times and agendas. Visit [www.mofd.org](http://www.mofd.org)

#### ConFire Board of Directors

Tuesday, May 9, 1:30 p.m.  
Board Chamber room 107,  
Administration Building,  
651 Pine St., Martinez  
For meeting times and agendas,  
visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

## Moraga-Orinda Fire District board: architect responsible for Station 43 cost overruns

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District board refused to approve a \$100,000 contract increase requested for construction of Fire Station 43, insisting that many of the extra charges were incurred because of mistakes made by the station architect.

Steve Stewart, Station 43 project manager, told the board April 19 that the piers at the base of the fire station on Via Las Cruces in Orinda had to be redesigned due to modifications to the original design and revised geotechnical requirements. "We're adding \$25,000 because the work wasn't done right in the

first place?" asked Director Craig Jorgens.

The architect also requested more money to secure project approval from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and to rebuild an interior countertop to have it fully comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. "They thought they had all of the permits needed," Stewart said of the architect.

"It is their sole responsibility to get every permit that is required. There is no exception to it," Jorgens said. "They had to go back and check the changes in the code, and obviously they did not."

According to the Nov. 17, 2015 agreement between Shaw Kawasaki Architects of Oakland and MOFD, the architect "shall review the most recent version of the California Building Code and make all necessary changes to the Station 43 design to meet the current code." The Station 43 rebuild had been placed on hiatus in 2013 while the district worked out a joint venture with the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District to build and staff a fire station in western Lafayette, but the project fell apart.

"Nothing has changed, except that a bunch of people didn't

do their jobs," Jorgens said. "Why are we going to pay them to manage the mistakes that they made?"

The board tabled both the architect's fee request and also a decision on installation of solar panels at the station. Directors Jorgens and John Jex complained about the project's lengthy capital payback and the lack of a district solar tax credit.

Fire Chief Stephen Healy said that he, not Stewart, will talk with Shaw Kawasaki about honoring the terms of its Station 43 contract.

## ConFire continues to struggle with firefighter staffing

By Nick Marnell

When Fire Chief Jeff Carman presented the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District 2017-18 budget recommendations to his advisory fire commission and his board of directors, he highlighted positive district events like the planned rebuild of Fire Station 16 in Lafayette, but the chief also warned about a nagging firefighter staffing issue.

Bolstered by a forecast increase in property tax revenue, new funding sources like the emergency medical service first responder fees and the sustainability of the emergency ambulance transport program, the district budgeted a 6 percent

revenue increase to \$126.6 million for 2107-18. The \$94 million expense for compensation, which includes nearly \$50 million in salaries and overtime and \$26 million in retirement contributions, will cover the operation of 25 fire stations and wages for more than 350 fulltime employees. ConFire also carries a \$154 million unfunded pension liability and a \$14 million debt for its pension obligation bonds.

But the chief said his main concern was the pressure on the organization caused by the difficulty of sustaining a fully staffed operation.

"I worry every day that something significant will happen to

our firefighters," Carman told his advisory fire commission April 10. He talked about the ladder truck destroyed on Highway 4 by a speeding driver who died on the scene and of the firefighter who fell from a roof during a fire attack, saved by a balcony that helped break his fall. The chief noted that ConFire responded to 65,000 calls in 2016, ranking the district in the top five nationally for call volume.

Maintaining a stable work force has been a struggle for the district, as ConFire is down 14 vacancies after having just completed a fire academy. Because of retirements, vacations and leaves, the chief said the resul-

tant overtime puts pressure on the firefighters and can force injuries and bad decisions.

"We may have to accept that we will always need two academies a year," Carman said, as he plans to fill Academy 51 in the fall with 30 recruits.

Also adding to the overtime demands of the firefighters will be the predicted blockbuster fire season, with Lafayette possibly at the center of the action. Because of its proximity to a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, the Lafayette area continues to worry Carman, especially after the heavy rains this winter.

## Oakland Fire steps up to help MOFD cover Canyon

By Nick Marnell

On the evening of April 18, the town of Moraga closed the Canyon Road bridge over Moraga Creek between Constance Place and the Valle Vista staging area, compromising the ability of the Moraga-Orinda

Fire District to quickly respond into the Canyon community.

"Our first thought was to use the Lafayette-Moraga Trail," Fire Chief Stephen Healy said. "We could use a bulldozer and scrape out a road." But the landslide along the trail was too big and it was pushing toward the bridge, nixing that approach. The muddy fire trails nearby need regraded and that option remained out until the summer. The district requested assistance from the Oakland Fire Department and from Paramedics Plus, the Alameda County ambulance provider, and the agencies immediately entered into a mutual aid agreement. "It was a lot to ask of Oakland Fire," Healy said.

Under mutual aid, either agency may decline to respond if it is unable to perform, so MOFD will respond to Canyon incidents out of Moraga Station 41 using a unique procedure. The district parked a reserve engine and a reserve ambulance on the Canyon side of the Canyon bridge, and locked them behind a fence topped with barbed wire. If Fire Station 41 is dispatched, the firefighters will shuttle to the bridge and walk across to the staged vehicles. "It's part of our job to take risks in order to save lives," said the chief, who noted that, should the bridge become impassable for even MOFD crews, they will use the trail at the



Locked up and ready to respond into Canyon. Courtesy MOFD

end of Augusta Drive.

Healy said that under normal conditions, Station 41 responses take eight minutes of travel time to Canyon. Adding five minutes for the crew to cross the bridge and start the engine would result in a 13 minute total travel time.

Should the Station 41 crew be unavailable, an engine from Orinda Station 45 and an ambulance from Orinda Station 44 will respond to Canyon through Oakland and Pinehurst Road.

Travel time to Canyon via Highway 24 from Station 44 is 25 minutes; from Station 45, 22 minutes. Crews from Oakland Fire Station 6, on Colton Boulevard near Skyline, would arrive in Canyon in 11 minutes.

"Only when we receive word

from Oakland Fire that they are on the scene will we send our guys back to their stations," Healy said.

The Oakland firefighters came to Canyon the day after the bridge closure and endeared themselves to the community. Crews toured the town, mapped the area, checked the water supply, pretty much socialized themselves to an area they knew very little about. "They were great and we are grateful," said Canyon Steinzig, Canyon Community Association president.

In the 365 days preceding the bridge closure, MOFD responded to 22 calls into Canyon, including eight emergency medical calls, five vehicle accidents and no structure fires.

## Sinkhole repair

For example, the city is trying to save three trees on the country club property and one tree on the other side of the creek, which has resulted in additional costs being incurred. It is estimated that the total job will cost around \$2.9 million, which includes a 20 percent contingency provision. Theis thinks that the city's portion will be in the region of \$300,000 to \$500,000.

Other questions from the community included questions about the potential litigation by the three homeowners whose homes were flooded on Feb. 7. Theis answered that all three have filed claims against the city, and that the city is dealing with those claims now.

Neighbors also wanted to know

when the repair would be complete and Miner Road reopened, and Theis replied that the city will reopen Miner Road the moment it is possible, and they may be able to reopen the road even before the work is totally completed, while decorative work on the headwalls and the mitigation planting is still being done.

Another question concerned the fate of another bridge on Miner Road, the one that crosses San Pablo Creek. Theis explained that that bridge has been scheduled for a seismic upgrade, but that the city is trying to change the scheduled work from a retrofit to a replacement. However, it cannot be done at the same time as the sinkhole

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repair, owing to the constraints of permitting and design.

Police Chief Mark Nagel said that there has been no major crime in the area but that officers are issuing tickets on the detour routes. He addressed a question about why the new stripping is broken rather than solid double yellow lines, explaining that the police want to encourage drivers to be able to go around obstructions on the road, but not to pass other vehicles.

Theis promised to keep the community updated on Orinda's new website, [www.cityoforinda.org](http://www.cityoforinda.org). He added that the city hopes to get some drone photos and time lapse photography of the repairs.

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