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Full-time staffing of MOFD Medic 45 not dead yet

By Nick Marnell

Still frustrated over the refusal of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District board of directors to allocate money to restore full-time staffing of the ambulance at Fire Station 45 in Orinda, Capt. Lucas Lambert, speaking as the district labor representative, tore into the board at the June 19 district meeting.

Lambert's remarks stemmed from the district's 2017 application for federal grant money to hire four firefighters, who were to be used to fully staff Medic 45 in Orinda. The ambulance had been and continues to be cross-staffed, as the grant money was used by the district to fill overtime positions, a permitted use of the grant funds notwithstanding the reason given in the application.

"I resent the fact that the statement was made that this money was to provide adequate staffing for our community and firefighter safety when in actuality that was never going to be the case," Lambert said. "I resent the fact that the line of duty deaths by two firefighters within this county were used in vain and quoted in an effort to sell the need for this grant." The MOFD grant application referred to the July 2008 line of duty deaths of two Contra Costa County Fire Protection District firefighters as a need for adequate ground support.

Lambert received support from two new directors, with Greg Baitx pushing for fully staffing Medic 45 immediately and Michael Donner insisting that safety of the firefighters and district residents called for the staffing increase. The fire chief agreed that a staffing increase is not a bad thing.

"More is undoubtedly better," Fire Chief Dave Winnacker said. "More firefighters equals greater certainty that there will be an engine or an ambulance at the patient's side or the resident's side in the shortest time possible."

Donner proposed that some of the \$1.8 million earmarked for district pension and retiree health care trust funds be shifted to increase on-duty staffing. "The climate has changed," Donner said. "Fires aren't the same as they were three to five years ago."

Using overtime to fully staff the Station 45 ambulance would cost an extra \$1 million a year, and increasing the firefighter roster from 57 to 63 to fully staff Medic 45 would cost \$1.44 million per year, the difference due largely to pension costs.

Board President Steven Danziger said that he would add an item to a future agenda, or even call a special meeting, to discuss a district staffing increase.

Which was exactly the request Lambert made of the board that evening.

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