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Published September 23rd, 2015

MOFD and ConFire to Go Separate Ways

By Nick Marnell

It may be just as well that fire station 46 never got off the ground.

Contra Costa County Fire Protection District chief Jeff Carman told his board Sept. 15 that he received a second opinion from a contractor concurring the feasibility of rebuilding station 16 in Lafayette, and that he awaits a report later in September from a structural engineer. The chief earlier presented to the board his desire to reopen station 16, scuttling plans with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District to combine station 16 with MOFD station 43 into a new station 46. MOFD chief Stephen Healy then recommended that his board memorialize the station 46 program.

"After listening to some of the comments from (the MOFD) board meeting, I think we made the right decision to move ahead on our own," said Carman. "The differences in the two organizations would have been problematic, so I'm happy that fire station 16 presented itself as an opportunity." MOFD director Fred Weil had commented that he did not want the district to hold on to the property it purchased as a site for station 46 in hopes that ConFire may come back to MOFD to reignite the partnership. "If the county came back next month and said, Yeah, let's go on with 46, it would just be more evidence that they are an unreliable partner," he said.

With the approval of the repairs to station 16 a near certainty, MOFD turned its attention to its own dilapidated station 43 in north Orinda.

"We need to get moving with this," said Weil at the Sept. 16 district meeting.

Healy confirmed that the current location of station 43 was the best site available for a fire station in the north Orinda area. He noted that four houses are for sale within a mile of station 43, and that the district geographic information system model showed that the station 43 site won out over the other four. "It would be hard to find a better location," said Healy.

Architect Alan Kawasaki estimated that the remodel of the station will cost \$4 million. "Nothing about station 43 meets any standard of a fire code," he said. The district has invested more than \$320,000 in the fire station remodel since 2011.

Board president Alex Evans said he was unsure that the district could afford sinking so much money into the station 43 project. "I don't want to have a nice fire station, and down the road, I can't afford the firefighters," he said.

MOFD union representative Mark DeWeese also questioned the proposed spending on station 43.

"The union's base salaries have lagged inflation and are only around 5 percent greater than they were in 2006," he said. "Before our board spends \$4 million to totally rebuild a station that is currently functioning, and has been for decades, we feel they should save the money for more pressing needs. The board's priority should be toward investing and restoring the district's most important asset, its human capital."

Healy plans to deliver to the board in October his specific recommendations for the station 43 rebuild, including contract details, financing options and the project timeline.

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