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Municipal fire prevention committee holds inaugural meeting

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District combined forces with the city of Orinda and the town of Moraga and formed a joint fire prevention subcommittee, tasked with bringing forward innovative ways to reduce wildfire risk on the 14,000 district parcels. The group met for the first time on June 22.

The subcommittee came about after a concerted effort by mostly Orinda residents, who pressured the city and the fire district to devote more resources to fire prevention measures. District residents complained about an insufficient amount of money spent on fire prevention, and challenged the three agencies to put together a funding plan to solve the problem.

Among ideas proffered at the meeting was the formation of a joint powers authority, comprising the district and the two municipalities, to create and administer a funding mechanism, possibly through a parcel tax, as MOFD Chief Dave Winnacker noted that a heightened fire prevention program will require a major multiyear, multijurisdictional effort.

But before anything official could be considered, Vice Chair and Moraga Mayor Kimberleigh Korpus reminded the members that the subcommittee needed to come up with a charter, outlining what the subcommittee can and cannot do.

Future discussion items include having Orinda provide for an aggressive fuels reduction program on city owned property as a part of its potential 1% add-on sales tax measure on the November ballot. The subcommittee will also review what more the fire district and the municipalities can do to improve fuels mitigation efforts, such as a stronger effort on community education.

"This was an important first step," said Darlene Gee, mayor of Orinda, who was appointed subcommittee chair. "This is the first time the three public entities have met together, and it provided a forum to talk directly with one another and for the public to participate."

In addition to the two mayors, the subcommittee includes the three MOFD directors from Orinda and one council member from each municipality. The group expects to hold its next meeting before the end of the summer.

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