

RESCUE 1

FOUNDATION

1993

SCRAPBOOK

The 1993 Rescue 1 Foundation Scrapbook is a comprehensive collection of newspaper clippings and commentary highlighting significant events, challenges, and developments related to fire and emergency medical services in Moraga and the broader Contra Costa County area.

Here's a summary of its contents:

Key Themes and Highlights:

1. Fire Department Consolidation Debates

- There was a countywide push to consolidate smaller fire districts into two larger "super districts" to improve efficiency and reduce administrative costs.
- Moraga and Orinda were often discussed in relation to merging services or consolidating management roles, despite local resistance.
- Moraga was excluded from some consolidation efforts due to its self-sufficient funding via a voter-approved fire flow tax and strong community support for its paramedic services.

2. Leadership Changes

- John Cooper, acting chief of the Moraga and Orinda Fire Districts, took early retirement in 1993, causing concern that the move was a backdoor approach to district consolidation.
- Multiple senior fire officials in Contra Costa County also retired early under a county incentive plan, prompting administrative restructuring and the appointment of a single chief for five districts.

3. Rescue One Foundation

- A nonprofit community-supported organization that funds the Moraga Fire District's paramedic program and purchases life-saving equipment.
- The Foundation filled board vacancies and celebrated successful community fundraising, including donations for advanced equipment like the LifePak 11 heart monitor.

4. Moraga's Unique Paramedic Program

- Moraga's fire district operated its own paramedic ambulance service—distinct from neighboring areas that relied on private providers.
- This program was credited with saving lives through faster response times and higher care standards.
- The town showed ongoing support by maintaining taxes and donating through Rescue One.

5. Public Engagement and Training

- The district offered child and infant CPR classes and encouraged community participation in emergency preparedness, including earthquake safety.
- Firefighters also participated in statewide competitions and public events to raise awareness.

6. Emergency Response and Community Risk

- Detailed stories include the tragic case of a toddler who died due to delayed ambulance response in Orinda, contrasting sharply with Moraga's faster, local paramedic service.
- A retired Moraga surgeon shared his experience helping with medical support at the Oklahoma City bombing site, showcasing the reach and expertise of local personnel.

Notable Takeaways:

- **Community Commitment:** Moraga's residents consistently supported enhanced fire and emergency services through taxes and donations.
- **Operational Independence:** Moraga resisted being absorbed into a larger fire district, preserving its autonomy and high service standards.
- **Forward-Thinking EMS:** Moraga led the county in adopting new technologies and training methods, significantly influencing emergency medical care quality.

1992–1995 Timeline of Fire & EMS Developments in Moraga and Contra Costa County

December 1992

- **Editorial Support for Shared Chief:** County supervisors appoint **John Cooper** as acting fire chief for **both Moraga and Orinda** as a cost-saving measure. The community is encouraged to support the move.
-

March 1993

- **Fire Chief Cooper Unexpectedly Retires:** Raises concerns about backdoor consolidation with Contra Costa Fire District.
 - **Community Pushback Begins:** Fire commissioners and residents express worry over loss of local control and unique services.
-

April 1993

- **Countywide Fire Consolidation Proposal:**
 - County supervisors discuss consolidating fire districts into two “super districts.”
 - Resistance grows from local communities, including Moraga and Orinda.
 - **Moraga Retains Independence:** Moraga remains out of the proposed consolidation due to its fire flow tax and local funding via **Rescue One Foundation**.
-

May 1993

- **Firefighter Combat Challenge:**
 - Moraga Fire Department places **4th statewide** in the Firefighter Combat Challenge, reinforcing their operational excellence.
-

June 1993

- **County Appoints One Chief for Five Districts:**

- **Allen Little** named acting chief over Riverview, Contra Costa, Orinda, Moraga, and West County.
 - Consolidation of management sparks more community concern.
-

Early 1994

- **Exploration of Public Safety Models:**
 - Articles discuss merging fire and police services (e.g., **Sunnyvale Model**) for efficiency. Moraga studies options but retains separate fire services.
-

Spring 1994

- **Community CPR Classes:**
 - Moraga Fire District offers **infant and child CPR classes** for parents, enhancing public safety education.
 - **Earthquake Preparedness Talk:**
 - Public invited to Moraga Library to hear about disaster response planning from local fire officials.
-

June 1994

- **Orinda Ambulance Response Under Scrutiny:**
 - Following a child's death due to ambulance delay, Orinda explores **paramedic services** and considers adopting a fire flow tax like Moraga.
-

June 1995

- **New Heart Monitor (LifePak 11) Adopted:**
 - Moraga becomes **first in Contra Costa County** to use a high-tech EKG monitor, improving heart attack response.
 - Funded by **\$12,000 in community donations** via Rescue One.
-

May 1995

- **Moraga Resident Aids in Oklahoma City Bombing Response:**
 - Retired Navy surgeon and local rescue expert **Dr. Ben Ho** supports federal disaster teams in Oklahoma City, highlighting Moraga's national-level expertise.

COMMENT

Single fire chief for Moraga and Orinda districts a sound idea

Orinda and Moraga have long been proud of their individual fire districts, and rightly so.

The fire districts are the heart of these small communities. All too aware of their isolation as the "town at the end of the cul-de-sac," Moragans have taxed themselves since 1981 to boost fire and paramedic services.

A similar Orinda tax fell just one percent short of the required two-thirds voter approval when it appeared on the November ballot. Orinda fire commissioners say they may put an improved ballot measure before the voters in a later election.

But despite the affection felt for these districts, the harsh reality for all tax-financed services is a continuing shortage of money. The fate of fire district funding is directly tied to the state's fortunes. No one believes the state finances are going to improve in the near future.

That's why the decision to appoint one chief for both Orinda and Moraga fire districts make sense. County supervisors last week pegged acting Moraga Chief John Cooper to fill the position on a temporary basis. Recruitment for a permanent chief is to begin soon; Cooper is

considered a strong candidate for that job.

The districts will continue to maintain separate fire commission and independent budgets. Moraga fire's healthy reserve — estimated at \$850,000 by the end of the fiscal year — will remain in Moraga.

But combining management positions, such as the chief and fire marshal, and eliminating other positions, such as assistant chiefs, in favor of more flexible positions such as battalion chiefs, won't dilute the service Orindans and Moragans deserve.

The communities are similar enough that one management team can effectively manage both. There is no plan to further consolidate the two districts into the larger Consolidated Fire, said chief assistant County Administrator Scott Tandy.

Although Orindans and Moragans may long for the good old days of ample funding and completely separate fire districts, those days are over. Combining management positions is a good compromise between complete consolidation and total independence.

The plan, and Chief John Cooper, deserve the communities' support



Fire Depts.

Supervisors want more details before consolidating fire districts

By M.E. SPRENGELMEYER

Staff writer

MARTINEZ — County supervisors failed to settle the question Tuesday of whether to consolidate a number of small fire districts into two so-called "super districts" while they await more details on how the plan would work.

Acknowledging lingering doubts about consolidation in far East County, supervisors delayed a vote on whether to send applications to the Local Agency Formation Commission to create the new districts.

Under that plan, one district would encompass Orinda, River-view, West County and Contra Costa fire districts, all of which are staffed by full-time, professional firefighters. The other would join

the Bethel Island, East Diablo and Oakley-Knightsen fire districts, where stations are staffed mostly by volunteer or paid, on-call firefighters.

Despite more than a year of discussion, there are still too many unanswered questions about what the plan would cost in terms of money and fire protection, Supervisor Tom Torlakson said.

"I realize we have a lot of questions but not all the answers," Torlakson said in proposing that the issue be set aside until next Tuesday. "The community is asking, what exactly does consolidation mean to us?"

The lack of details has agitated many firefighters, fire officials and residents of far East County.

Although many of those people

have said they favor consolidation in principle, county officials still have not given detailed breakdowns of how much money consolidation might save, and what the effects on staffing and administrative structures would be.

In the past year, backers like Torlakson, who represents East County, touted consolidation as a way the county can improve fire service by cutting duplicated administration.

In October, the supervisors tentatively approved a plan to create the two fire districts.

East Diablo Fire Chief Paul Hein told the board that the proposed LAFCO application was "basically an introduction letter, and left the rest of consolidation to the imagination."

File 12-8-1993

Moraga

CC TIMES
1/7/94

Rescue foundation seeks board applicants

Rescue One Foundation, a support group for the Moraga Fire District's Paramedic and Ambulance Service, is seeking applicants for a vacancy on its nine-member board of directors.

Applicants should send a letter of interest to Rescue One Foundation, c/o Moraga Fire District, 1280 Moraga Way, Moraga, CA 94556. The letter should include the applicant's name, address, phone number and qualifications.

The deadline is Feb. 1. For information, call 376-4939.

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Rescue One board vacancy

The Rescue One Foundation, a support group for the Moraga Fire Protection District paramedic program, is seeking applicants to fill a vacancy on the Board of Directors. The board receives and administers contributions to the Moraga Fire Department and emergency paramedic service.

The deadline to submit an application is Feb. 1. To apply, write to Rescue One Foundation, c/o Moraga Fire District, 1280 Moraga Way, Moraga, CA 94556; or call 376-4939.

Nation's Cities Copy Sunnyvale

Merging police-firefighter jobs gains favor in a tight economy

By Dan Turner
Chronicle Correspondent

In Sunnyvale, the cops also wear red helmets.

The idea of turning police officers into firefighters might sound simple, but the South Bay city recently touted by President Clinton as a model for government innovation was about 40 years ahead of its time when it merged its police and fire departments into one unit in the early 1950s.

Today, cities all over the country are calling Sunnyvale to ask how it can be done.

The concept could save cities millions of dollars a year in police and fire costs, which take the biggest chunk out of most municipal budgets. In tough economic times, that is making a lot of people sit up and take notice.

In California, only the cities of Rohnert Park and Marina have followed Sunnyvale's lead, but other states are more enthusiastic. Michigan has 21 cities with combined police and fire departments, including the city of Kalamazoo, with a population of 80,000.

Earlier this month, the Oxnard City Council narrowly rejected a proposal to create a Department of Public Safety modeled after Sunnyvale's.

Under the combination system, newly hired public safety officers must spend roughly twice as much time in training as conventional police officers or firefighters, attending both the state police academy and the county fire academy. In Sunnyvale, rookie officers do not hit the streets until they have gone through 45 weeks of training.

Switch-Hitters

An officer initially will be assigned either to police or fire duty, spending a few years in one area and then an equal number of years in the other. After five years, officers specialize and spend more time in one division than another, but all must spend at least one year in five in the other area.

The officers also must continually renew their training, so police officers spend several weeks a year honing firefighting skills they rarely need to use.

The result is that cities like Sunnyvale spend a lot of money on training, but more than make up for it with savings in other areas,

ous fire or disaster. But in Sunnyvale, the fire division is relatively small because only a few firefighters are needed to handle most calls. In case of a serious problem, officials can draw extra help in fighting fires from the police division.

By the same token, firefighters can help out in case of a police

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SUNNYVALE PUBLIC SAFETY DEPT.

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If statistics are to be believed, the system does nothing to lower efficiency. The FBI Crime Index shows that in Sunnyvale, with a population of 120,000, there were 4,874 felonies committed in 1992, compared with 5,487 in neighboring Santa Clara, which has only 90,000 residents.

Numbers like that might be deceiving because the cities have very different types of residents, but Sunnyvale's crime rate compares favorably with most Bay Area cities of comparable size and wealth. And the fire division's average emergency response time of 4.4 minutes is better than most.

Consider the Municipality

But for all the good points about Sunnyvale's system, law enforcement experts say it might not work quite so well in other cities.

"As with so much that works in Sunnyvale, it works because they're Sunnyvale, because they're pretty rich and fairly homogeneous," said Terry Christensen, a political science professor at San Jose State University.

Big cities with serious crime problems like San Jose, San Francisco and Oakland might be less successful with combined departments, Christensen said, because police there have to specialize more. Officers who work with

Safe from consolidation plans, Moraga considers fire options

By Karen Emanuel
STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — Moragans are pleased to be left out of plans for a large fire district but will watch with interest to see if their neighbors fight their way out of the plan.

The outcome of Orinda's attempt to be removed from the consolidation of all county fire districts could play role in the Moraga district's future.

The county Board of Supervisors agreed to leave Moraga out of the consolidation effort since the district has its own funding source through a fireflow tax. Residents also support the unique paramedic program through a non-profit foundation.

Moraga still operates under "functional integration" and shares a fire and assistant chief and fire marshals with other county districts.

"At this point our goal is to make functional integration work," said Ellen Dale, a member of the Moraga Citizens Committee.

The Moraga Citizens Committee recently sent the Town Council information on potential fire service reorganizations. These include remaining a dependent district under county authority, becoming a subsidiary district that reports to the town, becoming an independent district either by itself or

with Orinda.

Other alternatives identified in the report are the creation of a public safety police and fire force and annexation to the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District.

"We want to keep all the doors open," Dale said. "We'll just have to see what happens in Orinda."

Although Orinda leaders and the Moraga Citizens Committee have said they would consider an Orinda-Moraga district a potential, Moraga Town Council and Fire Commission members have not expressed such interest.

Sue Noe, a Moraga councilwoman and fire commissioner, said she doesn't see an Orinda-Moraga partnership forming.

"It would be tough," she said. "I wouldn't rule it out, but there are some differences between the districts."

She cited the Moraga paramedic program and the fireflow tax as two differences in the funding and operation of the neighboring districts. Moragans overwhelmingly voted for and later reaffirmed a fireflow tax while Orindans rejected such a tax.

"It's the same argument Moraga has used with the rest of the county," she said. "What are you going to bring to the table?"

Moraga fireworks need sponsors

By Karen Emanuel 3-2-94
STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — Moraga will celebrate Independence Day with a bigger than ever Fourth of July fireworks show — as long as they're prepared to help pay for it.

Town officials are asking people to foot half of the \$11,500 bill by "purchasing" rockets for \$23.26 each. The show will take place if the town receives \$5,750 by April 26.

Town Council members last Wednesday unanimously approved the pyrotechnic show.

A static light display commemorating Moraga's 20th anniversary will be a new addition to the show.

The show would consist of a 10-by-10-square-foot light display on the ground, probably in Moraga Com-

mons. Colorful lights would spell "Moraga - 20 years," and depict the town seal, said Town Manager Ross Hubbard.

Although Town Council members unanimously approved the fireworks show, Council members Jim Sweeny and Michael Harris opposed the static show.

Sweeny said he believes the 25th anniversary will be much more significant. He and Harris both said they thought the \$1,500 was an unneeded expense.

"We're all aware the incorporation date is Nov. 12," countered Councilwoman Sue Noe. "I still like waking people up to the fact that this is our 20th."

To sponsor a rocket, send a check for \$23.26, to Town of Moraga, P.O. Box 188, Moraga, 94556

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Contra Costa Sun

Sunday, August 15, 1993

Contra Costa Times—9A

Fire damages Moraga house



CHRIS MAYER/Special to the Times

FIREFIGHTER TIM BARTOLOMEI takes a breather Saturday after battling a two-alarm house fire in Moraga that caused an estimated \$400,000 worth of structure and content damage. Moraga Fire District investigators believe a short circuit in a television started the fire at 1144 Sanders Drive. The blaze was reported at 11:10 a.m., and was under control shortly before noon. A passer-by who tried to help extinguish flames with a garden hose suffered smoke inhalation.



Sun photo/Karen Emanuel

Moraga firefighters Matt O'Brien, Chris Klein, Sean Perkins, Dennis Aquilina, and (kneeling) Bill Klement competed in the Firefighter Combat Challenge. Vince Matulich, not pictured, also participated.

5-19-93

Moraga firefighters place fourth in statewide 'Combat Challenge'

MORAGA — Moraga firefighters placed a respectable fourth among 33 teams throughout California in the 1993 Firefighter Combat Challenge, which was held April 20 in San Jose.

This was the second year in a row the firefighters placed in the event. Last year, firefighters

placed second in the event, which fielded teams from only northern California.

Firefighters this year competed against five-person teams representing 33 fire districts.

The Combat Challenge is a national competition, and contests are held in 12 states. The challenge tests firefighting skills

in a series of five timed events including a five-floor stair climb with a 50-pound fire hose, hoisting the hose over a tower, driving a 165-lb. beam into a building. Firefighters then "rescue" a 175-lb. victim.

Moraga placed fourth overall based on their combined time



INSIDE MORAGA

Spring 1994

Published by the Moraga Chamber of Commerce for Moraga Residents

Vol. 3 No. 1

Unique Rescue Service Proven to be Pride of Moraga

by Linda Borrelli

The Moraga Fire Protection District has one of the premier fire and rescue departments in the state, and the primary reason we are so fortunate is because of the outstanding support of the District's residents. Citizens have demonstrated their concern for the continued quality of service by voting themselves a special tax (fire flow tax) to cover items not always provided in the annual budget.

The special tax has been levied only a few times since its passage in 1980. The Moraga Fire Commission, with the approval of the county Board of Supervisors, has enacted the tax to pay for such things as retrofitting both fire stations for earthquake safety and to pay for special equipment. The most recent purchase is

the new ambulance to be delivered in the next few months.

As the community grew during the 1960s and early '70s, residents began to feel a definite need for their own ambulance here in Moraga. The response time for an ambulance from outside the community, particularly during commute hours, could result in an unnecessary loss of life. In 1970, the Moraga Service League, a women's service organization, led the effort to raise funds to purchase the District's first ambulance. Within the next few years, the Paramedic Program was established.

The Moraga Fire District is the only one in the area that has a Paramedic Program. Neighboring districts have emergency medical technician (EMT) fire-fighters. The distinction is that an EMT is certified in only basic medical training. Their life-saving techniques are limited to first aid, CPR and the use of a defibrillator. Paramedics have far more extensive training in emergency or life-threatening procedures.

For example, they may begin an IV and administer drugs. They are in direct contact with the hospital emergency

Moraga Fire District is a few minutes compared to a much longer response time if a regional ambulance company is called. In a life-threatening situation, every second counts.

The Paramedic Program is a top priority to the community, and has had the citizens' support since its inception in 1977. Rescue One Foundation is unique in perhaps being the first such foundation in the state chartered specifically to support emergency medical services. Of particular interest is the fact that the Foundation has never had to raise funds actively. Citizens have contributed on a regular basis, many of whom have been aided directly by the paramedics.

In 1980 the Foundation made its first major purchase – an AMP PAK heart defibrillator – for the rescue unit in the amount of \$6,200. Since then, the rescue units have been fitted with the finest life-saving equipment available, and updated as necessary. The Foundation also has purchased equipment to provide educa-

(continued on next page)

Citizens' Strongly Support Rescue One Financially *(from previous page)*

tion in life-saving techniques to residents, such as resuscitating mannequins and training films for the District's CPR courses.

Another major purchase in 1992 was a trench rescue trailer, which has been fitted with heavy duty rescue equipment, of the type used in emergencies such as rescuing people from a collapsed building. Once again we are reminded how isolated our community could be in a catastrophe such as a major earthquake.

To date the Foundation has received and administered approximately \$68,000 in contributions from individuals, homeowners groups, service organizations, social groups and churches. Rescue One Foundation board members participate with Fire District personnel in conducting blood pressure checks at local com-

munity events, and help as required at the District's open house in October.

Current board members are Greg Reams, president; Dr. Ben Ho, vice president; Jane Reif, secretary; Ellen Long, treasurer. Directors are Julie Fisher, Gordon Nathan, Jerry Meyer and

Public Communications In an Emergency

Public communications will play a major role in helping to survive a major disaster. The Moraga Police Department has a command center that offers the capability to communicate with emergency services people elsewhere in the county. Should electrical power not be available, the Police Department has purchased and installed an emergency generator and an

antenna on the roof of its building at 350 Rheem Boulevard to keep in touch with the "outside world."

Chief Barry Kalar and Town Manager Ross Hubbard have initiated contact with the manager of Moraga's FM radio station, KSMC, on the Saint Mary's College campus, to talk about the possibility of having that station broadcast emergency warnings and instructions in case of a major disaster.

Chief Kalar said he would hope to have a supply of one-channel radios that would be tuned only to KSMC (89.5) for use in a disaster. "For \$12,000-15,000 we could purchase enough radios to give one to every residence in Moraga," Kalar added. (Batteries would be needed to operate the radios, with this cost to be borne by the individuals receiving the radios.)

He said he hoped the business community, service organizations and other community minded groups would contribute the funds to purchase such radios.

Meanwhile, KATD (990 AM) is Contra Costa County's emergency radio station for specific information for residents.

Stay tuned...

Carol Porterfield. Applications are being accepted for a current vacancy on the advisory board, and may be mailed or delivered to the Fire Station at 1280 Moraga Way, Moraga, CA 94556. Contributions to the Foundation also may be mailed to the same address.

Linda Borrelli, Moraga's Citizen of the Year for 1993, was a founding member of the Rescue One Foundation and served on its board 9 years. She is the current chairman of the Moraga Fire Commission, having served on its board for 7 years, and is also a former executive director of the Moraga Chamber of Commerce.

Contra Costa Sun

Vol. 58 No. 13

Wednesday, March 31, 1993

Shining on the communities of Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda since 1935

24 pages

75 cents

Fire chief takes unexpected early retirement



John Cooper

By Karen Emanuel

Staff writer

MORAGA — Acting Moraga and Orinda Fire Chief John Cooper unexpectedly retired Tuesday, causing some local fire officials to fear the districts are one step closer to consolidation with Contra Costa Fire District.

Cooper made the decision after the County Board of Supervisors on March 23 offered top level fire officials an additional two years toward their service record if they took early retirement. The length of time employed is used to calculate retirement income.

The retirement offer is part of a

county cost-saving plan aimed toward reducing management costs and consolidation or functional integration of the county's nine fire districts, said chief Assistant County Administrator Scott Tandy.

"We don't intend to fill the (Moraga and Orinda fire chief) job," said Tandy. "We intend to restructure, reorganize and consolidate management. It doesn't mean the district is eliminated — it's just a change in how the district is managed on a day to day basis."

The Board of Supervisors was to meet in closed session Tuesday to decide who would lead the Orinda and Moraga districts. Tandy said

several factors will be considered in deciding what to do with the Moraga and Orinda fire districts in the long run.

They include the number of county fire officials accepting early retirement, the severity of threatened funding cuts from the state and the results of an advisory measure on Orinda's June ballot asking whether the district should consolidate.

The Moraga Fire Commission met Monday night to discuss the effect of Cooper's retirement. They planned to ask supervisors Tuesday not to appoint an acting chief from the Contra Costa Fire District as was expected, but to allow fire captains

from the Moraga and Orinda districts to take over as acting assistant fire chiefs.

"We'd like them (the Board of Supervisors) to wait before appointing anyone to the district," said Fire Commissioner Gordon Nathan. "We're reiterating that we are financially sound and we have options that need to be looked at. We have support from the community, which supports the Moraga fire district in its present form."

Dick Olsen, a Moraga resident and former fire commissioner who was at the meeting, said he fears county officials are moving the district a step closer to consolidation

with the Contra Costa Fire district.

"I think this is a total back door plan for consolidation," he said. "They know they can't get the citizens of Moraga to vote for consolidation. Every time we've had a tax measure, the residents have supported it by two or three to one."

Cooper's retirement makes him one of three fire officials this month — and one of four in recent months — who has retired from the Orinda and Moraga districts.

Moraga Fire Marshal Les Wandel and Orinda Assistant Chief Walt Luihn retired Tuesday. Their

See RETIRE, Page 2

Fire district consolidation plans spark praise, concern, questions

By CATHERINE CHRISS
Staff writer

4-1-93 *Contra Costa Times*

A day after county supervisors moved toward consolidating fire protection, firefighters from Oakley to Orinda to Pittsburg were hashing out what hefty cost-cutting measures would mean to them.

Reaction varies from praise to wait-and-see to deep concern.

Two fire chiefs and two assistant chiefs took early retirement Tuesday and Assistant Chief Jim Hill of the Riverview Fire Protection District took early retirement Wednesday, enabling the Board of Supervisors to redesign the administration landscape.

County officials estimate the five early retirements announced this week and one last fall will save \$758,452 a year.

The board appointed one chief and three assistants to temporarily lead the districts affected by the resignations — Riverview, Contra Costa, Orinda, Moraga and West County. The lone chief administrator for the five districts signals vast changes for a county that a decade ago was dotted with many fire districts.

smaller districts will improve fire protection by making more fire equipment available, standardizing training and techniques and conquering the fiefdoms that dominate the diverse communities. Opponents fear communities will lose their identities and, at least in one case, that fire protection will suffer.

Supervisors plan to discuss more consolidation on Tuesday with chairpersons of the five districts.

County leaders and fire commissioners are reviewing several options. Some want to bring the entire county together into one district. Others support consolidating districts to form East, West and Central County districts.

Still others would like to merge the five districts, except for East County, which is unique because of several volunteer departments.

"I'd kind of like to see the whole county under one roof," said Fire Capt. Pat Fank of the West County Fire Protection District, adding that his colleagues also support more consolidation. "As far as I'm concerned, one big

department has got to be a plus for every aspect of the fire service. There are too many little districts trying to operate on their own."

However, complete consolidation could hurt volunteer fire districts, said Seth Cockrell, chairman of the fire advisory district in Oakley. The 51 volunteers there operate on a \$460,000 budget.

If the districts are united into one fire district, residents would expect the same level of service, rather than volunteers in one community and paid firefighters in another. The days of volunteer firefighters in Oakley, East Diablo and Bethel Island could disappear, Cockrell said, and greatly increase the cost of fire protection.

Cockrell favors creating three fire districts — East, West and Central.

At Station 85 in Pittsburg, the big changes left firefighters surprised.

"Everybody's kind of confused," said Larry Etherton, a senior firefighter. "Just kind of in shock."

He lauded the consolidation and said it is long overdue.

4-2-93

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BY FREDERIC LARSON/THE CHRONICLE

Moraga firefighters Jon Holmes (left) and Don Romero stocked up with supplies from the grocery store

Town Loses Prized Fire Department

County supervisors wrest control of Moraga's 'pride and joy'

By Erin Hallissy
Chronicle East Bay Bureau

Residents of Moraga, a secluded, upscale Contra Costa County town nestled below the East Bay hills, have long held their firefighters close to their hearts and their pocketbooks.

For almost 20 years, the people of Moraga have paid extra taxes to pay the costs of paramedic training for their fire department, making their firefighters the only ones in the county to provide such a high quality of medical care.

Last November, Moraga residents voted to raise their property taxes to make sure that the state budget crisis will not lead to any cutbacks in their service. They donate thousands of dollars annually to a nonprofit foundation, called Rescue One, which buys equipment that the department would otherwise have to forgo.

Residents Are Stung

For many residents, however, the rosy picture suddenly dimmed Tuesday with a surprise move by the county Board of Supervisors to wrest the department from local control put it in the hands of a centralized bureaucracy far from Moraga. The move has stung the people of Moraga.

"The fire department is just the pride and joy of our a community," said Jerry Meyer, who works with the Rescue One Foundation. "We know the men. We know their families."

Local support has meant a financially healthy fire district with \$1 million in reserves, making it far different from other fire departments throughout the state now facing huge cutbacks because of the state budget crisis.

The Board of Supervisors con-

does appear that the rug has been pulled out from underneath us."

Moraga's Unique Needs

Dick Olsen, a Transamerica executive who has lived in Moraga for 21 years, said that the new fire administration knows nothing about the unique needs of Moraga, which is far from major hospitals and accessible only by two-lane country roads.

"These people need a map to

taxation without effective representation."

The supervisors' move was not without warning, although it was not listed on the Tuesday meeting agenda and caught many residents off guard.

Last year, the board suggested merging the Orinda and Moraga fire departments, but backed off after more than 2,000 letters of protest flooded county offices. The board has studied for months whether to consolidate all the county fire departments to save administrative and training costs, but the idea has met with resistance from communities that want to keep local control.

Supervisor Tom Powers of Richmond, who has backed consolidation as a way of saving money, said the board might agree to guarantee that the extra tax dollars raised in Moraga be used only in Moraga and that the paramedic service will not be changed under a new administration. However, he defended the board's action as necessary and cost-conscious.

"We don't need to sit around and ponder these things," Powers said. "In my opinion, consolidation should have happened a long time ago."

'It certainly does appear that the rug has been pulled out from underneath us'

— FIRE COMMISSION CHAIRMAN GORDON NATHAN

solidated the administrations of five fire districts, placing them under a single chief from the River-view Fire District in Antioch. The action coincided with the immediate resignation of the acting Moraga fire chief and the fire marshal, along with resignations of fire chiefs in the other affected fire departments.

"All of these backdoor shenanigans have been going on without consulting with us," said Gordon Nathan, chairman of the Moraga Fire Commission. "It certainly

even find out where Moraga is," Olsen said.

Moraga residents are afraid that their ample coffers will be raided by the central administration to fill in budget gaps in other areas where residents have turned down property tax measures for fire services.

"I think there is a fear that through one means or another ... they could start to siphon off Moraga's money," Olsen said. "We feel like colonists back in the time of the Brits. It's another example of

POLICE

Tot CPR presented to parents

By Karen Emanuel
STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — New mothers at a recent child and infant CPR course didn't have to worry about getting baby sitters or missing feedings.

They brought their babies — along with diaper bags, infant seats, notebooks and a dessert to share — to the CPR class for infants and toddlers.

Darrell Lee, a senior firefighter and paramedic, started the free classes at the Moraga fire station. He said the two-hour morning session has worked well and more classes are planned.

"It's a great opportunity for the parents to practice taking their own child's pulse," he said. "It's the perfect time because the kids are tired and ready for a nap. At about 11 o'clock they start waking up."

The class is geared toward first-time parents. The objective is to teach parents how to care for an infant or child who is choking, stops breathing or whose heart stops beating.

Course material includes the infant and toddler portions of certification courses but does not result in certification. Participants are given a 20-page information booklet that outlines procedures for rescue breathing, injury prevention and safety precautions, and how to be the first caregiver in an emergency situation.

The class evolved after an initial trial in which 28 Moraga and Lamorinda mothers — most toting their infants — responded enthusiastically.

About 12 mothers and one father recently turned the class into a potluck coffee when they brought cakes, sweets and orange juice. Most of the young guests who were the subjects



KAREN EMANUEL/SUN

New mothers and one father intently watch a video tape of a near drowning during a Moraga Fire District CPR for infants class.

of the class were fed milk at some point during the class, of course.

The most important information Lee imparts in the class can easily be remembered in six characters, he said: "ABC911" stands for "airway, breathing, circulation" and "call 911."

"If you're going to forget anything, make sure you remember those six things," he said.

Lee showed a short video of an incident that illustrated the need for such skills.

The mothers and father were quiet as they watched the re-enactment of the near drowning of small twin boys in a residential swimming pool. The mother had taken CPR years ago and remembered enough to save one son. She was able to instruct a neighbor to save the other son, at which time paramedics arrived.

Lee pointed out that having the skills to be the first caregiver can make the difference between a life and a death situation.

"The problem is most people don't know CPR," Lee said. "You can't depend on a neighbor or some-

one else to arrive. You have to be able to act immediately."

In addition to his 10 years of paramedic experience, Lee and his wife have a 3-year-old son and an 11-month-old daughter. He started the Moraga class after holding one for his "30-something" friends in his own neighborhood who have babies.

While other fire district paramedics can teach the class, Lee says his fatherhood experiences enhance his instructor eligibility and increase his enjoyment in teaching the class.

"Being a dad myself it's easy to talk about the different stages, such as eye-hand coordination, going from walking to crawling, and opening cabinet doors," he said.

He told the listeners to welcome noise as a signal everything is all right, especially as the children grow older and more active.

"A healthy baby is someone who's agitated and irritable," he said. "A quiet baby you must look out for."

That becomes especially true when infants start crawling.

"Always keep an eye and ear

open. If you don't hear your child when they start crawling, go and check on them."

When cautioning parents about their children wandering into bathrooms, he also advised them to stock up on necessities.

"I know how it is with toilet paper," he said, drawing on his own experiences of fatherhood. "Buy a lot — it will be all over the place."

Cheryl Perko of Berkeley arranged for her group of new mothers, who meet regularly, to attend and bring the treats.

"I had heard about the class from a friend who said it was really good," said Perko, who was with her husband, Peter Engel, and 4-month-old daughter, Rachel.

"I'm a neurotic new mom," said Nancy Boas, with smiling 4-month-old Sam. "This was perfect."

The Moraga Fire District offers child and infant CPR classes, standard CPR and First Aid certification courses. For more information, call 376-5454.

Retired surgeon sees horror of bombing site

Moragan spent week in Oklahoma helping locate victims

By ANDY JOKELSON

Staff writer

MORAGA — Falling rubble posed an omnipresent danger for searchers hunting for survivors in the bombed-out Oklahoma City federal building.

Wind and rain compounded the hazards, dislodging debris and prompting precautionary delays and evacuations.

Despite the treacherous conditions, the cautious, trained searchers escaped without major injuries, said retired Navy eye surgeon and Moraga resident Ben Ho, who spent a week coordinating protective health measures for out-of-state teams.

But they had several close calls, he said. If not for luck, vigilance and speedy footwork, there might have been more fatalities in a building where so many had already died.

One afternoon, a large chunk of concrete plunged nine stories, Ho said. It landed between two firefighters who were perhaps three to four feet apart.

"It easily could have killed either one of them outright, but it just by chance missed them," he said.

On another occasion, a large slab of concrete moving toward workers in the bottom of an area called "the pit" nearly trapped them.

"They saw it out of the corner of their eyes. They evacuated immediately, in time to save their lives," he said.

"Just pulling debris out near the pit area often led to very unstable footing. And sometimes, in some areas, debris was what was actually supporting the remaining columns or the remaining structure."

Falling debris hit some workers' helmets or bodies. Many suffered minor eye injuries, some from concrete chips and dust spawned by jackhammering and drilling.

Workers' goggles would get foggy from rain and, while they cleaned them, concrete chips would fly into their faces, sometimes blown by winds as strong as 30 to 40 mph, he said.

Most workers had laryngitis, Ho said, from breathing concrete dust and trying to yell over the noise from drills and other machinery.

Muscle sprains from working on uneven surfaces and in contorted or twisted positions were common.

So was mental stress from coping with the dangers, working amid fluids from decomposing corpses, finding dismembered bodies and eventually failing to find survivors many days after the April 19 explosion.

"And everyone was giving it their best 110 percent," said Ho, who described his own mindset there as grim determination.

Searchers tried not to be overanxious or reckless, to overreach or take unwise shortcuts, he said. And they had to rein in their anger that someone had intentionally killed so many people, including children, Ho said.

Ho, 49, is an urban and wilderness rescue expert who advises federal and state agencies that train teams to find people trapped in collapsed buildings and in other desperate situations.

He had been in Australia visiting a daughter at the time of the Oklahoma City blast. He returned home April 22 and flew to Oklahoma City the next morning at the behest of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

He worked for 36 consecutive hours, often



KARL MONDON/Times

RETIRED NAVY SURGEON BEN HO of Moraga checks an Oklahoma City newspaper story about the bombed federal building, where he spent a week with other search-and-rescue personnel.

crawling from place to place in the mangled building, before grabbing four hours of sleep on the floor of a nearby office building, he said. Then it was back to work for 24 hours, sleep for about five, and another 18 to 20 hours of work, constantly making rounds in the building.

Ho checked search sites for chemical, biological or other potential medical hazards, determining whether workers were adequately protected. He outfitted teams in waterproof plastic "moon suits," gloves, goggles, double-filter masks and other protective garb, which later underwent decontamination.

He helped determine whether search procedures were safe. He helped plan extrication of bodies and prepared for treating, freeing and transporting any survivors.

The well-being of search dogs also came under his purview. They suffered cuts from

broken glass, Ho said. And after hours of not finding survivors, they also showed signs of depression, including slower movement and lack of alertness.

Ho came home from Oklahoma on April 30 after rescue leaders concluded there was no longer any chance of finding survivors, he said. The search for bodies ended Thursday with the death toll at 167, with two bodies still unaccounted for.

Like many other out-of-state rescue workers, Ho could not get over Oklahomans' generosity and gratitude.

"It was just unbelievable . . . and they made whatever we suffered in terms of physical and emotional hardships so much easier to bear because they were so overwhelmingly generous and gracious," he said.

Historians to hear earthquake expert

The Moraga Historical Society will take a break in their usual format of local history presentations to offer a program on Earthquake Preparedness. The public is invited to join Historical Society members on April 21 at 7:30 p.m. at the Moraga Library to hear Mark Watson on this subject.

The community will hear from someone trained for this eventuality in the Moraga Fire Department. Mark Watson heads the Emergency Response team. He has been with the Fire District for 12 years and is in charge of public education. He is senior paramedic fire fighter and when

not on duty responding to emergencies, he spends time visiting schools and preparing courses of action to deal with catastrophes.

Watson will outline procedures developed to deal with emergencies, particularly seismic disturbances. Treatment of victims, search and rescue procedures, safe entry and precautions will be discussed.

On May 21 the Historical Society will tour the Bay Model Visitor Center in Sausalito. The trip included a film of activities at the Model, which is a scientific tool used by engineers, scientists and planners to study the

salt and fresh water flows in the San Francisco Bay and Delta systems. It reproduces to proper scale the rise and fall of tide, flow and currents, and mixing of salt and fresh water.

The site is also the home of the Marinship Exhibit, which covers the development and operation of the shipyard which produced tankers, Liberty cargo ships and oilers through the end of World War II.

For information on the Earthquake Preparedness program, the Bay Model Tour, or membership in the Moraga Historical Society, please call Sue Holmes at 376-5646.

Rescue One opening

Rescue One president Jerry Meyer has announced there is a vacancy on the Rescue One board of directors. Anyone interested may write to the Rescue One Foundation, c/o the Moraga Fire District, 1280 Moraga Way, Moraga. Deadline for applying is Aug. 1.

Rescue One supports the paramedic program in Moraga through voluntary contributions. The board meets the first Monday of each month.

SUN 6/28

Moraga paramedics bolster heart-attack treatment

Town is first in the county to use new, efficient heart monitor

By Allison de Laveaga
STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — Moraga paramedics are pumping up their efforts to help heart-attack patients with new, state-of-the-art equipment.

The Fire Department last week became the first in the county to begin using a new EKG monitor that assists in early recognition and more efficient treatment of heart attacks.

The monitor, called a LifePak 11, can detect heart attacks with up to 98 percent accuracy, pinpoint where in the heart the attack is taking place, and send information via modem to the hospital.

According to Senior Firefighter/Paramedic Darrell Lee, the LifePak will make the most of the crucial time before a patient arrives at the

"What we're trying to do is educate people to know the signs and symptoms of a heart attack and call us early. Don't wait."

— Senior Firefighter/paramedic Darrell Lee

hospital.

"With this machine we're trying to decrease the time to treatment," Lee said. "Treatment can begin right away."

Moraga's Rescue One Foundation purchased the monitor with \$12,000 in donations.

"It's a really wonderful feeling to be able to purchase state-of-the-art equipment such as the LifePak 11. The citizens of Moraga funded the new ambulance through the fire-flow tax and now their generous donations have furnished it (the LifePak). The best paramedics deserve the best equipment," said Jerry Meyer, director of Rescue One.

device. John Muir Medical Center in Walnut Creek is considering such a device, Lee said, and may install one in the next few months.

The LifePak 11 is used in only one other Bay Area city, Lee said. Moraga's department will use it as part of an overall effort to educate citizens about heart attacks, he said.

Lee and others will be giving classes on the topic later this year.

"What we're trying to do is educate people to know the signs and symptoms of a heart attack and call us early. Don't wait," he said.

Early treatment is critical and can make a difference, Lee said.

"The biggest problem we've run into is that people who have chest pain wait up to two hours before they call us," Lee said. "A delay can result in more injury or death to the heart muscle."

People should call 911 as soon as they detect signs of heart trouble such as chest pains lasting more than 15 minutes, chills and sweats, and palid color, he said.

Until now, Moraga firefighters have used older LifePak monitors with no diagnostic capabilities. In comparison, the LifePak 11 provides more EKG graphs and prints out the results as well as a diagnosis. It also stores information on up to 50 different patients.

"We can know down to the minute when we gave a drug to someone. Our recordkeeping will be greatly improved," Lee said.

In addition, paramedics can attach the device to a telephone and send a patient's information onto a hospital, so it can begin preparing for that person. That capability, however, will not be functional until hospitals purchase a receiving

Leadership merged for five fire districts

By CATHERINE CHRISS

Staff writer

To cut costs, Contra Costa supervisors on Tuesday overhauled fire protection administration and named one chief and three assistant chiefs to lead five districts.

Allen Little, Riverview Fire Protection District chief for seven years, will remain Riverview chief and become acting chief for the Contra Costa, Orinda, Moraga and West County fire protection districts.

Assistant Chief William Cullen of the Contra Costa district was named operations chief for all districts except Riverview.

"The challenges are going to be very great," said Little, who has worked for the fire district for 28 years. "But I think we can pull together and support the effort."

The interim move, expected to save \$634,000 a year in salaries, was hailed by the Board of Supervisors as a bold, cost-cutting step that could usher in more consolidation as the county grapples with a staggering \$21 million shortfall and as much as \$80 million in state cuts.

Only a year ago the county's fire districts operated with five chiefs and seven assistant chiefs, said Supervisor Sunne McPeak of Concord, who has backed consolidation efforts.

The consolidation followed an announcement Tuesday that two fire chiefs and two assistant chiefs were taking early retirement.

The notion of consolidating fire districts has generated resistance for two years. Opponents maintain fire protection will suffer and communities will lose their identities.

The board will discuss later this year whether to keep the districts

LEAVING EARLY

Fire administrators taking early retirement:

	Annual including salary benefits	
Bill Maxfield , chief, Contra Costa Consolidated and West County district	\$105,348	\$151,701
John Cooper , acting chief, Moraga and Orinda	80,652	116,139
Walt Luhn , assistant chief, Orinda	76,812	110,609
Keith Hayden , assistant chief, Riverview	86,424	124,450
David Evans , chief, Orinda (retired Nov. 1991)	91,044	131,103
Total savings	\$634,002	



John Cooper



Bill Maxfield

intact with one administrator or merge some of the five fire districts. The West County district wants to consolidate with another, McPeak said.

Last month, the county hired a consultant to work on the consolidation effort.

The early retirement of the four administrators and one from Orinda last fall translates into an annual savings of \$634,000, said Scott Tandy, assistant county administrator. The departing administrators will receive retirement credit for an additional two years of work.

Of course, the early retirement comes at a cost. The county will pay an additional \$400,000 in retirement benefits to the five men, Tandy said.

Many dislike consolidation.

"Don't fragment things to the extent that you defeat the level of quality and services," warned Fire Commissioner Charles Blue of Orinda. "If you dilute too much, you lose control."

Fire Commissioner William Gross, also of Orinda, agreed. He urged supervisors to retain fire district boundaries.

"People in communities want their dollars spent their ways," he said. The budget for the fire districts has been reduced 15 percent over the past two years. Administrators plan to cut another 10 percent from the fire budget this year.

The county also is negotiating salaries with Local 1230 of the International Association of Fire Fighters.

The board is evaluating salaries of neighboring fire departments to determine how local firefighters' salaries compare.

Little's \$98,400 base salary will remain the same.

Assistant Chiefs Mike Argo and Ray Miraglia of the Contra Costa district will stay, but will work for all five districts.

Moraga fears paramedic service will suffer

By PAM KING

Staff writer

4/1/93 C.C. TIMES

MORAGA — Angry Moraga fire commissioners are worried about day-to-day operations of their local paramedic service now that an East County fire chief is running their district.

The Board of Supervisors on Tuesday named Allen Little, chief of the Riverview Fire Protection District, to replace Moraga's and Orinda's acting chief, John Cooper, who accepted an early retirement package from the county. Little also will serve as acting chief of the Contra Costa Consolidated and West County fire protection districts.

"Paramedics have special requirements, certifications and equipment, and if you want to get the optimum service and benefit, you need someone who has experience in the field," said Moraga Mayor Sue Noe, who is also a fire commissioner.

Noe said county officials told her Cooper was the only chief in Contra Costa with paramedic experience.

Little said he has no specific experience with paramedic programs, although he has participated in less sophisticated rescue units.

"In terms of managing a program," he said, "you approach as you would any other. I'm going to have to draw on expertise within all the districts, and we have experienced staff involved in all these programs. No single individual has to be responsible for everything."

Moraga taxpayers supplement their fire district's budget through a fire-flow tax, which is levied at the discretion of the commissioners. Last November, Moragans voted 69 percent to 31 percent to increase the cap on the tax, which could cost an average homeowner as much as \$400 a year.

Without the tax, the Moraga district could not provide paramedic service to the geographically isolated

town.

Tuesday, Noe asked supervisors to promote a Moraga captain to supervise the district on an interim basis. In selecting Little, they rejected her proposal.

"The supervisors let us down. They had an agenda laid out and they should have been honest enough to say, 'This is what we're going to do,'" said Gordon Nathan, chairman of Moraga's fire commissioners. "We've just been strung along. I'm very angry at this turn of events."

Little understands Moragans are not enthusiastic about the supervisors' choice, but doesn't take it personally.

"Right now the county is very fragmented and there are a lot of questions about the outcome of change. It will take an adjustment period to address these issues."

Little's appointment is a short-term arrangement, Noe said. She said she wants to know whether the supervisors would consider appointing an assistant chief, with paramedic experience, specifically for Moraga, if the position were funded through the district's fire-flow tax.

"We need to come up with an argument that, because of our uniqueness, we are able to support staffing," Nathan said.

Moraga also will consider becoming an independent district, Noe and Nathan said, although Nathan said he feared that might jeopardize state funds that augment fire district budgets.

Noe suggested Moraga could join with Orinda and Lafayette to form a Lamorinda fire district.

The Moraga and Orinda districts need the continuity of a full-time administrator, said Orinda fire commissioner William Gross. He has suggested to the supervisors that the administrator doesn't need to be a high-priced firefighter.

"What's important," Gross said, "is that the supervisors maintain the integrity of the borders."

Orinda asks what price ambulance service?

Some say it's time to copy Moraga fire tax

By Chloe Levy
STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — There is a dividing line on Moraga Way that could mean the difference between life and death.

An ambulance request from 521 Moraga Way results in a one-to-four-minute response.

For people calling from across the street at 520 Moraga Way, the wait could be 10 to 20 minutes.

The first house is in the Moraga fire district, the second in Orinda.

While both fire departments respond to medical emergencies within a few minutes, Orinda does not have any staff paramedics and so must rely on a private company — American Medical Response West — to provide ambulance service.

The average ambulance response time for Orinda in March was 11.8 minutes, while in Moraga the average was 3.6 minutes, according to county records.

For months, officials have been scrambling to improve response times. Recently murmurs of an Orinda fire-flow tax — like Moraga's — have surfaced.

"We need to make sure we are getting what's needed in Orinda. If that means a tax, so be it," said Judy Shallat, who serves on the Orinda Fire Protection and Emergency Services Committee.

AMR West spokesman Robert Weber told the Orinda Fire Protection and Emergency Services Committee in March that Orinda is "a problem area" and was not able to provide any promise of improved ambulance response.

"They have tried. But you can't expect them to move mountains," said Shallat.

Tragedy spurs change

The problem with Orinda ambulance service was brought tragically home in February, when an AMR West ambulance dispatched to help a 2-year-old choking victim got lost and eventually was canceled.

The child died and a county investigation followed.

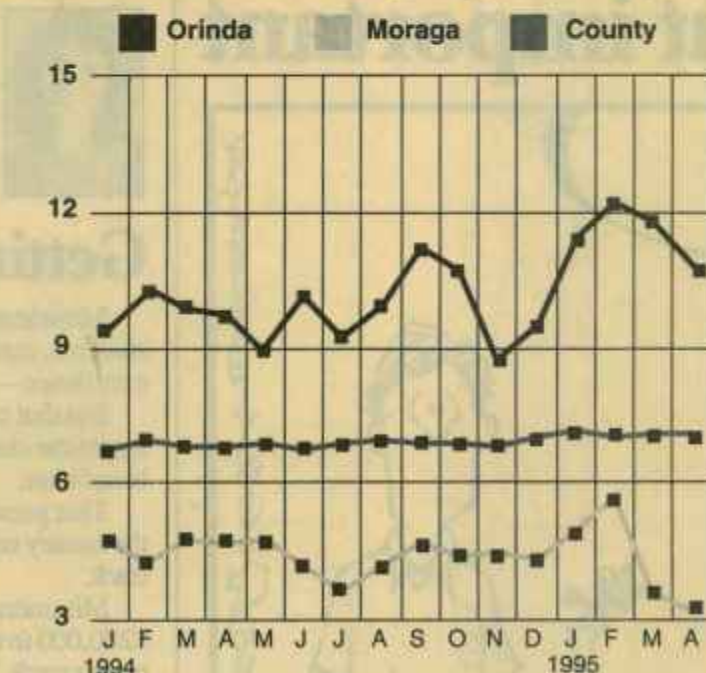
The resulting report recommended several solutions to the lagging response times including instituting paramedic service in Orinda, and operating a sharing arrangement with the Moraga fire district.

Months later, the fire department says it is ready to begin paramedic service in Orinda.

Still, the reality is that ambulance service in Orinda that is comparable

Ambulances on the run

A comparison of Orinda, Moraga and county ambulance response times. All measurements are monthly averages in minutes.



Facts:

Orinda

33 firefighters, none are paramedics
Three firestations
\$4.1 million budget
17,000 residents, 30 sq. miles

Moraga

24 firefighters, 12 are paramedics
2 firestations
\$4.4 million budget
15,852 residents, 9.5 sq. miles

Source: Contra Costa County Health Services Dept.

JON MANLOVE/SUN

to Moraga's service is months — if not years — away.

And county Supervisor Jeff Smith warns that such a program is costly, maybe even too costly.

The department has estimated the additional cost per paramedic in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"I don't think the money is there," Smith said.

Frustrated county officials broached a plan to dispatch Moraga paramedics to calls in Orinda when AMR West estimates a delayed response. AMR West would then cover the missing vehicle.

Robbing Peter to pay Paul

But Moraga firefighters scoffed at the idea, pointing out that the paramedics on duty in Moraga are also firefighters.

"What happens if a fire breaks out while we're on a medical call in Orinda? Will AMR West's paramedic fight our fire?" asked Moraga Firefighter Matt O'Brien.

"You're robbing Peter to pay Paul," agreed Firefighter Steve Anaya.

One week after the talks began, Smith said he'd received numerous calls from concerned Moragans.

"They're dead in the water," Smith said of the discussions.

Jerry Meyer, of Moraga's non-profit organization Rescue One, said if Orinda were to hire paramedics of its own, a sharing agreement might be possible.

"I don't think there is anybody in Moraga who isn't looking forward to the day when Orinda has its own paramedics and we might be able to share medical services," said Meyer.

But while the 1992 failure of a fire-flow tax in Orinda projects a dim prospect for such a request, committee member Shallat thinks it may be inevitable.

Moraga 'love affair'

"Moraga has a love affair with their fire department... they have put their money where their mouths are and they are well worth emulating," said Shallat.

Moraga's "love affair" bloomed on the rebound of Proposition 13. The city's fire department, like others across the state, was devastated by the new law, which fixed Moraga's tax at a low rate.

Moragans responded rapidly to the fire department's needs, launch-

"We need to make sure we are getting what's needed in Orinda. If that means a tax, so be it."

—Judy Shallat.

ing Rescue One — which has raised \$85,000 for the department since 1979 — and approving a special fire-flow tax.

The fire-flow tax has raised \$2 million for the department since 1980.

The tax is optional, depending on the department's needs, and is calculated based on the gallons of water required to extinguish a fire at a property.

In some years Moraga residents pay nothing.

The most a homeowner with a 2,500-square-foot house would pay per year is \$81.

Some wonder if Orindans are prepared to tax themselves for extra emergency service.

"The community support has made the department what it is. They don't seem to have the voting support in Orinda," said O'Brien.

But Shallat was optimistic, saying that the recent focus on ambulance response times may create "fertile ground" to pass a tax.

"Somewhere along the line, if we want Moraga's help we're going to have to come up to speed," she said.

Moraga firefighters ready to save lives in the trenches

By GORDON MAH UNG *Times*
Staff writer 8/13/95

MORAGA — After years of waiting to use their nifty trench-rescue equipment, Moraga firefighters got the call Monday.

They rushed to St. Marys Road, where a man was trapped by a collapsed trench. Firefighters began digging, but before they could finish unloading the equipment from its special trailer, the man wriggled free.

No matter the frustration, firefighters say. They were prepared, and that's what counts.

That wasn't the case 15 years ago, when the fire department became the first in California to be cited for saving a life without the right equipment.

In 1980, after resourceful firefighters managed to rescue a man buried up to his armpits in a 12-foot sewer trench, the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration cited the department for failing to take proper precautions with the proper tools during the successful rescue.

Public outcry and media attention to the bureaucratic Catch-22 caused the state to rescind the citations.

Although vindicated by the state's

retreat, Moraga firefighters studied the matter and found that no one in Contra Costa County had the equipment to do a trench rescue the way OSHA wanted it done, Capt. Bob Lunardini said. The department has since made sure it is prepared for the next trench rescue.

Tucked away in the back of Station 42 on Rheem Boulevard is the only trailer in the county outfitted for trench rescue. Among the items the trailer stocks are heavy plywood boards, thick sections of lumber, saws, a generator and a type of telescoping pneumatic device called an "air shore." The trailer and equipment were donated by the Moraga's Rescue Foundation in 1991.

Trench rescue can take hours of shoring and digging to free a person, Lunardini said. "You have to dig the whole person out."

In the 1980 incident, it took firefighters more than three hours to dig the man out and shore up the sides.

The rescue trailer equipment can do more than just hold trenches open, Lunardini said. In the event of a large earthquake, the equipment can be used to prop open collapsed homes.

County Fire District future looking bleak

By Chloe Levy *CC Sun*
STAFF WRITER 8/9/95

ORINDA — Unless a rebounding California economy fuels up its budget, Contra Costa Fire District is projecting a deficit of nearly \$5 million by 1997.

"In retrospect it's fortunate we rejected consolidation ... otherwise there's no doubt our fund balance would be siphoned off to cover their losses," said Carl Weber, member of the Orinda Fire Protection and Emergency Services Committee.

While Weber said it would be premature to predict the recommendations of the fire committee, members are leaning toward solutions other than consolidation.

Councilman Allan Tabor says he expects that spells a fight with the Board of Supervisors.

"It's going to be a much more difficult battle with the Board of Supervisors. They won't want to give up the goose that lays the golden egg," said Tabor.

But county Supervisor Jeff Smith denied he would fight Orinda over consolidation.

"I agree that according to the numbers there's no incentive for Orinda to consolidate with Con Fire ... basically I don't want to see any-

thing that steals money away from Orinda," said Smith.

According to the projections, Orinda Fire District is also facing a dwindling fund balance and probably would not be able to afford a pilot paramedic program.

"I don't want to paint a picture that Orinda Fire is without its own problems, though," said Weber.

"The projections are bleak for all three. It's true that Orinda will outlast Con Fire but they are still eating into their fund balance," said Smith.

Mike George, chief administrative officer for Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, said that while Orinda may be solvent now, one big expenditure could wipe the balance off the board.

"We could spend the entire fund balance on one item," he said.

The projections were part of a July 31 presentation by the county administrator's office to the Board of Supervisors and were based on conservative assumptions, such as a 1 percent revenue increase.

The estimates also assumed zero expenditure growth including no salary or benefits increases and no capital expenditures.

"They were unrealistic (that spending won't grow)," said Weber.

Differences between Orinda and Moraga fire districts keep them from merging

By Chloe Levy
STAFF WRITER

An Orinda-Moraga fire department merger is heating up, say officials from both communities.

"If we can reassure Moragans that their service won't be diluted by the merger I would say it's very likely," said Moraga Town Council Member Mike Majchrzak, who also serves on the Moraga Fire Committee.

This year, both communities appointed fire committees to determine whether or not to consolidate with the county.

In 1994, Orinda voters soundly

rejected consolidation, giving the city a year to contemplate independence.

But fire committees from both Orinda and Moraga scrapped consolidation after Contra Costa Fire District's July announcement that they were heading deep into the red with projected annual losses of \$5 million by 1996-97.

Both said County Fire's bleak future confirmed their fears that if consolidation were to be approved, they would be harvested for extra revenues by the county.

Politicians from Orinda are especially sensitive to that possibility, following last year's admission by the

county that Orinda paid \$3 million into the shared fund that it never got back.

And Dick Olson, from the Moraga fire committee, said that their projections show that a merger would save more than \$20,000 in administrative costs.

The major stumbling block for the merger, say both sides, is the contrast between the two departments.

Orinda's annual spending has outpaced Moraga's by nearly \$1 million. Yearly expenditures have been climbing steeply, from \$3.6 million in

See FIRE, Page 2

FIRE

FROM PAGE 1

1991-92 to more than \$4.3 million projected for this year.

In contrast, spending at Moraga Fire has kept steady, with minimal growth from 1990-94 and a small leap this year, raising the budget to \$3.3 million.

And yet, it is Orinda Fire that is languishing in the Jurassic age.

Orinda has zero paramedics on staff compared to Moraga's 12.

In an era when firefighters are more often called to medical emergencies than actual fires, the disparity is sharp.

Because Orinda doesn't have engine-based paramedics, as firefighters with that training are called, the city must rely on a American Response West, a private company contracted by the county.

While ambulance response times in Orinda average from 10-12 minutes, surpassing the county average of six minutes, Moraga's response times average three or four minutes.

Moraga's store of paramedics makes a merger especially sweet to Orinda.

Moraga's equipment is leagues ahead of the Orinda department where in the spring of this year, a fire truck actually broke down in front of

City Hall.

But while Moraga could easily upgrade equipment or hire staff by tapping into its fire-flow tax, Orinda has no such revenue source.

Mike Majchrzak calls that discrepancy the potential deal breaker.

"We're going to have to pass a parcel tax in order to come up to speed. Without one, the deal with Moraga won't happen," said committee member Judy Shallat.

"From a personal standpoint — I can't speak for the entire committee — a fire-flow tax is absolutely necessary," said Majchrzak.

Still, Orinda committees members are aware that a fire-flow tax may be a tough sell to Orindans who have rejected such a tax in the past.

A captain from Moraga Fire who asked not to be named said that Orinda's history concerns firefighters in Moraga.

"The people of Moraga have supported this department 100 percent," he said.

"Unfortunately, the community never backed the Orinda Fire District," he added.

But if Orinda is able to match Moraga's resources, the captain said he would support a merger.

"With those caveats in mind, I think it would be a great idea," he said.

"We're already sharing fire service with our automatic needs agree-

ment," he added.

The Moraga Town Council plans to discuss merging the departments at its Aug. 30 meeting.

One of the biggest hurdles will be selling the idea to Moraga voters, who have been fiercely protective of the department they have lavished with money.

"We have to convince people that service in Moraga won't be degraded by a merger," said Majchrzak.

But Majchrzak said Moraga needs Orinda as much as the reverse. The county has mandated that special districts be kept to a minimum. Moraga alone would face possible rejection by Local Agency Formation Commission, but Majchrzak said he believed a merger would improve its chances.

And he said that before a merger is approved, Orinda would have to show it can come to the table with comparable resources.

Majchrzak said a waiting period while Orinda improves its department would be likely.

Even if the revenue and asset imbalances are leveled, Majchrzak said they still face a fight with the county.

"They don't want to lose the goose who lays the golden eggs," said Majchrzak.

Both Orinda and Moraga would need at least three of the five county supervisors to approve the merger plan.

Agencies plan to improve emergency response time

By Chloe Levy
STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — Orinda may turn to neighboring Moraga to solve its slow ambulance response problem, county officials acknowledged this week.

An inter-agency agreement is being discussed among the county, the Moraga Fire District and AMR West, the private ambulance company that provides service throughout the county.

The negotiations — which county officials stressed are at an early stage — involve deploying ambulances from Moraga's fire department to Orinda in emergency medical situations when AMR West is delayed in its response.

"I think that this will resolve the problem in Orinda. What we're looking at is a win-win situation," said Art Lathrop, emergency services director for the county.

Lathrop said that Moraga stands to benefit from the proposed deal and that the county will not subordinate Moraga's needs to Orinda's. He did not elaborate exactly how.

In the case that AMR West estimates a delayed response, the Moraga Fire District would send its paramedic-staffed ambulance. An AMR West unit would then be dispatched to cover the missing Moraga ambulance.

Lathrop said that Moraga's fears of service erosion had stymied previous negotiations. AMR West's commitment to cover the missing Moraga vehicle calmed Moraga's fears, he said.

Moraga pays a special fire-flow tax to help fund its own paramedic-staffed ambulance.

"It sounds like a definite improvement for southern Orinda," said Fire

See **RESPONSE**, Page 2

RESPONSE

FROM PAGE 1

Protection and Emergency Services Committee Chairman Carl Weber, who added that the committee had not heard of the agreement.

John Wyro of the county fire commission said that they had not heard of the agreement either.

Agencies expect the sharing arrangement will be in place within the month.

The move follows three months of Orinda ambulance responses that

do not meet county standards. Although the county contract requires ambulance responses to fall below 10 minutes in 95 percent of all county calls, Orinda's average times have been well above 10 minutes for months.

Orinda only accounts for 3 percent of AMR West's business in the county, so they are able to meet county contractual requirements even if Orinda's times lag.

Although response times in Orinda have always been behind the rest of the county's, they worsened considerably after a January change

in the AMR West's deployment system.

Prior to Jan. 16, ambulances were stationed at a site at the west end of Lafayette. Now they travel throughout the region; when a call comes in, the ambulance closest to the caller's home is sent.

County records show that the average response times for Orinda for January, February and March were 11.38, 12.15 and 11.72 minutes, respectively. The 1994 average response time for Orinda was 9.4 minutes. So far in 1995, the average response time is 11.75.

Preserve superb paramedic service

In the discussion over consolidation of fire districts in the community, we would hope that whatever action is taken does not diminish the superb service provided by Moraga paramedics to residents of the town. This past week Bill had the occasion to see them in action firsthand and we would like to thank them and recognize them for their fast and professional response to his needs.

Thanks to their efforts he received immediate medical care at the hospital after his heart stopped for a few seconds and he blacked out and totaled his car.

Hopefully the resultant surgically implanted pacemaker will keep him from needing their services in the future. However if he or anyone else in the community does need them, we should all recognize that they are a unique resource to Moraga, and the consolidation discussions should not result in any change to the level of service they provide to citizens of the town of Moraga.

Bill, Winnie, Carlyn, Brodie and Breck Jasper
Moraga

SUN 9-20-95

Orinda to Moraga fire service: Let's get together

By Chloe Levy
STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — It isn't exactly love, but a letter from Orinda to Moraga is proposing marriage.

In a Nov. 13 draft, Orinda is proposing merging the two fire districts.

"Should the Moraga Town Council also endorse your committee's recommendations regarding fire service consolidation, the City of Orinda would look forward to working with the Town to develop mutually beneficial solutions for this important service," wrote Mayor Joyce Hawkins.

The two communities have been cozying up to the idea for months, and both expect negotiations to begin around Christmas.

Moraga won't officially respond until after it has approved the findings of its advisory committee on Dec. 13.

Carl Weber, chairman of the Orinda Fire Protection and Emergency Services Committee, said the Moraga Fire Advisory Committee has given him every indication they

support the merger.

If Moraga approves the merger, the two councils must then convince the county to approve the new district.

Several key issues have yet to be decided. Among them:

- *Will Orindans approve a fire-flow tax?

- *How much tax will Orindans pay for the district and will the tax subside after the paramedic program is in place?

- *Will the district be administered by an elected board such as in San Ramon, or by a city council-appointed commission?

- *Will the merger undergo a waiting period until Orinda's paramedic program reaches parity with Moraga's?

On Nov. 7, the Orinda City Council approved the findings of its fire committee that a merger was feasible and directed staff to write a letter to Moraga.

MERGE

FROM PAGE 1

The council had hoped to approve a paramedic plan Nov. 7, but those plans were scrapped for now.

"Of course we're worried about the ambulance problem but the program is very costly. We want to make sure we have the money not just for this year but for years to come before we approve the program," said Weber.

Ambulances to medical emergencies in Orinda take an average of 12 minutes and often take as long as 18 minutes.

The council had hoped to resolve the problem by hiring or training para-

medic firefighters.

Orinda doesn't have paramedic trained firefighters and is forced to rely on the private ambulance company hired by the county.

Half of Moraga's firefighters are paramedics. In medical emergencies, the firefighters transport patients to the hospital, cutting response times there to an average of three or four minutes.

In the letter to Moraga, Hawkins wrote that the council "conceptually approved the Orinda Fire Committee recommendations to implement a paramedic program and explore the feasibility of a fire-flow tax."

For now, though, the paramedic service will have to wait for the tax that would pay for it.

2 — Contra Costa Sun Wednesday, November 15, 1995

Moraga paramedics bolster heart-attack treatment

Town is first in the county to use new, efficient heart monitor

By Allison de Laveaga
STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — Moraga paramedics are pumping up their efforts to help heart-attack patients with new, state-of-the-art equipment.

The Fire Department last week became the first in the county to begin using a new EKG monitor that assists in early recognition and more efficient treatment of heart attacks.

The monitor, called a LifePak 11, can detect heart attacks with up to 98 percent accuracy, pinpoint where in the heart the attack is taking place, and send information via modem to the hospital.

According to Senior Firefighter/Paramedic Darrell Lee, the LifePak will make the most of the crucial time before a patient arrives at the

"What we're trying to do is educate people to know the signs and symptoms of a heart attack and call us early. Don't wait."

— Senior Firefighter/paramedic Darrell Lee

hospital.

"With this machine we're trying to decrease the time to treatment," Lee said. "Treatment can begin right away."

Moraga's Rescue One Foundation purchased the monitor with \$12,000 in donations.

"It's a really wonderful feeling to be able to purchase state-of-the-art equipment such as the LifePak 11. The citizens of Moraga funded the new ambulance through the fire-flow tax and now their generous donations have furnished it (the LifePak). The best paramedics deserve the best equipment," said Jerry Meyer, director of Rescue One.

Until now, Moraga firefighters have used older LifePak monitors with no diagnostic capabilities. In comparison, the LifePak 11 provides more EKG graphs and prints out the results as well as a diagnosis. It also stores information on up to 50 different patients.

"We can know down to the minute when we gave a drug to someone. Our recordkeeping will be greatly improved," Lee said.

In addition, paramedics can attach the device to a telephone and send a patient's information onto a hospital, so it can begin preparing for that person. That capability, however, will not be functional until hospitals purchase a receiving

device. John Muir Medical Center in Walnut Creek is considering such a device, Lee said, and may install one in the next few months.

The LifePak 11 is used in only one other Bay Area city, Lee said. Moraga's department will use it as part of an overall effort to educate citizens about heart attacks, he said.

Lee and others will be giving classes on the topic later this year.

"What we're trying to do is educate people to know the signs and symptoms of a heart attack and call us early. Don't wait," he said.

Early treatment is critical and can make a difference, Lee said.

"The biggest problem we've run into is that people who have chest pain wait up to two hours before they call us," Lee said. "A delay can result in more injury or death to the heart muscle."

People should call 911 as soon as they detect signs of heart trouble such as chest pains lasting more than 15 minutes, chills and sweats, and palid color, he said.

Moraga rescue vehicle gets lots of use in first year

By Lisa Szucs
STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — Don't let the glossy red paint and the \$126,000 price tag fool you — Moraga Fire Department's newest rescue vehicle is no luxury car.

"It doesn't ride like a Cadillac," says senior paramedic Darrell Lee, referring to the department's new wheels. "It's a solid, stiff, bumpy ride."

But a smooth ride is of little concern to Lee. This medium-duty Navistar Supermedic vehicle has one purpose: to transport rescue patients to the hospital, and to transport 'em fast.

In one year, the truck has safely hustled over 500 people to emergency rooms at Kaiser and John Muir hospitals in Walnut Creek and Alta Bates hospital in Berkeley.

Cardiac arrests, overdoses, and diabetes-related emergencies make up the brunt of 911 calls to the Moraga Fire Department, said Lee.

Paramedics make sure the truck's 230-horsepower turbo diesel engine is always tuned up and its tank — which gets a meager nine miles to the gallon — is filled with gas.

They also take turns washing the 14,000-pound monster by hand at least once a week.

Moraga Fire Department bought the vehicle late last year to replace a 17-year-old truck which



TRENT NELSON/SUN

Senior firefighter/paramedic Bob Cox walks by Moraga's newest rescue vehicle.

had just about rolled out its last rescue.

"The other one was getting too old. It was due for replacement," said Lee.

This new truck is bigger, badder and equipped with enough life-saving gizmos to run a roadside E.R.

It's equipped with respirators, a defibrillator, a pediatric kit, and a high-tech cardiac monitor unit valued at \$18,000.

The cardiac monitor was purchased by Moraga's Rescue One Foundation, a residents' group that raises money to buy equipment for the department.

Lee spent two years researching, drawing plans and working with a manufacturer to create just the right vehicle for the department.

"The guys call it my baby," said Lee.

Lee hand-picked features ranging from an exterior storage locker to the brick-and-gray color of the inside floor and paneling.

"(Buying the truck) was a lot different than going to your local car dealership and picking out the model car you want," said Lee. "This was almost like buying a house."

Money to buy the truck was taken from a fire flow tax fund, which is a town-approved special assessment for purchases such as this.

Moraga Fire Department's paramedic team covers all of Moraga and can respond to emergency calls as far away as the Alameda County line. The team

also responds to parts of Lafayette and Orinda.

Response times can be as short as 3 to 5 minutes, said Lee.

By contrast, response times for American Medical Response (AMR) rescue units average just under 12 minutes.

Quick response times are crucial, said Lee, explaining that brain death occurs within 4 minutes after a person's oxygen supply is cut off, as is often the case with a cardiac arrest.

"Those 3 to 5 minutes can really make a difference in saving someone's life," said Lee.

Lee said that rescue vehicles don't come much safer than this.

"It's about as safe a ride as you're going to get," reassured Lee.

Moraga panel touts local control of fire services

By Lisa Szucs
STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — A committee appointed to study alternative ways to organize the town's fire services has two words for Orinda: let's merge.

In a report released this month, the five-member Moraga Fire Committee concluded that combining Moraga and Orinda's fire services into one independent district would be best for both municipalities. Moraga Fire Protection District and Orinda's fire services are currently separate districts under county control.

The committee studied eight possible organizational scenarios, including whether to make Moraga its own independent district or to merge both Orinda and Moraga into one dependent dis-

trict.

But the structure that caught the committee's fancy was a dual-power, independent district.

"After considering the other organizational options for the Moraga Fire Protection District, we believe that combining Moraga and Orinda into a single, independent fire district makes the most sense," reads the report.

Committee Chairman Bob Merritt said the primary benefit of such a merger would be to maintain local control.

"The main idea is that we would have Orindans and Moragans in charge of Orinda and Moraga ... not somebody in Martinez," said Merritt. "You always feel better when the people living in the community are the ones making the decisions."

Merritt said he has no complaints about the

paramedic response times and fire service in Moraga now. It's down the road that he's worried about.

"There's concern about the future and whether Moraga will be able to enjoy the same level of service we have right now under county control," he said.

Orinda City Councilman Sarge Littlehale said the merger is the way to go for Orinda, too.

"This merger would result in much greater fire protection and a large improvement in the emergency medical services," said Littlehale. "The consolidation is in the interest of all concerned."

The Orinda City Council approved the merger at a November meeting.

The Moraga Town Council said it wants to give the public time to review the fire committee's report before a vote is taken.

Fire captain disputes editorial

By WILLIS LAMM

While I encourage the Contra Costa Times to engage in thought-provoking editorials, I found some of the characterizations made about the Orinda Fire District in your editorial, "Fire district for Orinda-Moraga," to be untrue and offensive.

To cite one example, you described the need for Orindans to raise taxes to bring "Orinda's fire fighting services up to Moraga's level."

Please note that Orinda taxpayers already pay \$1.2 million more in fire taxes than Moragans.

Moraga touts its paramedic program, however, it doesn't have sufficient strength to fill out a basic "first alarm fire" assignment. It routinely relies on Orinda's Orchard Road station to supplant its inadequate sized force.

Orinda is nationally known for its achievements in many areas. We have been the source of national standards.

We won the Governor's Award for emergency preparedness in 1991. Through the years, the Times has written about the accomplishments of the Orinda de-

partment, which the writer of the editorial obviously overlooked.

The Orinda Fire District is alive and well and healthy. It is self sufficient and does more than its share to assist its neighbors. It is embarking upon a paramedic program which will not cost Orinda taxpayers a penny in additional taxes by filling upcoming retirements with paramedic certification recruits.

Its aging fleet of fire equipment is being replaced with money saved in administrative areas. The public wanted us to become more efficient and we are doing so, funding a number of expanding services with money which we have saved.

When a salesman comes to your door to try to take your money, he first has to convince you that you have a problem.

Please look beyond this sales pitch and check the facts before you worry thousands of local residents through an editorial statement that their very solid fire district is somehow inadequate.

Lamm is a fire captain and 21-year veteran with the Orinda Fire District, and a published author on fire service issues.

2-12-96
TIMES

Orindans at meeting ready to pay for pipes

By Judith Scherr
STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — A group of citizens say they've had enough finger-pointing and are ready to pay the piper.

The residents say they'll take responsibility for upgrading the city's 30- to 50-year-old water pipes that cannot pump enough water to save their homes in a major blaze. They're prepared to write a plan that will give citizens most of the responsibility for paying the estimated \$53 million to have the work done.

"Those who benefit the most are going to have to pay the cost," said Fire Prevention District Commission Chair Robert Recker, speaking to the three dozen homeowners who had come to a rainy night commission meeting last week to hear EBMUD officials discuss a study on upgrading the pipes.

Citizen David Klement agreed with Recker. It's time for the city and the East Bay Municipal Utility District to stop arguing and for citizens to dig into their own pockets, he said.

Each of Orinda's 6,300 rate-paying families would have to pay less than \$10,000. "That's less than the cost of a new car," he said.

This could be a few hundred dollars a year, over 30 years. And it probably wouldn't cost that much, said Bill Kirkpatrick, EBMUD manager of engineering. When a second more detailed study is completed (at the cost of \$200,000), money-saving shortcuts should become apparent, Kirkpatrick said.

There were some citizens at the meeting, however, who take the tack that the water district ought to take full responsibility for upgrading the pipes.

How Rockridge resolved problem

OAKLAND — No amount of pipe upgrades could have produced water pressure sufficient to save homes the first day of the Oakland wild fire, said former EBMUD director Stuart Flashman.

On the second day, however, the fire was controllable but water output in upper Rockridge was "woefully deficient," he said.

At first Oakland was saying EBMUD should pay for the pipes that served the 750 water district customers in the area, and EBMUD was saying it was up to

the city. After heated community meetings and "a lot of arm-twisting to get enough votes," EBMUD agreed to pay costs to renew 2.8 miles of pipe to the standard to which they were originally built.

That added up to 19 percent of the \$2.4 million cost. Another 50 percent of the project came from a city-wide emergency services bond and the rest is covered by a \$134 annual assessment of area homeowners that will be paid over 30 years.

The project is 66 percent complete.

The same water system that was appropriate 60 years ago is not appropriate today, said Carl Weber from his seat in the front row. The onus for modernizing its system is on EBMUD, he said.

Kirkpatrick argued that board policy would not permit EBMUD to renew the 187,000 feet of pipe that needs upgrading. The district, however, could kick in funds to restore the pipes to their original flow.

"We're responsible to maintain the system as designed," he said, adding: "We're a player — there's no doubt about it."

While the City Council and a number of citizens continue to maintain that the responsibility to upgrade pipes is EBMUD's, Fire Commissioner Pete Wilson said he is ready to move forward to plan for citizen participation in solving the problem.

"There's got to be some timetable for action," Wilson said.

EBMUD FINDINGS

- Cost to upgrade pipes to adequate fire flows (2,250 gallons per minute for three adjacent hydrants): \$53 million.

- EBMUD customers in Orinda: 6,300.

- Total water lines: 610,000 feet.
- Need for water line replacement: 187,000 feet.

- Number of existing fire hydrants: 750.

- Hydrant needs: Upgrade 249 hydrants, add 116 hydrants, replace three hydrants.

The study can be found at www.ecis.com/~ornfire or at the Fire Station, 33 Orinda Way.

The issue will be discussed at the Fire Commission's next meeting, 7:30 p.m. Jan. 8 at the Orinda Firehouse, 33 Orinda Way.

cc San

12-18-96

Orinda Firehouse, 33 Orinda Way

Old pipes put Orinda in danger during fires

By Chloe Levy
STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — Last year, one of Orinda's fire trucks broke down in front of the city offices.

They got a new truck.

Though firefighters may now have transportation to fires, there isn't enough water in the hydrants to put out a birthday cake.

CC Lun
Skinny, aging pipes designed for a much smaller semi-rural Orinda of the 1930s only carry one-third of the minimum water flow firefighters say they need now.

4-3-96
"The pipes are corroded. Water is squirting out instead of gushing," said resident Ed Coyne. He planned to take the problem to the City Council Tuesday night, after the Sun's deadline.

Coyne and a group of residents planned to join the Fire Department and ask the Council to pay for a portion of the cost of replacing the pipes and hydrants: \$2.5 million.

"That money in the treasury belongs to the people," Coyne said of the city's \$9 million reserve. "It is needed to stop a possible spark from turning into a holocaust."

Part of the \$2.5 million would pay for a study of the water flow system to determine how many miles of pipes must be replaced.

The total cost of replacing miles of pipes and dozens of hydrants is estimated at about \$5 million. The East Bay Municipal Utility District has tentatively offered to pay about one-third of the cost. The Fire Department is hoping the balance can be made up with a federal grant.

Katy Foulkes, an EBMUD board member who represents Orinda and part of Lafayette, said the water district helped Rockridge pay to replace their decrepit pipes. EBMUD decided that although the pipes wouldn't have needed replacement for decades according to their needs, there was a value in replacing them.

"We would eventually have to replace them so whatever the cost savings are to us, that's what we're willing to pay," Foulkes said.

The \$2.5 million cost of the Rockridge project was split three ways between the city of Oakland, EBMUD and residents who paid a special assessment district tax.

"That's the most I'd be able to talk EBMUD, policy-wise, into doing,"

said Foulkes.

But getting the money from the city of Orinda may not be easy.

In December, the City Council committed to the \$9 million "Heart of Orinda." Although the project will be partly funded by Gateway development fees, some of the money was to come from the reserve fund.

City Council members must be convinced that water pipes are the city's responsibility.

"I'm aware that it's a problem, I've just never heard it described as the city's problem before," said Council Member Laura Abrams, who believed that EBMUD should pay to replace the pipes.

But Foulkes disagreed. "What is written is that it is the city's responsibility."

Coyne thinks that once the City Council understands the severity of the problem, they will have no choice but to pay up.

"The first obligation of the city is to do everything they can for the safety and welfare of the citizens. That's state law," said Coyne.

One neighborhood, Los Dedos,

See Fire, Page 2

banded together and raised the money to replace its hydrant and repair pipeline. The Fire Department matched the residents' dollar per dollar.

Pat Dunn, a resident who helped raise the money, believes that the problem needs to be solved by the city.

"It just won't work neighborhood by neighborhood," said Dunn.

Residents also worry that even if the area escapes a big fire, it can't escape insurance companies. "Our fire insurance rates are going to skyrocket if we don't do something," said Coyne.

Coyne said he is worried that if insurance becomes scarce or extremely pricey, housing sales and prices will suffer.

Orinda and Lafayette have both been designated as an extremely high fire risk by the state Fire Marshal, causing the insurance industry to reconsider its insurance rates.

Capt. Willis Lamm of the Orinda Fire Department said insurance carriers may refuse to cover Orinda if the water flow problem isn't solved.

"You can pay to get new pipes or you can pay the insurance companies. It's your choice, but wouldn't the money be better spent on a solution?" asked Lamm.

Council suggests tax for hydrant problem

By Chloe Levy
STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — The City Council gracefully side-stepped demands for \$2.5 million to improve water flow to fire hydrants, instead suggesting that voters approve the money as part of a fire-flow tax.

The April 2 City Council meeting opened with an angry contingent of residents and firefighters demanding money but ended with applause after the council offered several solutions.

"And we didn't even have to spend any money," City Council Member Allan Tabor said with a gleeful twinkle during the break.

Residents told the council that they wanted immediate action to improve water flow to fire hydrants. The council was given a 108-signature petition from the Charles Hill Homeowner's Association.

See Hydrant, Page 2

HYDRANT

FROM PAGE 1

"I'm here to plead with you to bring the fire safety standards up to the living standards of Orinda," said Gina Wall.

Fire hydrants throughout Orinda and miles of water lines only pump one-third to one-sixth the water needed in a big fire, a fire official told the council.

Capt. Willis Lamm said the problem was uncovered last year after drought standards were lifted and Orinda fire officials started testing hydrants.

"A group of neighbors gathered around the hydrant for what we thought would be this great demonstration and just little bit of water came out. We were appalled....," said Lamm.

Skinny pipes installed 60 to 70 years ago for a rural community have corroded and are barely passable at points scattered throughout the city, Lamm said.

Neighborhood groups quickly formed last year after Lamm sent out letters to residents warning them of the threat.

"Our community has been told by the fire department that in the event of a major fire, we'll be abandoned without a fight," said David Clement of Via Hermosa, a street with one of the worst problems.

Clement, the first speaker, asked the council to commit \$2.5 million to the estimated overall \$6 million cost of pipe and fire hydrant replacement.

Tabor interrupted Clement and challenged him to find the money in Orinda's tight budget.

"Considering our total budget is

only \$5 million, where — which of our city departments — would we take the money from?" asked Tabor.

Tabor then asked Clement if he would be willing to support a special assessment tax to pay for the improvements. Clement said he would.

Some residents complained that the city has been a bottleneck for making improvements to water mains.

"Two thousand years ago, Emperor Nero fiddled while Rome burned. I hope that doesn't happen in Orinda," said Ed Coyne.

East Bay Municipal Utility District representatives told firefighters and residents that attempts to improve some of the most deteriorated water mains had been stymied by excessive city fees.

"Let's don't nickel and dime over fifty bucks an hour and lose billions of dollars in houses and property," said Clement.

Many residents attacked the council for plans to build a \$9 million project that will include new city offices, a new library, a new gym and a renovated community center. The Heart of Orinda project was approved by the city council in December after many public meetings in which the public showed overwhelming support for the project.

But at the April 2 meeting, the mood had changed for some residents.

"The Heart of Orinda is not buildings, the heart of Orinda is out here," said Ray Davis, waiving at the audience behind him.

"This should be your highest priority," Doug Pinkin wrote the council in a letter read at the meeting. "After this is accomplished, we can direct attention to new buildings and more comfortable offices."

But when the council had its turn to speak, they reminded the audience that Orinda's fire department problems don't stop with poor water flow.

Council Member Sarge Littlehale said that 75 percent of the fire district's call are medical. The department has no paramedics on staff and response times from the private company that services Orinda are triple Moraga's.

"We have response times of 10 to 12 minutes," said Tabor, who added that he believed medical response should be of a much greater concern to an aging community than water pressure.

Tabor and Council Member Joyce Hawkins both pointed out that Orinda's fire service may merge with Moraga's and that the need for paramedics and fire equipment were pushing the council to consider a fire-flow tax similar to Moraga's. Hawkins said the council was considering putting a tax before voters in March 1997. She suggested adding the fire hydrant and water-line improvement cost to the tax.

But Mayor Gregg Wheatland said he believes that EBMUD is illegally shirking its responsibility to pay for the pipes.

"I don't want to write off too quickly EBMUD's responsibility here," said Wheatland.

The East Bay Municipal Utility District, which owns the water pipes, has said it will pay about one-third of the cost of the project.

Only two streets in Orinda are currently on EBMUD's list of pipes that need replacement by the year 2000. Katy Foulkes, Orinda's EBMUD Board representative said it isn't EBMUD's responsibility to provide adequate water pressure to fight fires.

Resident Pat Dunn, whose Los Dedos and El Pulgar neighborhood matched fire department money this year to add a fire hydrant, said the biggest problem has been figuring out who is responsible for the pipes.

Wheatland said the city shouldn't allow EBMUD's "arbitrary funding mechanisms" to decide their responsibility.

Wheatland, a judge at the Public Utilities Commission, said water districts are responsible for providing adequate water to hydrants and that he will work with the city attorney to prove it.

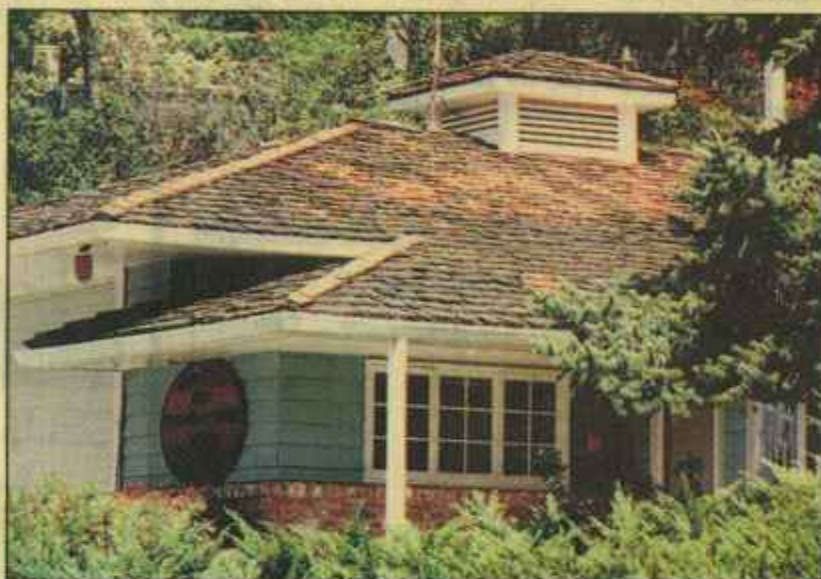
In addition to suggesting the tax, the council voted to have the city manager work with EBMUD to develop an inspection fee arrangement that both agencies can live with.

The council also asked Orinda's Fire Commission, which reports to the County Board of Supervisors, to investigate the water-flow problem and devise a solution.

John Wyro, a fire commissioner, told the council they plan to allocate \$20,000 of fire department money to pay for an initial study of the water main system to find the trouble spots.

4-10-96 CC San

Two firehouse roofs aren't fire-proof



ANDREW FAULKNER/SUN

The fire station at Orchard and Moraga Way is one of the many business and home roofs in Orinda made of untreated wood shake.

By Chloe Levy
STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — The Fire Department has been warning residents that untreated wood shake roofs and dry brush are not only hazardous but illegal. But they might also want to look in their own back yards.

Orinda fire stations 43 (Via Las Cruces and Honeyhill) and 44 (Moraga Way and Orchard) have untreated wood shake roofs.

"You're kidding," laughed Rachel Richman, an aide in state Assemblyman Tom Bates office "A fire station? Well, it doesn't sound illegal, but they should be setting an example."

Richman's job includes explaining the 1991 "Bates Bill," which outlawed untreated wood shake roofs and other fire hazards.

The Bates Bill, which went into effect in 1995, stiffened state fire code and targeted untreated wood shake roofs as extremely hazardous, outlawing any new construction using the material. The bill has not

See Roofs, Page 2

ROOFS

FROM PAGE 1

yet been formally adopted as an ordinance in Contra Costa County but it will soon go before the county Board of Supervisors, Orinda Fire Marshal Ron Garland said.

The ordinance will require the fire district to advise residents on high fire risks, including the proximity of tree branches to chimneys and existing wood shake roofs. The ordinance will require residents to replace wood shake roofs only if they are in the process of reroofing their homes, Garland said.

Two of the three Orinda fire stations are among the estimated 90 percent of Orinda residences that have untreated wood shake roofs.

"Of course, we should be setting an example," Garland said, referring to the Orinda stations. "Obviously, we have a public facility that needs to

remain standing."

The roofs were scheduled to be replaced several years ago, but tight times forced the department to put the work off.

Richman said the department and residents aren't required to replace the roofs until 50 percent of the roof needs fixing. But work to the roof at station 43 has been done piecemeal, making it difficult to determine if 50 percent of the roof has needed replacement.

Joan Jennings, a deputy chief with the state fire marshal's office, said that the roof only needs to be replaced if 50 percent of the tiles need to be replaced "at one time."

Jennings said, under current law, the roof could remain indefinitely as long as work is done in patches.

Also, at least one of the stations is surrounded by bushes and trees, some of which appear dry.

"Now that sounds illegal," said Richman. "The brush removal is a legal requirement."

Orinda Fire Inspector Devin Russell said he has visited all the stations recently and knows of no problems with dry brush.

"If there was a problem, I would mention it to the station captain. They're quick to take care of something like that," Russell said.

One firefighter who asked not to be named said that the roofs are an embarrassment. "I mean, we'd prefer to set an example," he said.

And other fire officials said that the roofs are only one example of many problems.

Capt. Willis Lamm notes that three of the fire trucks are decades old. A new truck was ordered last year and is expected to arrive in June.

"The whole fire service has old equipment and we're trying to replace it as the budget permits," Contra Costa Fire Department Assistant Chief Ray Moralia said.

"There's a lot for stuff that needs to be done and the money's just not there," Moralia said.

Two plans target paramedic service

By Judith Scherr
STAFF WRITER

If you're in Orinda and need a quick paramedic response to save your life today — someone who can insert an IV or administer life-saving drugs — you could be out of luck.

Two unrelated programs, however, are on the drawing boards to cut Orinda's 11- to 12-minute paramedic response time. A county program could be operational before the end of summer. A local plan to merge the Moraga and Orinda fire departments could be in place by July 1997.

The county and city aren't working together on the mutually exclusive plans. "I don't know what is happening at the county level," said City Manager Bill Lindsay.

The county-sponsored pilot program was supposed to make its debut in early spring, but has been delayed because of personnel issues with American Medical Response — the company they contract with for ambulance service.

The county program involves placing one paramedic (rather than the current two) on AMR ambulances stationed in Walnut Creek, stationing a paramedic in a medical van in Lafayette and cross-training some fire fighters as paramedics.

The paramedic stationed in Lafayette would be the first responder in Orinda as well as Lafayette. The paramedic, who would respond via medical van rather than ambulance, would be able to begin life-saving treatment while the ambulance, stationed in Walnut Creek, would come a few minutes later to transport the patient to the hospital.

Currently the fire fighters are EMTs, emergency medical technicians able to administer first aid. Under the new system, there would still be two paramedics on the scene — one that gets there with the medical unit and the other that comes in the ambulance, accompanied by a driver

who is not a paramedic. One of the paramedics could be a fire fighter rather than a responder coming on a medical van.

"If (the pilot) works well, it could become a model for countywide services," said Art Lathrop, Emergency Medical Services Director for the County Health Services Department. Once fire fighters are trained as paramedics, "we'll reduce the money used to subsidize (AMR) paramedics," Lathrop said.

Pete Wilson, a member of a citizen and staff task force working on the plan to merge the Orinda and Moraga departments, said he has little faith in the efficacy of the county plan.

"If we want a paramedic program the best way, and the most timely way, is for Orinda to have its own department (with fire fighters trained as paramedics) in conjunction with Moraga," Wilson said.

Lindsay said the committee defined the following steps necessary for the two fire departments to merge:

- Moraga and Orinda write a joint master plan.
- They submit the plan to the local Agency Formation Commission; this will be done in late summer.
- LAFCO holds public hearings and votes on the plan.
- The Board of Supervisors

approves the plan. (Property tax that now goes to the fire district will be re-directed to the consolidated district.)

• Eighty-eight days before a March 1997 election date, the Orinda City Council votes to put the tax before the voters. (For the joint district to work, Orinda must approve a fire-flow tax similar to the tax Moraga has had on its books since 1980.)

• In March 1997, voters approve the tax by a two-thirds majority.

• Also in March 1997, voters elect a fire commission to oversee the new consolidated district.

If all the steps are concluded in a timely way, the new district will be formed by July 1997.

Some cities opting for fire-flow taxes

By Judith Scherr
STAFF WRITER

Orinda shares both wooded beauty and fire danger with its neighbors to the south and west.

But the city doesn't share the protection Moraga, Oakland and Berkeley have bought with their residents' tax dollars.

At a recent community meeting, Orinda citizens urged the City Council to put a tax measure — or two — for fire protection on the November ballot, but council members say they won't not rush to do so.

"It's completely premature," said Council Member Alan Tabor, who is working with staff and a citizen's committee "to put together the pieces of the (fire protection) puzzle."

One costly task the city faces is replacing the narrow and corroded water pipes, a problem Tabor says falls to the East Bay Municipal Utilities District. (EBMUD disputes this.)

A separate set of needs normally falls to the county, charged with local fire prevention. They include purchasing modern firefighting equipment, upgrading paramedic services and reducing heavy vegetation.

Orinda is working on a plan to join Moraga and jointly take over fire

services. If that is done, the council would probably ask voters for a fire-flow tax such as Moraga implemented 14 years ago.

At that time, more than 80 percent of Moraga residents voted to tax themselves for added fire protection, according to Gordon Nathan, chair of the Moraga Fire Protection District board of commissioners.

"The community felt there needed to be a way to support fire and paramedic services," he said.

Assessment funds have purchased some big-ticket items, such as an ambulance and a fire engine that is on order. The money also has gone to upgrade Moraga's fire stations to earthquake standards.

When the state took away some special district funding five years ago, the local fire-flow tax was used to make up for the deficit in the fire district's general fund.

The district collects the tax — about \$47 for the average homeowner — only when it is needed, Gordon said, noting none has been assessed the last two years. In fact, there is a \$1 million reserve, he said.

After the 1991 wildfire, Oakland and Berkeley hills residents voted to

See Fire, Page 2

IRE

FROM PAGE 1

ate fire assessment districts within
h municipality.

There are 20,000 parcels in the
kland hills fire protection assess-
nt district and 8,200 parcels in the
keley district. Oakland hills resi-
ts pay \$75 each year, while Berke-
hills residents are charged an an-
l \$50 fee.

Both programs emphasize a veg-
ion management program where
ectors strictly enforce fire codes
rivate and public lands. The tax
funds annual "brush chipping," a
gram where each of the cities
s up and disposes of bulky yard
te such as large tree branches.

Orinda City Council Member
ce Hawkins said she is concerned
at overgrown properties in Orinda
ell as other unmet fire protection

needs, but she hesitates to propose
new taxes.

"Some people live on fixed in-
comes," she said.

And others, Tabor added, "put
their wallets before their safety."

A plea for action on fire issues

By David Klement 5/29/96
cc [unclear]

This is an excerpt from a letter to be read at the June 4 meeting of the Orinda City Council:

I am here again, along with many others, to help this Council protect our lives and property from a disaster we are not equipped to fight. Orinda lacks sufficient water to stop destruction of whole neighborhoods by fire. Large sections of our city have been written off as indefensible and will be allowed to burn if a major fire erupts. No one disputes the threat, but we seem unable as a community to do much about it.

Tonight is a particularly significant occasion to raise the issue since the Council will review the upcoming budget. Where we spend money reflects our priorities, and I believe that protecting lives and property is our most important task; our city's budget must commit to this highest obligation.

We earlier spoke to this Council collectively and to several members individually. We listened to many lectures about the travails of public decision-making. From you we heard concern and support, even assurances that "a lot is being done." City representatives held a few special meetings with neighborhoods. Council member Sarge Littlehale forwarded information about a 1993 assessment attempt. City Manager Bill Lindsay discussed a range of possible funding mechanisms and offered to speak to interest groups. However, a "but" statement quickly followed all these discussions. The "but" statement attempted to explain why real progress by the Council is nearly impossible.

We hear different reasons why the Council cannot lead. There are probably more, but these seven seem to nicely sum up attitudes:

- The Council is not responsible for fire safety, the Fire Commission (and county) is. The city has a limited charter and is simply a victim of Fire Commission and county priorities.

- The Council is not responsible for water supply, EBMUD is. The city is simply a victim of EBMUD's priorities.

- The council has no money for water supply. Other agencies should pay for improvements. Library upgrades, redevelopment plans and the like more easily attract capital investment so we must stay focused on these less important priorities.

- Citizens of Orinda will not support any solution that requires taxes or assessments. People on fixed incomes cannot afford the luxury of adequate fire protection. A failed 1993 special assessment proves that people will not spend money for fire safety.

- Lack of water for fighting fires is not a critical issue for many Orindans. Individual families could improve chances of survival by cutting back brush and reducing other fire hazards. Besides, completion of improvements could be years off, so what's the rush?

- Orinda does not have equipment or emergency vehicles for basic services, even if water were available. Perhaps after we consolidate fire districts with Moraga, we can discuss water supply.

- We only have rough estimates of the scope of work required or the funds needed to complete this work. Until somebody else can deliver these figures, the Council is helpless. Efforts to gain community support would be

futile.

If we accept these as legitimate obstacles, what should citizens expect of this Council?

I have three recommendations. Each is within the Council's authority and acknowledge the obstacles I listed. None require approval or concurrence by any other agency. All would elevate this Council to the front lines of protecting our community.

- First, adopt a resolution requiring use of Council meetings as a "bully pulpit." Educate us about the dangers we face. Tell us about complexities. Explain alternatives and press for public commitment. Point out that we will pay for inadequate protection with sharply increased insurance rates and lower property values. Warn us about what the Bates Bill means to Orinda. Invite the community to help. Certainly, this city faces other issues (such as inadequate equipment and poor emergency response) but solutions are being discussed and plans being developed for them. Every Council meeting should have a status report as a routine agenda item, and the budget should provide for monthly circulars to every household explaining where we are in finding a solution. Use this same forum to tap into the community's extraordinary willingness to help itself. Sponsor neighborhood brush removal parties with awards underwritten by civic-minded businesses or city funds. Invite civic groups to adopt fire protection of Orinda as an event they would sponsor. In the end we will need some sort of public vote, regardless of the mechanism used to pay for improvements. The sooner we citizens understand the magnitude of the problem, the better prepared we will be to put our money where our interests are.

- Second, use the council as a facilitator. Bring together EBMUD, county representatives, fire commissioners and citizens. Several of you have managed to meet individually with representatives from various agencies. Why can't we have a seminar attended by all? In the end, well intentioned organizations *can* find common solutions without surrendering principle or position. The budget should provide funds for sponsoring an ongoing seminar.

- Third, suspend all non-essential spending. Instead, start a mandatory savings account for bringing water to Orinda's fire hydrants. Fix the worst ones immediately and assign priorities for later work. The sooner we identify and approve a solution, the sooner the city can resume discretionary spending.

We are not naive about the difficulty of leading Orinda into a safer future. We often disagree among ourselves about how best to get your attention. However, we all know that it is simply not acceptable to look the other way while Orinda smolders. Our requests are non-partisan, favor no one solution over another and allow the Council to match words with deeds.

Please answer our call. Do not take these proposals "under advisement," then bury them somewhere.

If you do not believe the problem is as serious as we do, have the courage to say so publicly now so we can compare facts. If you share our fears, help us convince our community that apathy will be more costly than action.

We come to you with open minds and a willingness to be part of the solution. We know you have difficult roles as our representatives, and we think you care as much as we do. We are your friends and neighbors. However, we have done what we can as amateurs. We need you to act as our leaders, starting tonight.

David Klement is a resident of Orinda.

NERT helps Moragans prepare for disaster

By Elaina Medina
STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — This small community offers residents all of today's convenient lifestyle perks: grocery and clothing stores, gas stations, tanning booths, a fitness center and fast food restaurants. But in the event of an earthquake, fire or other emergency, the residents could be faced with the reality of providing their own disaster relief.

Miles from any freeway, with limited accessibility, the 20,000 residents are at a public assistance disadvantage, according to Mark Watson, senior firefighter/paramedic for Moraga.

"We've got four roads coming in and out of town and none of them are what I call stable access points," said Watson, who is the department's community education coordinator. With only 15 public servants on staff in Moraga at any given time, residents should know what to do when

and if public assistance is unavailable, said Watson.

That is where NERT comes in. The Neighborhood Emergency Response Team's program of classes, taught by the town's Fire Department, focus on educating and empowering communities to know what to do in emergencies.

Based on a program launched by San Francisco's Fire Department, NERT teaches residents what to do during earthquakes, fires, chemical spills or any other life-threatening situation. Those who enroll learn how to "earthquake-proof" their homes and set up a medical emergency station.

Watson began taking a NERT teaching course, ironically, a few weeks before the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989. After the quake, the department began receiving several calls from concerned residents who wanted information on what they could do to be more prepared for emergencies. So Watson began to

put together a NERT program specifically for Moraga.

"I found out more and more information about how ill-prepared Moraga was and is," said Watson. In fact, the plan's committee — those responsible for implementing a disaster plan if necessary — no longer lived or worked in Moraga.

"Three people from the Fire Department had retired, the town manager had retired and the police chief had moved on. So there was no committee," said Watson. "We needed to be prepared for a disaster." Police Chief Barry Kalar heads the new disaster committee.

Gordon Nathan, who has been with Moraga Fire District for more than 30 years and also teaches the course, has experienced how quickly an emergency can spread available resources. "I feel strongly about people learning to protect themselves and their families," said Nathan.

He said during the Oakland

72-HOUR EMERGENCY KIT

Water — a minimum of 1 gallon per person per day for at least three days.

Food — enough to last family at least one week.

Bleach — one gallon to purify domestic water supply.

Sanitation supplies.

Hygiene supplies.

Flashlights, portable radio and extra batteries.

First-aid kit.

Prescription medicines, eye glasses.

Heavy clothes, boots or shoes.

Small hand tools and shut-off wrench.

Shovel.

Rope.

Camp stove and extra fuel.

Camp supplies — tent, sleeping bags, lantern.

Cooking and eating utensils, can opener.

Paper plates and cups.

Heavy-duty garbage bags.

Aluminum foil, plastic wrap, zip-lock bags.

Waterproof matches.

Pet provisions.

Money.

*Note: Perishable supplies should be replaced at least once a year.

Hills fire in 1991 and following the Loma Prieta quake in 1989, Bay Area public agencies simply couldn't provide the amount of assistance needed. "In major situations, the resources may not be

there," said Nathan.

The 15-hour course is available to groups of 17 to 25 residents, with a \$25 per person fee for class materials. For more information, call 376-5454.

MERGER

FROM PAGE 1

Supporters of the merger say they plan for the election on the tax to be held in March 1997.

At the same time, Moraga will hold an advisory vote on the merger. A five-person board — two representing districts in Orinda, two representing districts in Moraga and one representing a district both in Orinda and Moraga — could be elected then.

Moraga has had the right to tax its citizens for 16 years. There is, however, a surplus in the assessment fund and residents of the district have not paid fire flow taxes for two years.

The tax was at the heart of the debate at the Orinda Council meeting last week. The idea of spending funds for anything beside replacing the old narrow pipes that carry insufficient water to fight fires raised the ire of Charles Hill resident Ed Coyne.

"Put this off — make fire flow priority No. 1," Coyne said.

"I have to chuckle," added pipe advocate Pat Dunn. "The rate is based on what it costs to put out a fire — what if there's no water?"

But Tabor pointed out that 80 percent of the emergency calls in the Moraga-Orinda area are in response to medical needs. He argued that improving the paramedic situation should come first.

The marriage of the two firefighting districts is not envisioned as a perfectly balanced union. Moraga has the material advantages — new fire equipment, retrofitted fire stations, a well-respected paramedic service, a tax surplus and volunteers that raise additional funds.

The merger, however, will help

Moraga gain its independence from the county by having a local chief. The agreement also protects Moraga by guaranteeing its funds will not be merged with Orinda's.

Some residents at the Moraga meeting were not against the idea but said that residents should have been notified in advance and given more information on the merger. "There has been inadequate opportunity for public review. A comprehensive, detailed report ... was never made available to the community before this application was drafted," Betty Murphy said.

The commission assured those at the meeting that if the application is approved by LAFCO, the merger must still be approved by residents.

How the system would operate is far from its final definition. There are a number of yet unanswered cost questions, such as the price to retrofit the fire stations, the cost of replacing the water pipes and the amount of money EBMUD — and perhaps the city of Orinda — will contribute to the pipes.

"I'm concerned that there is not enough money to get it all done," Dunn said at Thursday's fire commission meeting.

Fire Commissioner John Wyro offered one possible answer. "The new board could take out a loan and pay it back with the fire flow tax."

But, he added, agreeing with Dunn, "The fire flow tax will not entirely solve the problem."

Orinda-Moraga fire merger talks progress

By Judith Scherr and Elaina Medina

STAFF WRITERS

In an attempt to douse flames sparked by opposition to an Orinda-Moraga fire district merger, Orinda city officials proposed adding replacement of old water pipes to the consolidation plan.

"... A portion of the ... proceeds generated from the ... combined district may be utilized to upgrade the water distribution system to improve fire suppression capabilities," read the addendum written by City Manager Bill Lindsay. It was presented Thursday to fire commissioners.

Lindsay's response came just two days after a City Council meeting where an intense debate erupted between those saying pipe replacement is paramount and others arguing the city's top priority ought to be the merger.

The city manager's recommendation was intended to blunt the factionalism which could kill the merger plan, according to Council member Allan Tabor, who attended the fire commission meeting.

The City Council and fire commissioners

planned to meet jointly and to vote separately on the plan Tuesday night, after the Sun's deadline.

Meanwhile, the five-member Moraga Fire Commission voted unanimously on Aug. 8 in favor of supporting the concept of the merger.

Carl Weber, the chairman of an Orinda task force to study the merger, presented the commission with a rough plan, which included an application to the Contra Costa County Local Agency Formation Commission requesting the reorganization. "We believe the formation of such a district is advantageous to both Orinda and Moraga," said Weber, who is an Orinda resident.

The application will be presented to the Moraga Town Council on Aug. 21.

The merger will bring the two departments under one local chief; leadership now comes from Pleasant Hill and is shared with the Contra Costa Fire District.

"Once we become independent, nobody has jurisdiction over us, except for the (new) commission," said Mike Majchszak, Fire Commissioner and Moraga Fire Committee member.

The new plan also would allow Orinda to use Moraga's highly touted paramedic system. Orinda now depends on the county-funded American Medical Response, whose paramedics are stationed in Walnut Creek.

The merged departments could decide to upgrade Orinda's three fire stations to earthquake and fire standards (two have shake roofs) and provide additional funds to reduce the fuel load caused by the build up of plant materials.

The benefits will not come without a price — a tax that Orindans will have to approve by a two-thirds vote.

The proposed assessment is called a fire flow tax and is calculated on the volume of water necessary to put out a fire of a house based on its size. Commissioners are considering a tax calculated at a rate which would cost owners of a 3,000-square-foot home \$59 to \$88 annually. Larger homes would be taxed more, smaller homes, less.

See MERGER, Page 2

FIRE MERGER: STEP-BY-STEP

•Aug. 6: Approval of the merger, in concept, by the Orinda City Council.

•Aug. 8: Recommendation by the Moraga Fire Commission, in concept, to the Town Council in favor of the merger.

Steps proposed:

•Aug. 13: Joint meeting of the Orinda Fire Commission and Orinda City Council. Approval by council and recommendation for approval by the Orinda Fire Commission to the Board of Supervisors.

•Aug. 21: Approval by Moraga Town Council.

•September: Approval by the Board of Supervisors.

•October: Public hearings and

approval by the Contra Costa County Local Agency Formation Commission.

•December: Vote by the Orinda City Council to put a ballot measure on March ballot in favor of a fire flow tax, and a similar vote by the Moraga Town Council to put an advisory measure on the ballot.

•March: A special election for a vote on fire flow tax by Orindans and an advisory vote by Moragans (and Orindans who live within the Moraga fire protection district boundaries), and a vote for the governing body of the new district.

•July 1: Effective date for consolidation.

The marriage of the two firefighting districts is not envisioned as a perfectly balanced union. Moraga has the material advantages — new fire equipment, retrofitted fire stations, a well-respected paramedic service, a tax surplus and volunteers that raise additional funds.

The merger, however, will help

tirely solve the problem.

Orinda Fire recommendations: Moraga merge, county contract

By Chloe Levy
STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — Orinda should either merge its fire district with Moraga Fire or mimic the Police Department and contract for personnel through the county, a city sub-committee concluded last week.

The Fire Protection and Emergency Services Committee — whose five members have been meeting since March — narrowed the field to two options by using a chart of pros and cons.

"We still haven't looked at the financial feasibility of these options," said Committee Member Carl Weber, adding that they will crunch numbers at their Aug. 24 meeting.

One of the paramount problems stressed by the committee is Orinda's lagging ambulance response times.

Average response times for medi-

cal emergencies in Orinda have stretched to 11 minutes, whereas in bordering Moraga the average is between three and four minutes.

Moraga Fire District — which employs firefighters who are also paramedics — does not rely on American Medical Response West, the private ambulance company that holds the county contract.

Moraga has given itself the option every year of taxing itself to fill any gap in its fire department's budget.

If Orinda hopes to merge with Moraga, a comparable fire-flow tax would probably be unavoidable, Committee Member Judy Shallot said.

If Orinda chooses to run its fire service as it does the Police Department, the City Council will contract out to the county for firefighters and

See FIRE, Page 2

FIRE

FROM PAGE 1

pay the county an administration fee.

Both options would give the city control over the department without burdening it with a lot of administrative duties.

And both solve firefighters' concerns that an independent district would leave them stranded with no chance of promotion or transfer.

Most committee members favor the merger option.

In the past, Moraga has expressed concerns over the relative state of di-

"We still haven't looked at the financial feasibility of these options."

—Carl Weber

lapitation of Orinda Fire. In Moraga, most of the fire equipment is new, while in Orinda some of the vehicles date back to the late 1970s.

And while half of Moraga's 24 firefighters are paramedics, none of Orinda's firefighters have paramedic training.

The Town Council in Moraga will discuss a merger with Orinda at its next meeting.

One of the options that the committee trashed was the option to consolidate with the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District.

A report released by the county last week speculated that Contra Costa Fire District is heading deep into the red. It projected a yearly deficit of nearly \$5 million by 1997.

That same report predicted dwindling resources for Orinda even if it remains independent from the district. Moraga is saved from the deficit by its fire-flow tax.

The committee plans to make a recommendation to the City Council in October.

Local firefighters may oppose merger

By Judith Scherr
STAFF WRITER

A proposal that would free the Moraga and Orinda fire departments from county control could face resistance from local firefighters, who say the agreement may hurt working conditions.

"There are good things about the merger and things we're not crazy about," said Orinda Fire Capt. Glen Lewis. Firefighters, he said, are taking a wait-and-see attitude.

On the plus side, Lewis points out that the plan to merge the Orinda and Moraga departments includes an equipment upgrade. On the other hand, firefighters fear working for an unknown entity, the proposed five-person body to be elected by Orinda and Moraga citizens, Lewis said.

"There is some apprehension — hopefully we'll be invited to work out the details," said Lewis, who criticized the committee for not involving firefighters in writing the application.

The application, still under revision, was written by the city and town managers and a two-city committee.

A resolution to support the application, approved last week by the Orinda City Council, will go to the Moraga Town Council tonight.

Firefighters say the agreement could limit the variety of situations they face, said Robert Recker, chair of Orinda's fire commission. "They like to fight big fires," he said.

The merged department could restrict training opportunities, Orinda Fire Capt. Lewis added. Training is

INSIDE

Orinda Council OKs merger. Page 2.

now done on a large scale with the 13-city Consolidated Fire District and on a smaller scale with the Larmorinda battalion.

Firefighters also fear a loss of the economies of scale they now enjoy under county supervision. "The trend is to downsize at the top," said Allen Little, Con Fire chief and interim chief in Orinda and Moraga. Administrative costs under the new agreement could cut into funds that would otherwise be used for fighting fires, he said.

The firefighter's union, the United Professional Fire Fighters Local 1230, has written to the citizen's committee asking for "a meet and confer" — a formal meeting between a union and its employers, according to union president Lou Paulson.

"They are yet to respond," Paulson said.

Carl Weber, an Orinda resident who chairs the joint committee, acknowledged receipt of the letter but said the elected board and not his committee will negotiate with the union.

The new district will benefit the firefighters, Weber argued, pointing out that firefighters who are cross-trained as paramedics — part of the new agreement — will get a 10 percent pay hike.

"We made it clear that we will honor all existing contracts," he added.

MERGER

FROM PAGE 1

Supporters of the merger say they plan for the election on the tax to be held in March 1997.

At the same time, Moraga will hold an advisory vote on the merger. A five-person board — two representing districts in Orinda, two representing districts in Moraga and one representing a district both in Orinda and Moraga — could be elected then.

Moraga has had the right to tax its citizens for 16 years. There is, however, a surplus in the assessment fund and residents of the district have not paid fire flow taxes for two years.

The tax was at the heart of the debate at the Orinda Council meeting last week. The idea of spending funds for anything beside replacing the old narrow pipes that carry insufficient water to fight fires raised the ire of Charles Hill resident Ed Coyne.

"Put this off — make fire flow priority No. 1," Coyne said.

"I have to chuckle," added pipe advocate Pat Dunn. "The rate is based on what it costs to put out a fire — what if there's no water?"

But Tabor pointed out that 80 percent of the emergency calls in the Moraga-Orinda area are in response to medical needs. He argued that improving the paramedic situation should come first.

The marriage of the two firefighting districts is not envisioned as a perfectly balanced union. Moraga has the material advantages — new fire equipment, retrofitted fire stations, a well-respected paramedic service, a tax surplus and volunteers that raise additional funds.

The merger, however, will help

Moraga gain its independence from the county by having a local chief. The agreement also protects Moraga by guaranteeing its funds will not be merged with Orinda's.

Some residents at the Moraga meeting were not against the idea but said that residents should have been notified in advance and given more information on the merger. "There has been inadequate opportunity for public review. A comprehensive, detailed report... was never made available to the community before this application was drafted," Betty Murphy said.

The commission assured those at the meeting that if the application is approved by LAFCO, the merger must still be approved by residents.

How the system would operate is far from its final definition. There are a number of yet unanswered cost questions, such as the price to retrofit the fire stations, the cost of replacing the water pipes and the amount of money EBMUD — and perhaps the city of Orinda — will contribute to the pipes.

"I'm concerned that there is not enough money to get it all done," Dunn said at Thursday's fire commission meeting.

Fire Commissioner John Wyro offered one possible answer. "The new board could take out a loan and pay it back with the fire flow tax."

But, he added, agreeing with Dunn, "The fire flow tax will not entirely solve the problem."

Contra Costa Star
8-21-96

Orinda OKs merger over some protests

By Judith Scherr
STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — A proposal to consolidate the Orinda and Moraga fire departments gained unanimous City Council support last week, despite criticism from the League of Women Voters and unanswered questions from citizens.

(Council member Laura Abrams was absent.)

At least one supervisor, who sits on the Local Agency Formation Commission, has also voiced concerns.

The agreement goes before the Moraga Town Council tonight and to the Local Agency Formation Commission in October. If approved, it will go to the voters in Orinda and Moraga in March — when Orinda voters will be asked to approve a tax.

League of Women Voters activist Betty Murphy asked the Council to slow down.

"This application has raised many complex issues about which the citizens must be informed and consulted," said Murphy. "Inadequate effort has been made to solicit their input."

Council members argued, however, that LAFCO will hold hearings and citizens can study the merger before the March vote.

County Supervisor Mark DeSaulnier, a LAFCO member, said in an interview Monday that the application "presents a bit of a problem." He said he fears administrative costs will rise for residents of Orinda and Moraga and that mutual aid — fire districts helping one another — could be negatively affected.

DeSaulnier said he will withhold judgment until he sees the written

application.

The new fire district would begin as a loosely consolidated agency and wouldn't completely merge until finances and equipment of the two parts are equal.

The district would be overseen by a five-member board initially elected by districts. When the two districts become financially and materially equal, the governing board is to be elected at large.

Because of the initial inequality — Orinda needs the paramedic capability, the new equipment and the earthquake safe stations that Moraga has — the merged district will keep money and materials separate in the early years.

In order to catch up to Moraga, Orinda will impose a tax similar to the one Moraga has been able to levy for 16 years — if voters give a two-thirds approval.

Adding to the complexity, Orinda has water pressure needs and plans to upgrade water pipes. Citizens questioned the language of the merger application and demanded that it say clearly that some of the tax money will be spent on water pressure needs.

The Council and the Orinda Fire Commission, which met jointly with the Council, agreed. But how much money will come from the fire tax and what responsibility other agencies will have remains unclear.

Ambulance services also will be a sticking point. Moraga has promised residents that neither they nor their insurance companies will have to pay for ambulance calls — that includes asking insurance companies to reimburse them. Orinda officials want to charge insurance companies for emergency services.

Contra Costa Sun 8-21-96

Firefighters not sure they'll back Moraga, Orinda merger plan

Workers worry about new entity, training

By JUDITH SCHERR
Staff writer

A proposal that would free the Moraga and Orinda fire departments from county control could face resistance from firefighters, who say the agreement may hurt working conditions.

"There are good things about the merger and things we're not crazy about," said Orinda Fire Capt. Glen Lewis. Firefighters, he said, are taking a wait-and-see attitude.

On the plus side, Lewis said the plan to merge the Orinda and Moraga departments includes an equipment upgrade.

On the other hand, firefighters fear working for an unknown entity, the proposed five-person body to be elected by Orinda and Moraga residents, Lewis said.

"There is some apprehension. Hopefully we'll be invited to work out the details," said Lewis, who criticized the merger planning committee for not involving firefighters in writing the application.

The application, still under revision, was written by the city and town managers and a two-city committee. Orindans and Moragans do not want to be "dependent on the decisions of a distant County Board of Supervisors," says the merger application.

In October, it will be presented to the Local Agency Formation Commission, the body that can create or dissolve the county's various government bodies.

A resolution to support the application, approved last week by the Orinda City Council, will go to the Moraga Town Council tonight.

Firefighters say the agreement could limit the variety of situations they face, said Robert Recker, chairman of Orinda's fire commission. "They like to fight big fires," he said.

The merged department could restrict training opportunities, Orinda Fire Capt. Lewis added. Training is done on a large scale with the 13-city Consolidated Fire District and on a smaller scale with the Larmorinda battalion.

MEETING

Moraga Town Council, 7:30 p.m., auditorium, Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School, 1010 Camino Pablo.

"There are good things about the merger and things we're not crazy about."

— Capt. Glen Lewis,
Orinda Fire Dept.

Firefighters also fear a loss of the economies of scale they now enjoy under county supervision. "The trend is to downsize at the top," said Allen Little, Consolidated Fire chief and interim chief in Orinda and Moraga. Administrative costs under the new agreement could cut into funds that would otherwise be used for fighting fires, he said.

The firefighter's union, the United Professional Fire Fighters Local 1230, has written to the citizen's committee asking for "a meet and confer" — a formal meeting between a union and its employers, according to union President Lou Paulson.

"They are yet to respond," Paulson said.

Carl Weber, an Orinda resident who is chairman of the joint committee, acknowledged receipt of the letter but said the elected board and not his committee will negotiate with the union.

"We go out of business after the election," Weber said.

The new district will benefit the firefighters, Weber argued. He said that firefighters who are cross-trained as paramedics — part of the merger plan — will get a 10 percent pay hike.

"We made it clear that we will honor all existing contracts," he said.

**PERSONALLY
SPEAKING**

By Lois Larrance-Requist

At issue: mergers

Fire districts — to merge or not to merge. This was discussed recently at the Moraga Council.

Carl Weber, who led a committee studying the matter, presented a brief, excellent summary, and was congratulated for his efforts. I also applaud his work. He and the other educated citizens who have spent many hours on this issue know more about it than I do, and may be correct in urging the Moraga Council to approve — as it did, sending the application to the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). At that point, public hearings are held.

If approved at all points, an election would be held in March 1997 in Orinda and Moraga. Three issues would be voted on and all three would have to be approved for the merger to take place.

- Orindans, by a two-thirds majority, would have to vote for a fire flow tax of probably 6 cents per \$1,000 of assessed evaluation, for upgrades.

- Both Orindans and Moragans also would have to approve the merger, by a simple majority.

During the public comment section, a Moraga resident said, "I understand what this would do for Orinda. What does it do for Moraga?" The answer: the gaining of local control and a fire chief.

The current disparity between the systems in the two communities is a major concern. Moraga has wide streets, good water delivery systems, paramedic services and fire stations that are earthquake safe. Orinda, on the other hand, has older sections that back up on the hills and do not always have adequate water delivery to fight fires. Orinda has no paramedics. Their buildings aren't retrofitted for earthquakes. They have a freeway running through town, causing additional demands on their system.

To equalize this situation, the recommendation is to have a four-year phase in, in which Orindans would be paying a tax and upgrading their system. To my understanding, this would not do anything about the inadequate water delivery in older areas. Apparently, this is EBMUD's job and upgrading is not likely to happen soon. It could take 15 years.

Local control is a major reason for the merger: becoming separate and independent from the county. Apparently there is reasonable concern that, in the present situation, taxes paid locally might be spent in other part of the county. Additionally, amalgamation of the two districts could bring about certain economies of scale and would allow for back-up if one paramedic unit is busy.

Some residents are concerned about insurance. Orinda's proximity to the disastrous Oakland fire may affect rates. Would Moragans be buying into that problem? This and other questions were not answered.

When I spoke, it was to say that I didn't know whether the merger was a good idea or not. One of the reasons I was uncertain: written material had been unavailable to me. At the town office, someone had illustrated — by holding their fingers apart — that the documentation was about two inches thick, and therefore could not be copied. Unless I wanted to sit there and read it, I was out of luck.

There was a report. We were simply not all privy to it. In spite of that, the mayor said more than once, "It's in the report. Read the report."

Someone had gone to the library to read the report. It wasn't there.

I urge the town of Moraga to adopt "user friendly" policies toward inquiring citizens, to make access to information easier. When citizens ask, some attempt to meet their request should be made.

The Council was advised, over and over, to approve the application. It is going to be on the ballot anyway. Plenty of time to get all the questions asked and answered. We're in a time crunch.

That's called begging the question — as opposed to answering it.

The information should have been available to all interested parties ahead of time. Let's hope that's what happens in the future.

Moraga resident Lois Larrance-Requist's column appears every other week in the Sun.

Moraga Council OKs fire merger

By Elaina Medina

STAFF WRITER

8-28-96

CC Sun

MORAGA — Residents packed last week's Town Council meeting to discuss combining the Moraga and Orinda Fire Protection Districts. The proposal would mean reorganizing the two districts into an independent district with its own elected board.

After hearing from a number of residents — including a concerned firefighter — the Council voted 4-0, with Frank Sperling absent, to apply to the county's Local Agency Formation Committee (LAFCO) requesting the merger.

Before LAFCO can approve the application it will hold its own public hearings. If approved, the two communities will put the question before the voters in March.

Although some of the plan's details are still sketchy, the Council members said they were sat-

isfied with the proposal.

"I think it's important to have local control," said Councilman Jim Sweeny.

Mayor Cherie Grant agreed. "This (merger) is the only way to achieve local control," she said.

The county Board of Supervisors currently governs both separate districts. A merged district would have its own five-member governing board elected by "mini-districts": two from Orinda, two from Moraga and one from a combined area of both communities.

The district would begin with two service zones, based on current district boundaries until parity is reached.

Fire Commissioner Mike Cory said the money would remain separate until Orinda catches up. "Funds raised in Moraga will be spent in Moraga, and funds raised in Orinda will be spent in Orinda," Cory said.

See MERGER, Page 2

MERGER

FROM PAGE 1

The Orinda ballot would include a measure asking voters to allow a six cent fire-flow tax to earthquake-proof firehouses, eliminate current debt, improve water systems and upgrade equipment.

Moraga has had authority to levy such a tax for 16 years. There is now a surplus in the town's fund, and residents haven't paid fire-flow taxes for two years.

Firefighter Steve Mazaika said many firefighters are concerned about working in a new district. "Those firemen out there don't know what's going to happen. We could get lowered wages and sick leave. ... Internal things should be looked at. There (are) people that want to leave," said Mazaika, who has been a firefighter for 35 years.

"You think you have happy firemen — you don't," he added.

Richard Olson, a task force member, tried to reassure Mazaika. "Trust us. ... We will pay what it takes to have the best people," he said.

Resident Graig Crossley encouraged the council to support the application and place the merger on the ballot, giving residents an opportunity to digest the materials and arrive at a decision.

The Council expressed concern about the question of ambulance services. In the merger, Orinda residents would be charged for ambulance services and Moraga would continue not to charge its residents.

"We have a distinct difference. That doesn't make me feel comfortable," said Sweeny.

Lot line unchanged

In other action, the Council refused to approve a resident's request for reconsideration of an approved lot line adjustment.

Dennis Cunnane asked the Council to revoke their July 10 decision to allow Batavia Land Co. to adjust the lot lines on a 310-acre Mulholland Ridge property. With Mike Majchrzak opposing, the Council rejected his request 3-1, saying he provided no new information that was not already considered for the approval.

The Council also approved a citizen survey that will be sent to all residents to find out how they feel about the need for more and better facilities in the town.

LAFCO would be next stop

By ANDY JOKELSON

Staff writer

ORINDA — A proposal to merge the Orinda and Moraga fire districts includes asking Orindans to approve a tax for paramedic service and upgraded firehouses.

The Orinda City Council tonight will consider sending an application for creation of an independent Moraga-Orinda Fire Protection District to the county Local Agency Formation Commission.

The Moraga Town Council will consider the application Aug. 21.

A committee representing both cities drafted the application and unanimously recommended approval.

Members envision asking Orinda voters to approve a tax measure in March 1997. The measure would need a two-thirds majority for approval.

The application does not specify the tax, but committee Chairman Carl Weber said most Orinda homeowners probably would pay less than \$100 a year.

"We're trying to come up with what we think are very realistic numbers that accurately reflect probable costs, and we are being as conservative as we can," Weber said.

The Moraga district has paramedic service and the authority to levy a fire-flow tax, but does not impose one and is not likely to because it has ample reserves, Weber said.

The merger would create two service zones — one identical with the existing Orinda district, the other identical to the Moraga district. An Orinda tax would apply only in the Orinda zone.

The tax would be multiplied by an estimated number of gallons of water per minute needed to extinguish a fire in order to compute the

amount owed.

Weber said he expects that the proposed tax will be between 4 and 6 cents.

A 4-cent tax could cost about \$48 to \$50 a year for a 2,000-square-foot home and about \$60 for a 3,000-square-foot house, he said. A 5-cent tax could cost about \$60 a year for a 2,000-square-foot home and \$75 for a 3,000-square-foot house.

The district would have a five-member board elected by Orindans and Moragans.

It would be independent of the county, whose fire district now manages the Orinda and Moraga departments.

In May 1994, LAFCO ordered dissolution of the Orinda district and a merger with the county district.

A petition drive forced an election on that issue, and in November 1994, Orinda voters overwhelmingly overturned the dissolution and merger.

County Supervisor Mark DeSaulnier, who sits on LAFCO, said he's open to listening to the Orinda-Moraga proposal.

If communities "have worked out their differences and financially it makes sense, then generally I'm supportive of proposals like that," he said.

Supervisor Jeff Smith was skeptical that residents would support a proposal that would, he said, increase taxes in Orinda and Moraga.

The proposal estimates the district would have nearly \$8.5 million in operating expenses for fiscal 1997-98.

The district would accumulate nearly \$279,000 a year for replacement of equipment.

The plan calls for seismic retrofitting for Orinda's three firehouses, Moraga's have already undergone retrofitting.

TIMES $\frac{8}{96}$

Local Fire Commissions vote to approve merger

SUN STAFF

9-4-96 C.C. Sun

The Moraga and Orinda Fire Commissions each voted unanimously on Wednesday night to support the merger of the departments.

Attendance at both meetings was just a handful, down considerably from the last meetings — where many residents debated the pros and cons of the merger.

The Moraga vote came after the commissioners reviewed the latest version of the proposal and made some comments to Carl Weber, the chairman of a task force studying the merger.

"They were really insignificant — kind of like editorial matters," Commissioner Ray Fish said on Thursday.

At the Orinda meeting, concerns were raised about the city's water supply.

"One agency has legal responsibility for the water

supply and that is East Bay MUD," said Orinda resident Irene McDonald.

The East Bay Municipal Utility District is scheduled to submit its water analysis by Nov. 27.

"It is not a question of either/or — whether to merge or fix the water supply," said Commissioner John Wyro.

The merger would bring the two departments under one local chief and would allow Orinda to use Moraga's paramedic system. Orinda now depends on the county-funded American Medical Response, whose paramedics are stationed in Walnut Creek.

The Moraga and Orinda City Councils have already given their approvals to the merger.

The two Fire Commissions will submit their applications initially to the county Board of Supervisors and then to the Local Agency Formation Commission.

Moraga Council debates ceiling on fire-flow tax

By Gwendelyn Pinkela

CORRESPONDENT

9-18-96 C.C. Sun

MORAGA — Though the fire-flow tax isn't within the Town Council's jurisdiction, at least one member thinks the tax's ceiling should be reduced — and he wants it put to the voters.

If a reduction in the fire-flow tax is put on the March ballot, two-thirds of the voters would have to approve it.

The fire-flow tax is based on property and provides funds for fire protection and prevention services. The amount of the tax is determined by the Moraga Fire Protection District. In 1991, voters approved a 30-cent maximum tax per gallon of water it takes to put out a fire at a certain

house.

The amount residents have paid in Moraga, however, has never been near that cap. The last time the tax was rendered — in 1994-95 — it was at a rate of 3.5 cents per gallon.

Council member Jim Sweeny, who brought up the issue at last Wednesday's meeting, said it may be determined that the 6 cent price per gallon proposed for Orinda property owners may be sufficient for Moragans.

"If there is discomfort that 6 cents is too low, then raise it, but I am not comfortable with it sitting up that high," he said.

Other Council members, including Frank Sperling, Michael Majchrzak and Michael Harris, said

that having this issue on the ballot at the same time as the merger of the Orinda and Moraga fire departments would confuse voters.

Sweeny disagreed that the voters would find this issue confusing and felt the time is right now. Even if the voters decided against the merger, they could vote for the tax, he said.

During public comment, Moraga resident Dale Walwark said he agreed with Sweeny. "I think it should be presented separately (on the ballot)," Walwark said, adding that the Council should give the voters some credit on understanding the issue.

Resident John Connors said Sweeny's suggestion is admirable, but it may be better to wait to reduce

the tax to see if additional dollars are needed for the fire department down the line.

Funds raised by the tax are under the supervision of the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors and are used for fire equipment, salaries of firefighters and any other fire-related expenses.

Majchrzak, who is also on the Fire Commission, said he would ask that this matter be placed on the commission's agenda for an upcoming meeting. Majchrzak also said the Council could send something to the Fire Commission asking them to look into lowering the tax.

"I think it's an issue that needs to be aired out," he said.

Orinda wants panel approval for fire district merger

ANDY JOKELSON

writer

ORINDA — The City Council has voted to seek a county commission's approval for a proposed merger of the Orinda and Moraga Fire Protection Districts.

The council also anticipates asking voters in March to approve the merger and a tax to help give Orinda paramedic service, strengthen firehouses, upgrade equipment and improve the water distribution system.

The merger plan would allow a portion of the Orinda tax proceeds, combined with money from other agencies, to finance wastewater pipe improvements. Many Orindans, citing inadequate water pressure in the aftermath of a major fire, have pushed the city to pursue improvements to the East Bay

Municipal Utility District's aging distribution system.

The council approved a maximum tax rate that would, for example, cost the owner of a 2,000-square-foot home \$72.36 a year. The annual cost would be \$81 for a 2,500-square-foot home and \$88.68 for a 3,000-square-foot house.

The tax, computed with a complex formula that includes square footage, would need approval by two-thirds of voters. Council members voiced a desire to keep the tax low enough so it can gain voter approval.

If it goes over \$100 a year, "you're going to lose a lot of people," Vice Mayor Sarge Littlehale said at the council's Tuesday meeting with the Orinda fire district commission.

The council rejected a League of

Women Voters request to delay submission of a merger application to the Contra Costa County Local Agency Formation Commission until more hearings are held.

"You're not answering our questions. You're not giving people a chance to ask the questions," said league spokeswoman Betty Murphy.

Council members disagreed. They contended there have been numerous hearings and other opportunities for the public to participate for more than a year and there will be many others.

"We need to go to the electorate as one, but to delay the process doesn't accomplish a thing," said Councilwoman Joyce Hawkins.

Moraga's Town Council on Aug. 21 will consider joining Orinda in applying to LAFCO to approve the merger plan, which

residents of both cities drafted. The cities want to submit the application by Sept. 1 so LAFCO can consider the matter in October and take action by November. That would give city officials time to get measures on the March ballot and campaign for them.

The proposal would create an independent Moraga-Orinda Fire Protection District governed by a five-member board elected initially from wards and eventually at-large. The county now governs the fire districts.

A merged district would start with two service zones, one of them identical with the existing Orinda district, the other identical to Moraga's.

An Orinda tax would affect only the Orinda zone. It is intended to help bring the zone up to parity with Moraga on para-

medic service, modernization of equipment and seismic retrofitting of firehouses.

Moraga no longer levies a tax because it has ample reserves, but would retain authority to impose one. It also does not charge for ambulance service by its paramedics.

Orinda council members favor charging an ambulance transport fee in the Orinda zone to generate an estimated \$150,000 to \$180,000 a year. They emphasized that insurance companies, not residents, would pay the fee and that a resident who does not have coverage would not owe anything to the district, which would absorb the cost.

Ray Davis, an Orinda council candidate, decried the notion of charging for ambulance service and said the proposed tax was unnecessary.

Fire merger OK'd for March vote of residents

By Judith Scherr
STAFF WRITER

MARTINEZ — A county agency has cleared the way for voters to decide if an independent Moraga-Orinda fire district will be created.

"This is America — people have the right to vote; it's their decision," said Dwight Meadows of Oakley, who represents the Ironhouse Sanitation District and chairs the Local Agency Formation Commission.

The 6-0 vote on Oct. 9 came after heated public testimony for and against the proposed district, sparks that could portend a fight before the special March elections. (LAFCO member and Supervisor Mark DeSaulnier abstained from the discussion and vote because he has accepted contributions from the firefighters' union and said he may have a conflict of interest.)

Voters living in the Moraga Fire Prevention District, which includes Canyon and parts of Orinda, and those living in the Orinda Fire Prevention District will decide in separate votes if they want to break from the county fire district and merge the two departments.

A fire services tax must be approved by two-thirds of Orinda voters. Moraga already has such a tax, although it does not always opt to levy it. If approved in Orinda, the tax will reflect the amount of water it takes to put out a fire in a home of a specific size. A homeowner with a house of 2,900 square feet, for example, would pay \$87 annually.

Representatives from the firefighters union, the League of Women Voters and several Lamorinda residents questioned the proposal.

The cost for those remaining in the district will be higher, said Mary Dunne of Lafayette. She noted that while the county will continue to employ a chief, fewer taxpayers will remain in the district to support his salary and equipment.

Another opposing argument was that Orinda would use more than its share of resources. Orinda's fire stations need earthquake retrofitting, its water pipes need upgrading, its heavy fuel load, by law, must be abated and it has no paramedics.

"Moraga's ... fire-flow tax is going to subsidize Orinda's needs," said Dan Murphy, an Orinda resident living in the Moraga Fire Prevention District. Murphy argued that Orinda needs a higher fire-flow tax to cover expenses.

But supporters of the proposal, weighing in with the force of a united Moraga Town Council and Orinda City Council, said the proposal guards against that. "Equalization is not a prerequisite to an effective and equitable consolidation," said a memo to

Contra Costa Sun
10-16-99

Moraga backs plan to team with Orinda on fire district

By ANDY JOKELSON

Staff writer

MORAGA — The Town Council will join its Orinda counterpart in asking a county agency to allow a proposed merger of two fire districts.

The proposal calls for consolidating the Moraga and Orinda fire protection districts into an independent district with its own elected board.

The cities will ask the county Local Agency Formation Commission to approve the proposed Moraga-Orinda Fire Protection District.

"It'll give us an opportunity to have local control here in Moraga and Orinda for our fire service," said Moraga Councilman Jim

Sweeny.

"I think that it should, if anything, strengthen our overall services."

"I support it mainly because I honestly feel that it's the very best that we can do for Moraga," said Mayor Cherie Grant. A consolidated district would reduce administrative costs, she said, and enhance paramedic and fire service for Moraga by having backup from Orinda.

The Moraga council voted 4-0 on Wednesday to apply to LAFCO with Orinda, whose council took the same step Aug. 13. Residents of both cities developed the proposal, which the councils intend to put on their ballots in March.

The Orinda ballot would include a measure asking voters to allow a tax on Orin-

'I think that it (merger) should, if anything, strengthen our overall services.'

— Jim Sweeny,
Moraga councilman

dans to help upgrade paramedic service there, strengthen firehouses, upgrade equipment and improve the water distribution system.

The tax is intended primarily to help bring

Orinda's fire protection and paramedic services and facilities to parity with Moraga's.

The Moraga district already has authority to levy such a tax, though it no longer does so.

Under the merger plan, that authorization would continue, with proceeds from any Moraga tax usable only in that former district.

A merged district would start with two service zones, one of them identical with the existing Orinda district, the other identical to Moraga's. The proposed Orinda tax would apply only to the Orinda service zone.

The county Board of Supervisors currently governs the Moraga and Orinda districts. A merged district would have its own five-member governing board, elected initially from

wards and eventually at-large.

Some opponents of an immediate merger application urged the Moraga council to wait until Orinda's paramedic service, firefighting equipment and firehouses are upgraded to match Moraga's.

Betty Murphy of the League of Women Voters urged the Moraga council to wait until the cities better inform the public on the proposal and get its support.

"If there's anything that needs to be corrected, it should be corrected now before they have this combined board, because they should be focusing on providing the best fire and emergency services, not on settling disputes between the two former fire districts," she said.

FIRE

FROM PAGE 1

LAFCO written by Carl Weber, chair of the Orinda-Moraga task force that worked out the details of the proposed merger.

The two districts will be unequal in the initial years, with Orinda gradually catching up to Moraga. Until then, funds will be collected and spent separately in the two parts of the merged district.

For example, in the first year, Orinda will be able to replace three vacant firefighter positions with firefighters cross-trained as paramedics. The city will continue to rely on American Medical Response, as it does now, to serve most its paramedic needs until it catches up with Moraga — which currently has 14 authorized paramedic positions.

"It will take time," Weber said.

Firefighters could move to the forefront of the electoral battle. The union was to detail its position before the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, after the Sun's deadline.

Lou Paulson, president of the United Professional Fire Fighters, said his union opposes the merger and its "increased administrative costs."

Weber countered that the new district could enhance firefighters' working conditions. In his memo, Weber pointed to a county administrator's report that said the county fire district had "significant funding problems ... that will require substantial budget and service reductions."

"In contrast," Weber wrote, "the budget projections for the new combined District ... show a much more stable fiscal environment than that described by the County Administrator."

10-10-96 The Times

Orinda, Moraga fire district plan OK'd for vote

By ARIEL AMBRUSTER
Times Martinez Bureau

MARTINEZ — Voters in Orinda and Moraga are now free to cast their ballots in March for a local, independent fire district after a countywide commission Wednesday approved the merger.

With a cry of local control, leaders of the two hillside communities launched the drive for firefighting independence, saying residents don't trust Contra Costa County to provide the best service.

The two communities now have separate fire districts, but they are governed in Martinez by the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors.

A number of Contra Costa's small, upscale communities have wrestled lately with county supervisors for power over services.

Supervisors last month agreed to take control of garbage franchising away from the Kensington Community Services District. And they've angered San Ramon Valley city leaders by limiting local participation in development projects.

Local leaders complain that county supervisors ignore community concerns and don't provide a high enough quality of service. Supervisors say the localities tend to view the trees instead of the forest, and countywide services can be provided with greater equity and efficiency.

ciency.

Opponents of the proposed Orinda-Moraga fire district, including a majority of supervisors and some area residents, have questioned whether the proposal will pencil out. And they note that the plan won't work unless two-thirds of Orinda voters agree in March to a fire tax that could cost an average homeowner between \$70 and \$90 a year.

But the merger plan won 6-0 approval from the Local Agency Formation Commission, a body of city, county and special district leaders that authorizes any changes in government boundaries.

Commissioners said Orinda and Moraga residents should be able to weigh in on the idea. "This is America — people have the right to vote," said Chairman Dwight Meadows of Oakley. Firefighters' union President Lou Paulson asked commissioners

to hold off on a decision until county supervisors next week could consider a report on the matter from fire officials.

But others said the matter needed to be decided this month to make the March ballot.

"The maneuvering of the Board of Supervisors to try to delay this is simply that," said Moraga resident Merle Gilliland, "a delaying tactic ... so this effort can't be successful."

County seeks new option on fire plan

Move aims to halt joint services for Orinda, Moraga

By MICHAEL HYTHA
Times Martinez Bureau

MARTINEZ — Trying to head off Orinda's move to form a joint fire department with Moraga, Contra Costa supervisors Tuesday ordered the drafting of the county's "best offer" to improve emergency services.

Supervisor Jeff Smith of Martinez, whose district includes Orinda and Moraga, pushed for a delay in considering a key step needed for the two districts to merge and break away from the county.

On a 4-1 vote, supervisors approved his proposal to instead study how long it would take to hire paramedics, retrofit fire stations and make other improvements.

Smith believes the county can win an advantage over merger proponents by improving services without raising taxes. A merger with Moraga would require a tax hike to pay for the added administrative costs.

"I think it will be hard to get Orinda to approve a fire tax. I think you're going to have a hard time," Smith told merger supporters.

Supervisors asked fire officials to report back in three weeks, which would leave enough time for merger proponents to win the needed approval from another agency in time for a special election in March.

Proponents complain their taxes subsidize services elsewhere in the county. A modest tax increase in exchange for more local control is a fair trade, they say.

The maximum tax rate for a 2,000-square-foot house would come to \$72.36 a year.

"Our constituents want a separate independent agency," said Orinda Mayor pro tem Sarge Littlehale. "With the constraints on the county, I don't believe you can come through."

The Local Agency Formation Commission, which regulates government jurisdictions, must approve the merger before it can appear on the ballot.

Supervisor Gayle Bishop of the San Ramon Valley, the only supervisor to vote against presenting the alternative to the planned merger, said Orinda voters were justifiably skeptical because of past county failures to fulfill promises of improved services.

"We set ourselves on a course a few years ago and that course is paved in mistrust," Bishop said. "I don't think we can do a very good job of convincing people they should trust the county."

County takes 2nd look at fire merger proposal

By Michael Hytha
and Bev Britton
STAFF WRITERS

MARTINEZ — Trying to head off the move to form a joint fire department in Orinda and Moraga, Contra Costa County supervisors have ordered the drafting of the county's "best offer" to improve emergency services.

Supervisor Jeff Smith of Martinez, whose district includes Orinda and Moraga, pushed for a delay in considering a key step needed for the two districts to merge and break away from the county.

At its meeting on Sept. 24, the board was scheduled to vote on whether to approve a property tax transfer from the existing Moraga and Orinda fire departments to the new combined department. After a vote on that failed 3-2, supervisors voted 4-1 to approve Smith's proposal to instead study how long it would take to hire paramedics, retrofit fire stations and make other improvements.

Supervisors asked officials from the 13-city Consolidated Fire District to report back at the Oct. 15 meeting.

The move came after discussion of written opposition of the merger

from ConFire. The Orinda resident who leads the committee seeking the merger said he hadn't before seen the material, which was included in the agenda packets handed out at the meeting.

"Trying to rebut all of those contentions orally was very difficult," Carl Weber said in an interview on Wednesday. "We were at an extreme disadvantage and they (ConFire) knew it."

Smith believes the county can one-up merger proponents by improving services without raising taxes. A merger would require a fire-flow tax in Orinda to pay for the added administrative costs.

"I think it will be hard to get Orinda to approve a fire tax," Smith said at the meeting.

Chief Allen Little said he will look at ways to fund paramedics, new equipment and seismic upgrades with existing general fund money. "I think we'll have to look at it on a schedule. There's not enough money to do it all in one year — even with a fire-flow tax," he said in an interview Monday.

The proposed merger has already received the backing of the city coun-

See MERGER, Page 2

MERGER

FROM PAGE 1

cils and fire commissions in Orinda and Moraga. And Weber said in an interview that he believes there is support from the community for the tax, which he maintains is necessary.

"There isn't a person in our group that wants to impose a tax," Weber said. "We are doing this reluctantly because it's the only way we could see to get these services."

Merger proponents complain their taxes subsidize services elsewhere in the county. A modest tax increase in exchange for more local control is a fair trade, they say. The maximum tax rate for a 2,000-square-foot house would come to \$72.36 a year.

"Our constituents want a separate independent agency," Orinda City Council member Sarge Littlehale said at the meeting. "With the constraints on the county, I don't believe you can come through."

Supervisor Gayle Bishop of the San Ramon Valley, the only supervisor to vote against presenting the competing alternative to the planned merger, said Orinda voters were justifiably skeptical because of past county failures to fulfill promises of improved services.

"We set ourselves on a course a few years ago and that course is paved in mistrust," Bishop said. "I don't think we can do a very good job of convincing people they should trust the county."

Despite the delay on the county level, the proposed merger remains on the agenda for the Oct. 9 meeting of the Local Agency Formation Commission. LAFCO, which regulates government jurisdictions, must approve the merger before it can appear on the ballot in March.

At the Oct. 9 meeting, LAFCO will consider whether a property tax exchange agreement is a prerequisite to hearing the application.

Weber said their lawyer, Harrie Steiner, has filed an opinion with the county that such an agreement is not necessary. County counsel has not yet provided a written response.

Contra Costa Sun 10-2-76

Bear-ly disguised



JESSICA BRANDI LIFLAND/SUN

Alex Benvenue, 5, reaches out to meet Smokey Bear, aka reserve firefighter Atanacio Garcia, at the open house at the Orinda Fire Department on Saturday. At right is Alex's father, Steve Benvenue of Orinda. In the background is Orinda's new \$285,000 fire engine.

Wednesday, October 23, 1996

Contra Costa Sun — 3

Fire chief delays report on adding services in Orinda

By Judith Scherr
STAFF WRITER

MARTINEZ — Supervisors expected county fire district officials to tell them last week how they could provide Orindans with better emergency services without a merger of the Orinda and Moraga fire districts.

While maintaining that the county would be able to provide a higher standard of paramedic service and make fire stations earthquake and fire safe, county Fire Chief Allen Little told the Board of Supervisors that he was still unable to say how he would pay for the services.

He said he lacked information on the costs to make fire stations accessible to the disabled, an upgrade mandated when public buildings face major remodeling.

Supervisor Mark DeSaulnier pressed Little for his report. "You said all the things Orinda and Moraga wanted to accomplish could be accomplished within the (present) structure," DeSaulnier said. "We need to more clearly define where we're coming from. I'd like to offer a valid alternative (to the creation of an independent district)."

Little promised the report in two to three weeks. DeSaulnier's comments followed Little's annual report on the fire district's performance.

As part of that report, Little told the supervisors the county fire district is "challenged by fiscal problems." Rising costs are eating into reserves which will be depleted in a few years,

he said.

In an interview after the meeting, Little explained that the financial problems would not affect the Orinda and Moraga districts as they are now constituted. As districts dependent on the county, but not part of the county Fire Prevention District, the two cities' fire prevention budgets are kept separately from the rest of the county.

Orinda City Council member Joyce Hawkins said in a separate interview, however, that the state could reverse itself and decide that the county could use Orinda's property tax money in other areas of the county — as was done before 1993.

Firefighters' Union President Lou Poulson accompanied Little to the supervisor's meeting, but the firefighter did not address the board. The union is opposing the merger.

Poulson said after the meeting that although the county fire district may be in financial trouble, firefighters do not want to leave the comfort of the county district to face an unknown situation.

Citizens who wrote the proposed merger plan said firefighters will fare better in an independent district. But Poulson said those who are making the promises "are not the people who will make the decisions."

The board of directors of the district, to be elected when the district is formed, will negotiate pay and benefits, he said.

The people who prepared the plan "are not held accountable — there's no guarantees," Poulson said.

\$53 million estimate for new pipes

By Judith Scherr
STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — A pipe dream took a nightmarish turn Wednesday night when fire commissioners learned it could cost \$53 million to boost water pressure to meet the city's firefighting needs.

On Nov. 27, commissioners got their first glimpse of a report released earlier that day by the East Bay Municipal Utility District.

No source of funding was identified in the document, which was based on a Fire Protection District-funded study and prepared by EBMUD's Water Distribution Planning Division.

The report said that the water district accepted responsibility for keeping water lines in repair "as designed." When it is less costly to replace a pipe than repair it, the water district replaces the pipes and in doing so "evaluates the cost implications of improving the facilities to meet today's fire-flow standards as set by the local fire agencies," the document said.

INSIDE

Orinda-Moraga fire district merger on agenda for county Board of Supervisors.

Page 3.

City Council members are on record disagreeing with the water district, saying it is EBMUD's responsibility to upgrade Orinda's water lines to meet firefighting demands.

Fire Commissioner Pete Wilson asked how the water district prioritized replacement of 31 percent of the city's 610,000 feet of pipes, but Capt. Willis Lamm said it left prioritization to local control.

"EBMUD did not want to decide where to scale back," Lamm said.

In addition to replacing the 30- to 60-year-old narrow and corroded water pipes, the cost of raising the water pressure includes upgrading 249 hydrants, replacing three hydrants, adding 116 new hydrants, replacing pressure regulating valves and adding water storage capacity.

Along with the \$53 million of work identified by EBMUD, there are \$7.1 million in projects that the district is already funding, said the report. They include replacing pipeline on Brookwood Road, Camino Don Miguel, Acacia Drive, Hacienda Circle and Loma Vista Drive; replacing a regulator on Via Farallon; adding storage capacity by replacing the existing Mulholland Reservoir with two new reservoirs; and adding water storage at Crossroads.

Copies of the EBMUD report are available at the Fire Station at 33 Orinda Way. A map detailing the city's water pressure needs is available for inspection at the Fire Station and at city offices, 26 Orinda Way.

EBMUD officials will be present to discuss the report at the next Fire Commission meeting at 7:30 p.m. Dec. 11 in room 4 at the Community Center, 26 Orinda Way.

County board expected to act on fire merger plan

By Judith Scherr
STAFF WRITER

MARTINEZ — The county Board of Supervisors is slated to take formal action next week to pave the way for a June vote that would establish an independent Moraga-Orinda Fire Protection District.

Supervisors will hold a public hearing on the proposal at 2 p.m. Dec. 10 in the Board of Supervisors chambers, 651 Pine St., Martinez.

At the close of the hearing, the board will be asked to approve consolidation and adopt an ordinance allowing for collection of the special tax for those presently living in the Orinda Fire Protection District.

Consolidation, however, will not be realized until a majority of voters in Orinda and Moraga approve the plan and until two-thirds of the voters in Orinda approve the tax.

After approval of consolidation, the board will set a date for the election in June of 1997.

Meanwhile, a report seen as the first of firefighter arguments against

the formation of a consolidated district was to have been discussed by the Board of Supervisors on Dec. 3, after the Sun's deadline.

But Fire Commissioners voted at their meeting last week to ask the supervisors to delay discussion of Contra Costa County Fire Chief Allen Little's suggested funding options for the district's future.

"I'd rather deal with the new Board of Supervisors on these issues," said John Wyro, asking commissioners to write a request to delay discussion until January when the new supervisors will be seated.

If approved by voters, the consolidated district will ask citizens to pay a fire-flow tax to fund a variety of fire-related needs — including the hiring of paramedics and upgrading equipment and fire stations.

Little, however, says a fire-flow tax will be necessary only if fire stations are completely rebuilt. Funds to upgrade the fire stations and to hire firefighter paramedics can come from the city's general fund budget and from loans, his report says.

Newly hired firefighters may not be paramedics

ORINDA — Fire commissioners thought four new fire department employees would be firefighter-paramedics. So they were surprised Wednesday night when Battalion Chief Greg Holm said he hoped the new employees would be cross-trained, but that there are no guarantees.

"Firefighter-paramedics were encouraged to apply," Holm said, adding that the department offers cross-trained candidates incentive pay.

Dual training is not the only factor considered in hiring the new firefighters. Of the 2,900 original applicants for the 10 positions available in Contra Costa County, 2300 people took an examination.

Among the 300 who remain in the running, only 50 are qualified both as firefighters and paramedics, Holm said.

The intent, he added, is to hire firefighter-paramedics, but Commissioner John Wyro said intent is not enough.

"I'd love to see something (from the supervisors) in writing with their intent," Wyro said.

There are four firefighter positions to be filled in Orinda, three in Moraga and three in the county department. Interviews are taking place this month and successful candidates begin training in January, Holm said.

— Judith Scherr

Orinda, Moraga fire secession issue set for June ballot

By MICHAEL HYTHA
Times Martinez Bureau

MARTINEZ — With the reluctant approval of some Contra Costa supervisors Tuesday, Orinda and Moraga voters will decide in June whether to break away from the county and form their own fire department.

"It's really unfortunate that it's come to this, but it's up to the voters to decide," said Supervisor Mark DeSaulnier of Concord.

That does not mean county officials plan to sit tight while two of its fire districts secede. County officials will devise a plan for improving services should the campaign fail.

In addition to the merger votes in both cities, Orinda voters in June also will face a separate fire service tax measure to pay for the improvements that will come with the merger. That tax will cost \$72 for a 2,000-square-foot home, and must be approved by two-thirds of voters. Without the tax, similar to one already in place in Moraga, the merger won't go through.

County supervisors had no choice but to put the measures on the ballot because the local board that regulates the jurisdictions of government agencies authorized the vote Oct. 9. Orinda leaders have been complaining for years about the quality of emergency services, including slow response times for ambulances. The county had promised to improve services by adding paramedics to fire engine crews, but that improvement proved to be too slow for backers of a separate district.

Carl Weber, chairman of the joint

Moraga and Orinda committee that studied the merger, said he thinks voters will back the plan and the tax hike.

Weber sought to dismiss fears a merger would undermine cooperation between the Orinda and Moraga fire districts and the larger Contra Costa fire district, which serves most of the county.

"Mutual aid will not change at all," Weber said. "Public safety is not adversely affected at all by this."

Contra Costa Fire Chief Alan Little said emergency services could be affected if response procedures change. For a house fire in the Lamorinda area, for example, dispatchers automatically send four engine companies from the closest stations. Lafayette has three stations, Orinda has three and Moraga only has two. Each city benefits from firefighters based in the other, an arrangement that could become more difficult if Orinda and Moraga leave, Little said.

"Fires don't stop at the city limits," said Lafayette resident Mary Dunne, who criticized the plan. "We need the fire trucks coming at the same time."

In her first important vote affecting her district, newly seated Supervisor Gayle Uilkema of Lafayette asked the board to approve the resolution.

"I endorse the right to vote," Uilkema said afterward. "When the people ask to make a decision, they have a right to do that."

Uilkema said she has not decided whether she will take a stand on the measures or take part in the campaign.

County OKs June 3 fire merger vote

MARTINEZ — The county Board of Supervisors voted unanimously last Tuesday to let the voters decide if they want to create a Moraga-Orinda Fire District that would be independent from the county fire district. A special election will be held June 3.

In addition to responding to the question of establishing the new district, voters in the Orinda Fire Protections District will be asked to approve a fire-flow tax similar to one Moraga has had since 1980.

CORRECTION

It was incorrectly reported in last week's Sun that the Moraga-Orinda Fire District planned to have an ambulance at every station by 1999. According to fire board member Pete Wilson, the goal is to have ambulances at three of the five area stations and backup support at the other two. In addition, the budgets for the two cities include \$100,000 for reserve expenditures in Orinda and \$1,574,914 for Moraga. Actual outlays planned are \$791,931 for Orinda and \$98,990 for Moraga.

Sun 10-8-97

12-4-96
Contra Costa Sun

Sun 1-22-1997

Times 12-27-98

Moraga fire station needs to be replaced, adviser says

By Andy Jokelson
TIMES STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — A consultant has recommended replacing a Rheem Boulevard firehouse because of inadequate space, poor ventilation, chronic subsurface dampness and other problems.

The Loving & Campos architectural firm also urged the Moraga-Orinda Fire District to abandon the firehouse's living quarters and install temporary housing for firefighters.

The district's board will consider the firehouse's future Jan. 13 and is awaiting results of another consultant's air quality testing inside the station.

In a preliminary check by a specialist in air quality monitoring, "there didn't seem to be anything that was life-threatening" in the air, said district board President John Wyro.

Nor is there any "concern about something needing to be done just absolutely immediately," he said.

Nevertheless, he said, he expects the district to move the station's firefighters to a double-wide trailer sometime in January.

"Rather than fix (the station) up to make it habitable, every indication is that it's going to be uninhabitable for the long term, and so the trailer is necessary," he said.

Demolition and replacement of the station "seems to be the best thing to do," Wyro said. The board must decide whether a new station would go on the same site or someplace else.

The board this month called for

air testing amid concern over the long-term presence of mold and standing water beneath the station, ventilation problems and firefighters' exposure to exhaust fumes from the station's vehicles.

Inadequate ventilation in the station's crawl space and chronic seepage of water into it from a nearby hill contribute to the station's poor air quality, says the Loving & Campos report.

So do the absence of a vehicle exhaust removal system for the 40-year-old station and inadequate separation between the rigs and the dormitory-style living space, the report says.

The station lacks an adequate communication center and a decontamination area, says the report, and its apparatus bays are not high or wide enough to accommodate new, larger firefighting equipment.

It does not separate living quarters for men and women, and it lacks space to improve accessibility for disabled people, the report says.

Many people might come there in an emergency, but the station lacks an emergency generator and has insufficient kitchen, sleeping and bathroom facilities, the report says.

Replacing the one-story, 3,556-square-foot station would cost \$12.77 million including \$75,000 for a trailer as temporary housing, the report says. The site contains enough space for a two-story, two-bay station with 5,000 square feet of space, surface parking, an emergency generator and above-ground fuel supply.

New battalion chief takes over

MORAGA — Steve Rivers has been named the Moraga-Orinda Fire District's third battalion chief. Rivers, who was promoted from his captain position with Orinda Fire, grew up in Orinda and has been a part of Orinda Fire for the past 20 years.

Rivers joins Greg Holm and Rob Goodyear in running the day-to-day operations of the district during their three shifts.

SUN 10-15-97

CONTRA COSTA SUN MAY 14th, '97

Unique Rescue One service marks 20 years

By Dan Halem

STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — It started as a widow's tribute to her late husband. Over the years, it has blossomed into a unique relationship between a small foundation and the community it serves.

Rescue One, a non-profit foundation, will celebrate its 20th anniversary this Saturday. A celebration, including a simulated helicopter rescue, will take place at the Rheem Shopping Center from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The helicopter is expected to land at 11.

Through the years, the foundation has served as a lightning rod, raising more than \$100,000 in donations, said Gordon Nathan, chairman of the Moraga Fire Commission and current vice president of Rescue One.

"It is the community that has donated to us the funds necessary to provide equipment and training supplies," Nathan said last week. "All of these were important things that we couldn't have acquired through the standard budget process."

In 1977, when former fire commissioner Ray Devin died, his wife, Marion, chose to establish a \$1,600 fund to aid Moragans. The result was Rescue One.

The concept of citizens donat-



ANDREW FAULKNER/SUN

Senior firefighter/paramedic Tim Bartolomei gets into the ambulance at the Moraga fire station at 1280 Moraga Way on Friday.

ing money to a private organization which, in turn, gave money to a public fire district that served the needs of those same citizens is something unique within California. Nathan does not know of any other foundation like it in the state.

Before its inception, the town at the end of the road was trapped in quite a different position.

"We had to rely on a private ambulance service that was dispatched by the county to Moraga. Many times, it took quite some time for that ambulance to arrive. Rescue One enabled us to shorten that time and give citizens prompt

medical service," said Nathan.

Rescue One has also given the Moraga Fire District the means to purchase some of the most advanced equipment available today for paramedics. Soon this will include a Lifepack 11 EKG machine to monitor a heart attack while the victim is being transported to a hospital. Previously, such machines have only been available at medical facilities.

"The fact that we are a small organization and we provide this kind of service is special," said Rob Goodyear, battalion chief of the Moraga Fire Protection Dis-

trict. "People know us, they realize our value to the community and they support what we do."

When Rescue One started, local residents paid for the then-infant Fire District's first ambulance. The foundation also paid for paramedic training from Stanford University — a program which Goodyear was one of the first to complete.

Goodyear believes the town's community spirit has allowed the foundation to thrive where organizations elsewhere failed. Because of this level of support, many firefighters and paramedics have grown quite loyal to the area.

"It's a nice place to work because people really support you and appreciate what you do for them. It's nice to be liked," Goodyear said.

Nathan thinks Rescue One is a concept more communities will one day introduce. He is proud that other fire districts have come to observe from time to time and study Moraga's operation.

"Mary Devin was far-sighted enough to look into the future and see how we could keep this level of service going," said Nathan. "We owe a lot of what we have to her."

Fire board may extend service to all of Orinda

By Emille Karrick
STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — About 70 Orinda homes would be inducted into the Moraga-Orinda Fire District under a plan proposed by the board at last week's meeting.

A few hundred Orinda residents have remained a part of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, while neighbors a few yards away voted in July to become a part of the newly merged district. That's because city boundaries, laid down when Orinda incorporated in 1985, do not correlate with the former Orinda fire district boundaries.

The Moraga-Orinda district recently sent a letter to the affected homes on Tahos Road, Juniper Drive, Saint Hill Road, White Oak Drive, El Nido Ranch Road, Blackthorn Drive, Silver Oak Terrace, Oakridge Lane and Charles Hill Circle asking if they would like district boundaries extended to include them.

"There were no boundary changes when the district merged because they wanted to keep it all pretty simple," Battalion Chief Rob Goodyear said. "Then some citizens were questioning why they weren't involved in the election."

So far, the response has been in favor of being included, yet the board wants to hear from everyone affected. "I think we need to hear from quite a few more," said board member Gordon Nathan.

Board members Pete Wilson and Peter Scurr will oversee a process that will inform many who do not even realize that they are not already part of the district.

"The letter came as a surprise to me," Florine Gainer of Tahos Road told the board. "There are a lot of people who do not realize where the line is."

According to Wilson, they will elicit the help of the former Orinda committee that worked to achieve July's fire district merger. The committee will go door to door to explain the advantages and the tax implications. They will have a petition for supporters to sign in order to chronicle support.

"We will contact in person each house that is up there," Wilson said. "We want to find out their sentiment, because it is really up to them."

According to Goodyear, the main benefit of joining the district is a five- to 10-minute increase in medical transport response time; there would be virtually no change in structure fire response time. Currently, a county engine on Upper Happy Valley Road could respond to a fire, but the closest ambulance available for medical transport is in Walnut Creek.

Residents will be asked to pay the same fire-flow tax that the rest of Orindans have already voted to pay — approximately \$80 for a 2,500 sq. ft. house.

"I'm willing to pay more to have local services that are more responsive to my needs," said Tahos Road resident Robert McCleary. "I think countywide fire services are too dispersed."

The district will evaluate residents' reactions at their next board meeting, on Nov. 25. If they assess that there is overwhelming support, they will file an application with LAFCO and in a few months all of Orinda could be a part of the district.

"In the past we have kind of felt like stepchildren," said Judy Eben, a resident of Tahos Road. "I hope that by becoming a part of the district, we would become more legitimate."

11-19-97 cc sun

It may not leap tall buildings, but it will help out firefighters

By Bren Unger
STAFF WRITER

It's big, red and weighs about 23,000 pounds fully loaded. It's Moraga-Orinda Fire District's new trench rescue vehicle and it's ready for work.

The new 22-foot multi-purpose addition to the fire vehicle fleet will have its official unveiling this weekend at the district's open house. Formerly a nondescript yellow moving truck, firefighters have transformed it into a mobile warehouse of emergency action.

Up until now, the district has been using an undersized trailer that was hooked up to one of the engines and towed to emergency sites, according to Capt. Pete Nowicki, who is heading up the truck's retrofit. The inefficiency was apparent as the needs of the community grew.

"That trailer was becoming overloaded," he said. "The time wasted to hook it up, mobilize it and get it set again was too much."

After searching for the past year, Nowicki said the district got a good deal on the truck, a 1992 GMC, and has mostly relied on community contributions for upgrade materials and on firefighters for labor.

"I've been working on it every day for the last two months. Others join in when they can so it doesn't cut into emergency response time."

The truck is outfitted with 15 backboards, four emergency medical kits, four cots, enough lumber to build a cabin, a water pump, a wheelbarrow and a 50-amp generator that can be plugged into the side of the vehicle to provide power. Halogen lamps and side lights have been installed and radio communications equipment was surplussed from other vehicles.

"We just need some help on the suspension," said Nowicki. "This thing will be carrying a lot of weight. Before, it only carried sofas."

According to Capt. Chris Klein, the truck is primarily meant for use in hazardous situations that include time-consuming fires, electrical emergencies and technical hillside res-



KRISTOPHER SKINNER/SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Firefighter Sean Perkins works on the new trench rescue vehicle last week at the Moraga fire station.

cues. Eventually the truck will also be utilized in confined-space rescues such as in wells, caves or tunnels.

The total cost of the retrofit, including vehicle purchase price, is "about 23,000," including \$3,000 for the paint job, said Nowicki. The district will put striping and lettering on the side in the next few weeks.

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District open house starts with a pancake breakfast at 7:30 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 11 at the fire station at 1280 Moraga Way in Moraga. Tick-

ets for the breakfast may be purchased at the door, and proceeds will go to the California Burn Federation.

The open house also will feature many activities for children, including a visit from Smokey Bear, tours of the fire engines and free badges. Adults can learn about roofing and take part in fire extinguisher demonstrations. Free refreshments for all are available from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more information, call 376-5454.

Orindans get free ambulance service

By Andy Jokelson

TIMES STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — Beginning today, local paramedic-firefighters will begin ambulance service at no charge for Orindans with medical emergencies.

The five-month-old Moraga-Orinda Fire District's Orinda ambulance service will replace one provided by American Medical Response crews based in Walnut Creek and Concord, said Battalion Chief Rob Goodyear.

"This gives us another step towards self-reliance," he said.

A district ambulance staffed by two paramedic-firefighters will routinely respond to 911 calls from

Orinda and, if patients desire, take them to the hospitals of their choice, Goodyear said. Moraga paramedic-firefighters have long provided similar service in that city.

The district, formed by merger of the old Moraga and Orinda districts, will use operational funds and some of the proceeds from a voter-approved tax to finance the Orinda ambulance service, Goodyear said.

Voters in June approved merging the Moraga and Orinda fire districts into an independent one after supporters promised improved, speedier Orinda paramedic and ambulance transport service long sought by many residents.

The new district has increased its

paramedic-firefighters to 18, Goodyear said, and six more firefighters are expected to finish paramedic training in April.

The increased staff, including those from Moraga, "has enabled us to begin (ambulance) transport service rather quickly" in Orinda, Goodyear said.

Orinda resident Carl Weber, a leader of the merger campaign, praised the impending launch.

"It's great for the community. I think that the community's confidence is well-placed, that we did what we said we would," he said.

The district has two ambulances — one in Orinda, one in Moraga — and has ordered a third, he said.

SIRENS

TIMES 12/1/97

Danville man picked to lead fire district

James Johnston will become the first permanent chief of the new Moraga-Orinda Fire District on Dec. 15.

Johnston, a 44-year-old Danville resident, has been deputy fire chief of the Alameda County Fire Department since 1995. His duties there have included responsibility for administration and management of the fire prevention bureau, disaster preparedness, the emergency medical services division, budgeting, purchasing and labor relations.

The Moraga-Orinda district's board unanimously chose him from three finalists and will pay him an annual salary of \$110,000. He will replace interim chief Mel Deardorff, who came out of retirement and did not seek the permanent post.

Board member Pete Wilson praised Johnston's "management philosophy of sharing responsibility and working with the troops, rather than dictating to the troops." Johnston has good chemistry with board members and they share similar views on organization, training and other matters, Wilson said.

"The board feels very fortunate to have a gentleman of his caliber and experience," said Vice President Gordon Nathan.

2 - Contra Costa Sun

Wednesday, October 1, 1997

Fire district proceeds with paramedic plan

By Bren Unger
STAFF WRITER

Seeking to reduce response time to medical emergencies and establish paramedic units at all five area fire stations by 1999, Moraga-Orinda firefighters have presented a plan designed to shed their reliance on American Medical Response while upgrading local services.

After welcoming seven paramedics integral to the plan, Moraga Battalion Capt. Rob Goodyear and Capt. Chris Klein explained to the fire board the transition from the current medic-based response weighted toward Moraga to an evenly spread paramedic-trained staff. The Advanced Life Support system will place two paramedics at each station, enabling emergency response followed by immediate transport to an area hospital. Currently, Orinda operates on a two-tiered Emergency Medical Technician system which delays transport.

"Basically, EMT is sort of advanced first aid," Goodyear said in an interview. "The medics arrive on an engine or an ambulance, establish basic life support and then wait for AMR out of Walnut Creek. ALS will shave 10 to 12 minutes off the critical transport time."

EMTs are not accredited paramedics and thus have limited treatment parameters. Of the seven new paramedics, three are accredited for practice in Contra Costa County. The rest will complete their training and certification in the next month.

Moraga-Orinda receives 2,200 calls per year, according to Klein. "Sixty to 70 percent of those calls are medical in nature. If we get a double hit, this will alleviate back-up problems."

The new system will cost \$72,000 a year and will add one more paramedic, bringing the total firefighting staff shift to 17. The plan initially calls for one full-time ALS ambulance by next April and one at every station by 1999.

In addition to accepting the cost of \$72,000 for the ALS program at the Sept. 23 meeting, the board approved capital outlays of \$891,931 for Orinda and \$1,673,904 for Moraga for 1997/98. That includes \$40,000 each for new 4x4s and \$150,000 for a new Orinda ambulance.

Report says Orinda fire stations blazing with hazards
 Fire Dept's
 Orinda fire stations blazing with hazards
 Report says Orinda fire stations blazing with hazards

Report says Orinda fire stations blazing with hazards

By JUDITH SCHERR

Staff writer

ORINDA — All three of Orinda's fire stations need earthquake retrofitting and are riddled with fire hazards, a consultant has found.

According to a report from Dewell & Associates Architects, problems at the main station include:

- A backup generator fueled by natural gas could be knocked out of service by an earthquake.

- The walls, ceilings and door frames of the main station could be damaged, making it difficult or impossible for firefighters to get vehicles out the doors.

- An unbraced gas heater and unbraced gas furnaces are tipping and are fire hazards.

- Storage cabinets could fall during earthquakes.

- Hallway walls would burn in 20 minutes. They should be replaced with walls rated at "one hour," meaning it would take an hour for them to burn.

- Communications equipment is not braced, stairs are unsafe, hallways too narrow, the basement has no fire sprinklers, the station lacks proper facilities for laundering clothing exposed to hazardous materials

and there is no exhaust system for the room where fire trucks are housed.

"The exhaust enters the living space," said Holm, adding that when the stations were built, there was little consideration of the firefighters who live half their lives at the station.

Fire and earthquake hazards at the two smaller stations are similar to those at the main station on Orinda Way. The smaller stations have flammable wood shake roofs, and Orinda's new fire engine does not fit into the apparatus rooms.

Although the engineers and ar-

chitects said the stations "will not collapse around everybody's ears," the district could be liable for accidents resulting from hazards identified, fire district Battalion Chief Greg Holm said.

The report was "quite shocking," said Robert Recker, chairman of the Fire Prevention District Commission.

The architects said remodeling and retrofitting would cost \$2 million. Recker wonders whether it would be better to rebuild the stations at a cost of \$5 million.

"We want the fire stations to be functional for the next 50 years," said Holm.

The main firehouse at 33 Orinda Way was built in 1968. The stations at 295 Orchard Road and 20 Via Las Cruces were built in 1952.

When they were built, each was a two-man, rather than three-person, post. There were no women firefighters, firefighters had no emergency services responsibilities and the needs of disabled people were not considered.

Earthquake faults had not been identified then. Now it is known that the Hayward fault runs three miles from the main station and four miles from the other stations.

166-52-1-24

New district summons paramedics, ambulance

By Andy Jokelson
TIMES STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — Three paramedics have begun working this month for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, and four others are expected to start by mid-October.

Meanwhile, the newly created district has budgeted \$150,000 to buy an ambulance for Orinda and nearly \$33,000 to equip it.

The paramedics and ambulance are part of the district's effort to improve service in Orinda, which has relied on ambulance crews based in

Walnut Creek and Concord.

"We're well under way, absolutely," said Battalion Chief Rob Goodyear.

Voters in June approved merger of the Orinda and Moraga districts, partly because of its promise to provide Orinda-based paramedics on engine and ambulance crews for quick response. Moraga has long had popular, locally based paramedic service.

The merged district might reassign some experienced Moraga paramedic-firefighters to Orinda, Goodyear said.

"Actually, we have ... more than enough to provide service in Moraga, and some of those can be utilized in the Orinda service zone," Goodyear said.

Some newly hired paramedics with little or no field experience initially might be assigned to Moraga stations to work with experienced personnel, he said.

The district is discussing assignments, overtime, recall, vacation and related matters with Local 1230 of the International Association of Fire Fighters, Goodyear said.

Four of the seven new employees were originally hired for the old Orinda district and the other three for Moraga before the merger, Goodyear said.

All will work as both firefighters and paramedics. Their base salaries are nearly \$50,400 a year.

They have undergone firefighter training for several months, and four of them still need to complete an accreditation process before they can begin paramedic work for the district, probably by mid-October, he said.

The other three have begun work.

The new employees bring the number of district paramedics to 19, including 12 in Moraga's longtime program. The total will rise to 26 next year when seven firefighters complete paramedic training.

The district will soon order an ambulance for Orinda, and it should be operating by next summer, said Pete Wilson of the district's board.

"We're achieving our goals ... in a shorter period of time than we had anticipated," he said. He credited the acceleration to higher-than-expected

savings and revenue for the merged district.

He and other merger proponents had anticipated it would take "at least four years before we would have operating a reasonably effective paramedic program (for Orinda)," he said. "We will have that, hopefully, by next summer."

Wilson said he wants the program to do for Orinda "exactly what's done in Moraga, which is a fully-staffed paramedic ambulance, fully-staffed, engine-based paramedic (service) and the ability to transport."

Contra Costa Sun

Wednesday, February 11, 1998

LAMORINDA BRIEFS

Rescue One Foundation expands

MORAGA — The board of directors of the Rescue One Foundation, a support group for the Moraga-Orinda fire district's paramedic program, will expand their board to include two new members from the Orinda service zone.

Rescue One Foundation, founded in 1977 to serve the former Moraga district's paramedics, made this decision in an effort to develop their support services in all areas of the newly merged Moraga-Orinda Fire District. "It is hoped that the residents of Orinda will become familiar with this respected community organization and support its goals," said president Julie Fischer.

The group raises money in order to purchase items not included in the fire district's budget. To date, \$100,000 has been donated for the purchase of state of the art equipment.

Orinda residents interested in becoming a part of the expanded 11-member board should send letters of interest to the Rescue One Foundation, 1280 Moraga Road, Moraga, CA 94556.

Ember sparks roof fire, destroys home

TIMES STAFF

An ember from a chimney ignited a quick-moving fire that destroyed a Moraga home and its contents Sunday afternoon, fire officials said.

Both residents managed to escape the home, in the 500 block of Fernwood Drive, without injuries, said Moraga-Orinda Fire Protection District Battalion Chief Steve Rivers. But the house and its contents — with an estimated value of \$700,000 — were a near total loss, he said.

Rivers said a resident had lighted a fire in the fireplace and settled down to watch TV when embers

blew out of the chimney and landed on the wooden-shingled roof. The man didn't realize what had happened until his TV shorted out. He woke up his wife, who was napping in another room, and they fled. The fire was reported at 12:26 p.m.

Six fire engines responded, but Rivers said the blaze spread too quickly to be stopped.

"When you get a roof fire when it is windy and dry, there is not much you can do except not have a shake shingle roof," Rivers said. "If it was a regular roof this probably wouldn't have happened."

TIMES 12-29-97

Technology comes to aid of firefighters

By Emilie Karick
STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — It's Saturday afternoon at Fire Station 45, and the paramedics on duty are just sitting down to a catered luncheon of lamb chops, scalloped potatoes, endive salad, asparagus, gourmet cheeses and a delicate, lemon mousse cake for dessert.

While the elaborate affair may appear to be an exuberant use of fire district funds, it is, in actuality, a simple thank-you for saving a life.

On Jan. 24, Orinda resident Ruedi Scherer was experiencing chest pains so severe that his wife ushered him into the car and drove him down to Station 45. Paramedics quickly diagnosed him with myocardial infarction (heart attack) and in a record 51 minutes, Scherer was hooked up to John Muir Medical Center's cardio lab, his heart revived and pumping comfortably.

"This gentleman was experiencing chest pain and all of sudden said, 'I don't think I am going to make it,'" Moraga-Orinda fire chief Jim Johnston said. "He ended up in a real positive outcome in the emergency room."

Scherer, a caterer in San Francisco for the past 30 years, was so grateful to the paramedics for their expedient work that he decided to thank them the best way he knew how — with gourmet food.

The paramedics happily obliged yet admit they can't take all the credit. They owe a good part of Scherer's miraculous treatment to a new piece of machinery on board, known as the Lifepack 11 or 12-lead heart monitor.

"It actually saved Scherer's heart muscle," said paramedic engineer Daryl Lee. "Time is muscle. For

HEART

FROM PAGE 1

every minute that goes by, there is cardiac muscle that is dying."

Because of the new equipment, paramedics were able to obtain a better picture of Scherer's heart while still at the fire station. They were then able to fax the picture over their cellular phones to John Muir Medical Center while en route themselves.

"The emergency doctor can get everything ready for this patient," said paramedic engineer Bob Cox. "It cuts down on the (time) from door to definitive therapy."

Those involved in the rescue were engineer/paramedic Tim Bartolomei and firefighter/paramedic Jeff Landis.

The new 12-lead heart monitors have replaced three-lead monitors. With just three electrical discs to attach to a patient's chest cavity, paramedics have only a limited reading on the heart's condition. With the three-lead paramedics are unable to make a diagnosis in the field. Thus, a patient suffering from chest-pain must wait until they arrive in the emergency room for a diagnosis, adding significant time from diagnosis to preparation and treatment.

Most districts still use the three-lead system. The Moraga-Orinda Fire District is the first EMS in the county to have the sophisticated, diagnostic 12-lead equipment on board.



KAT WADE/SUN

Ruedi Scherer brought lunch for Orinda firefighters and paramedics on Saturday as a thank you for helping diagnose his heart attack.

They first began purchasing the equipment in 1995, thanks to a grant from the Rescue One Foundation. The equipment, consisting of a 12-lead monitor in both Orinda and Moraga, became operational on Jan. 1 of this year.

The entire implementation process consisted of more than purchasing the equipment. In between, there was two years worth of work that involved data gathering, discussions with other fire departments and agreement from area hospitals to install receiving equipment that enables the program to work.

Among those integral to the process were Lee and Moraga-Orinda fire district medical director Dr. Joe Barger.

They found that the 12-lead

monitor is especially vital in areas such as Moraga and Orinda, where distance to a hospital is fairly significant. In cities where the distance to a hospital is significantly less, the equipment may not be as practical, Barger said.

The national benchmark for door to therapy time in a case such as Scherer's is 90 minutes. This does not take into account the typical delay for denial time, during which the patient does not want to admit they need to seek help. This can go on for two hours or more, so that once help is sought every second counts.

"If Scherer's an example of what we can do to shorten that time period, then we're doing our job," Lee said. "It's really going to make an impact."

New district summons paramedics, ambulance

By Andy Jokelson

TIMES STAFF WRITER

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KAT WADE/SUN

Capt. Mike Kazar shows water that has collected under Station 42 in Moraga during recent rains.

Long list of woes at Station 42

By Emilie Karriek
STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — At 40 years old, Station 42 is over the hill. Built in 1957 on Rheem Boulevard, it has doggedly served its constituents.

However, last Tuesday night at the Moraga-Orinda fire board meeting, the station was declared past its prime.

Carl Campos, of Loving and Campos Architects in Walnut Creek, presented a functional analysis report of Station 42, comparing it to a recently built station in Walnut Creek. "I wouldn't spend any more money on 42," Campos concluded after an in-depth presentation.

Campos used slides to illustrate a long list of deficiencies that begins with the station's basic size. With a 3,000 sq. ft. building and a minimal-

Residents raise concerns to board

Several Moragans and a few Orindans voiced fervent concerns at the Moraga-Orinda fire board meeting last Tuesday night about changes they didn't vote for when the new fire district was formed last June.

Moragan residents raised concerns stemming from what they call degradation of the emergency medical service in Moraga in order to bolster service in Orinda. This issue is a sensitive one for Moraga because last year's controversial merger was contingent on a promise that Moraga's tradition of paramount paramedic service would not falter.

"It upset me when I heard that some of our best paramedics were being taken to Orinda," Moraga resident Jerry Meyer said. "Things were very happy the way we were; don't take it away from us."

Director Gordon Nathan said that although some of Moraga's

paramedics have gone to train others in Orinda, this measure has by no means caused a decline in Moraga's service.

Dick Allee of Moraga said he felt the board's reasons for re-allocating Moraga paramedics had not been adequately articulated to the general public. "Communication needs to be improved drastically," he said.

Meanwhile, some Orinda residents have felt that Moragans are dominating the district. Consequently, they have felt left out of the process.

"Are there any plans to involve the citizens of Orinda?" Pat Dunn asked.

The board would like to address these issues at their Feb. 10 meeting. They ask anyone who has questions or comments on such issues to submit written comments to the district office by Jan. 23. For more information, call the office at 253-4770.

— Emilie Karriek

... yet.
Anthony — choose one or both. It
ere my missing keys.
ended the silverware drawer for a
first time I tried, my prayer was bare-
things." I was willing to give any-
deep breath and pray to St. Antho-
— it's endless. I have a friend who
eservoir parking cards, keys.
against a handbag. Go figure!
g shell, there was the girl, nicely
ives to no avail. Weeks later, when I
had dropped it up somewhere. I
to a birthday breakfast without my
of the keys tucked in by mischievous
to look up a number in the phone
p me, but it was two more days
... ..

housekeeping area, insufficient bathrooms and dormitory space, and no separate facilities for males and females.

Campos recommended a few options for the district and urged that their first concern be the station's air quality problems. The district has already begun air quality tests.

He then suggested that the district look for a nearby one acre plot of land that could house a new 5,000 sq. ft. station.

If no new land is found, the next option would be to build a two-story station with two apparatus bays on the existing site. A temporary trailer could be brought in to house fire-fighters and equipment while construction is under way.

Campos estimated a total cost of \$1.5 million.

The board's facilities committee will discuss the various options for Station 42 and bring it back to the board for a vote.

10-15-97
Contra
Costa
Beam

Two-year-old Bradley Rochlin of Moraga appears to have taken command of a fire truck during the Moraga-Orinda First District open house on Saturday in Moraga.



KAT WADE/SUN

Learn a little, laugh a little at open house

By Emille Karrick
STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — It was a chance for the community to show off their shiny new fire district and learn a little in the process.

Station 41 was hopping this past Saturday at the Moraga-Orinda Fire District's open house; firefighter staff and reserves were out in full uniform from 7 a.m. on into a sunny, breezy afternoon. It was one of those days defined by the vitality of community spirit.

"They are so charged with excitement," said volunteer Erica McCarthy. "They give to the town and the town gives back to them."

Festivities began with a pancake breakfast prepared and served by the firefighters, who dedicated personal time in order to pull together the feast. The food for the breakfast was donated by Safeway and all proceeds were given to the California Burn Foundation.

Stomachs were filled by 10 a.m., and activities began that appealed to young and old fire truck fanatics alike. All vehicles were displayed in their full glory — spectators even got to see an engine and ambulance in action when festivities were interrupted by an emergency call.

The featured item on display was the brand-new trench rescue vehicle and its mas-

sive collection of innovative rescue equipment. According to Capt. Pete Nowicki, this vehicle is the only one of its kind in Contra Costa County, as well as much of the Bay Area. Nowicki has trained 38 firefighters in trench rescue, and Moraga-Orinda staff can unload and prep the truck at a rescue site in nine minutes.

Donations enabled the district to give away party favors with an educational message. Blockbuster Video was on-site producing and giving away video tapes for parents in a measure that will help if a child turns up missing. Long's donated \$250 worth of film in order to photograph kids and parents posing behind a fire station cut-out board.

Kids also got free badges and fire hats, pencils and stickers, distributed by an aspiring firefighter. Vital sign readings were taken and then explained by paramedics.

The younger crowd took part in squirt the firehouse and a coloring contest, as well as interactive fire safety demonstrations. McCarthy led children through a fire drill and a stop, drop and roll drill in the makeshift bedroom created to emulate real world circumstances. Mark Watson, senior paramedic and public education coordinator for the district, put on an educational puppet show.

The educational features of the open house

were a continuation of efforts coordinated by Watson, who spent last week going into local elementary schools to teach about safety. The comprehensive ongoing program encompasses grades K-5.

The kindergartners learn to stop, drop and roll and crawl under blankets in case of fire. First-graders go around to three fire stations to see firefighters in their turn-out coats or brush-fire gear. "They get the idea that we are their friends, that we are the same people dressed three different ways," Watson said.

Second-graders learn the quickest way to get out of the house, while third- and fourth-graders focus on earthquakes and home hazards.

Fifth-graders watch a movie in which a model bedroom burns down in order to experience the true danger of fire. "The kids' attitudes change," Watson said. "It is pretty dramatic; it gets them motivated."

Watson developed the curriculum himself in order to address a different issue each year. In a recent fourth-grade earthquake lesson, one student raised his hand and reminisced about what he learned in kindergarten.

"The kids really retain a lot," said Gordon Nathan, district board member. "They come home and tell their parents what they learned."

Fire board alters life support plan

By Emilie Karrick
STAFF WRITER

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District board and staff received a proverbial pat on the back from Moragans and a few Orindans at last Tuesday's board meeting.

Tension dissipated as residents spoke up to congratulate the district on a job well done. This time they truly felt that their district had listened.

Fire Chief Jim Johnston allayed concerns over what many residents perceived as a degradation of paramedic service in Moraga when he announced a plan to freeze the district's Advanced Life Support Implementation Plan at Phase 1.

According to Johnston, the district will continue to put paramedics on all engine companies, with one ambulance at Station 41 in Moraga and another at Station 45 in Orinda. Once all new paramedics are on board, the district will reassess their service before instigating any other changes originally adopted by the board in September.

"There are a number of things we need to look at and resolve before we implement any more changes," Johnston said. "They lacked raw data when they were putting together the ALS plan. We need time to get the paramedics out there and evaluate the changes."

The revised plan came about in response to feelings of anxiety and frustration expressed by several Moraga residents at the Jan. 13 board meeting and in letters and conversation with the district.

"We expect a high level of service and we want to make sure and emphasize that we still want that high level of service," Councilman Mike Majchrzak said at that meeting.

Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the ALS plan included a change in emergency transport, with the entire district utilizing one primary transport ambulance based at Station 44 in Orinda. Some residents said this translated to a decrease in service to Moraga.

According to the former ALS plan, Station 44 would be "the best

Joint meeting on pipe issues

ORINDA — For many residents, their city is a dangerous place. Though the city is declared a "very high fire hazard severity zone," residents are armed with only enough water to quell a minor blaze.

"Orinda is so heavily overgrown that a fire here similar to the one in Oakland would be much worse," Orinda resident Pat Dunn said. "There are large homes on densely overgrown lots and nothing is done about it."

Dunn has been asking the city to replace an outdated water piping system and inadequate hydrant network since she discovered that the hydrant on her street delivers less than 500 gallons per minute. She then found out that the city has half as many hydrants as it should, with one-third delivering less than 1,000 gallons per minute. In addition the pipe system — put in approximately 60 years ago — is out of date, and the pipes are corroded and too small for adequate flow. There is also need for new reservoirs and a vast reduction in vegetation.

Representatives from EBMUD, the Orinda council and the fire district have begun a series of meetings to address these problems. Discussion began a few weeks ago, revolving around the issue of financial responsibility.

According to fire district director Pete Wilson, the group will look at Marin water district's upgraded water system at their next meeting as a potential model for a solution. Southern Marin County is an area with similar problems and the group hopes to enact a similar solution.

"Because of our topography and the physical nature of Orinda, we need to come up with a program," Wilson said. "There are several fire safety issues here. It's a much bigger issue than just the water pipes."

The next meeting will be at 8 a.m. March 19 at the EBMUD offices in the watershed building on San Pablo Dam Road. For more information, call 253-4770.

— Emilie Karrick

FIRE

FROM PAGE 1

location for the dedicated ambulance ... centrally located in the district."

For Moragans, it meant that they were losing their ambulance.

"We didn't connect with the community in educating on service levels and what the changes mean," Johnston told the Sun. "It's premature to explore that secondary component (of transport) until you have all the data."

Board President John Wyro echoed Johnston with regrets about the dearth of communication. "We've been so caught up in the doing, that we've spent little time telling what we're doing."

Many residents said that by setting a precedent for understanding and communication, the district has laid the groundwork for better service all around.

"My feelings have completely changed," Moraga resident Jerry Meyer told the Sun. "I was just so impressed that they were willing and had listened enough to the concerns of citizens."

Orinda resident Carl Weber, chair of the Orinda-Moraga task force that worked out the details of last summer's merger, agreed with Meyer's assessment. "The point is they're

addressing the problems," he told the Sun. "They're responding to community concerns — which wasn't happening before the district was formed — and they're responding more rapidly than I thought was possible."

Others took a more tepid stance. Pat Dunn of Orinda said that while the board is paying heed to Moraga's concerns, many of Orinda's problems are left ignored. "I don't feel involved," she said.

Dunn urged the board to put effectiveness before efficiency and take the time to address concerns throughout the district. Director Pete Wilson brought Dunn's point to light when he raised the issue of parity — how it is defined by a Moragan, Orindan or district staff member.

"What we're trying to do is get toward a unified district and get away from these two service zones," he said. "How do we rectify when we're there, what should be parity and what shouldn't be parity?"

CORRECTION

Last week's Orinda City Council story misstated a traffic mitigation fee for new businesses, which would be assessed approximately \$1.60 on a square-foot basis, according to Councilman Sarge Littlehale. Also, the three Lamorinda councils have not yet officially agreed to pass the fee.

See FIRE, Page 2

A pressure-packed moment



New Moraga-Orinda chief knows first-

By Emilie Karrick
STAFF WRITER

"Irish in a big way." The green and white mug on Jim Johnston's desk proclaims an Irish heritage distinctly echoed by his shock of fiery red hair, sparkling blue eyes and wide smile.

He embodies an exuberant Irish spirit and bubbles over with enthusiasm when talking about his new job as the first fire chief of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District. The district was formed after the June election, in which voters decided to break away from the county fire department.

"I am very lucky to be going into a community that cares so much about their fire department," he said. "It is time for me to move on to new challenges. I just feel right about it."

Currently a deputy fire chief in the Alameda County fire department, Johnston brings with him a love for a line of work that throughout his 20-year career has never been anything less than satisfying. Johnston describes firefighting as a unique form of public service — "coming to the needs of the public in a way that you can see what you've done."

Johnston started out as a volunteer firefighter in Chico and worked

for a short time in Piedmont and Burlingame. He then spent 18 years in his hometown of San Leandro, first with the San Leandro department and then with the county department when San Leandro consolidated into the Alameda County district in 1995.

"I have a lot of experience dealing with people who have to deal with change," Johnston said.

He served as acting fire chief in the close-knit, five-station San Leandro department during their last seven months as a separate entity. He then moved to his current position, which designates him second in command in a department that covers a territory of more than 500 square miles and 16 stations.

He is charged with a wide range of duties, from the budget and facilities to running the countywide incident command team and the Emergency Medical Services program. Johnston has worked to further the department's public education outreach, taking what he calls a proactive stance on fire prevention. He started a CPR class that has instructed more than 8,000 citizens and has overseen a popular in-school program that features two firefighters trained as clowns.



KRISTOPHER SKINNER/SUN

Jim Johnston will become the first chief of the newly merged Moraga and Orinda fire departments on Dec. 15.

Johnston championed the EMS program in the Alameda department. 10 years ago he founded the EMS section for the Alameda County Fire Chiefs Association. He also initiated a semi-automatic defibrillator program for emergency medical techni-

cians in the fire service.

Johnston feels strongly about the integral role paramedics play in a fire department. "They are in the best position to deliver emergency service to citizens," he said. "When 70 or 80 percent of your calls are

Fire chiefs to battle big blazes together

■ County's top firefighters plan multi-agency command teams that will assist other departments in emergencies

By Andy Jokelson

TIMES STAFF WRITER

Contra Costa fire chiefs intend to form multi-agency volunteer teams of command staff to help one another's departments cope with major blazes.

Their availability to handle safety, logistical, public information, planning and other matters will mean better decision making, said Jim Johnston, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District's chief.

"It enhances everything," said

Johnston, who won approval this month from the Contra Costa County Fire Chiefs Association to organize countywide teams.

"I like the idea because not all of our organizations have enough chief officers that we can run large ... fires without assistance," said Bill Dutcher, chief of the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District.

It allows a fire department to contribute one or two command employees to help another battle a major emergency, without overtaxing its own organization, Dutcher said.

Johnston will organize the command teams and will ask fellow fire chiefs to solicit volunteers.

He aims to have teams available by July, in time for the bulk of this year's fire season.

Departments have long had mutual-aid arrangements for bringing in firefighters and equipment from outside agencies to help combat major fires.

They have also obtained outside command, but in a less organized way in Contra Costa than in Alameda County, which has multi-agency incident command teams.

Johnston, formerly with the Alameda County Fire Department, served on one there before joining the Moraga-Orinda district in December.

Previously, a Contra Costa agency requesting command assistance might not know in advance who would respond "or whether they could even spare the help," Dutcher said.

With the p. dnesday, July 9, 1997

issues, disseminating word, for example, about downed power lines or other problems that could endanger firefighters.

■ Operations officer directing deployment of firefighters and equipment.

■ Planner to keep track of deployments and what's available for other assignments.

■ Team member to keep an accounting of costs.

"On a small incident, the incident commander usually wears all of those various hats," said Johnston.

"But as the incident grows, it's very difficult for one or two people to maintain control of all of those various hats ... so that's why it's her of-

20 pages 75 cents

Small Orinda area to join new district

By Emille Karkick

STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — When the Moraga-Orinda Fire District became official in July, residents in east Orinda wondered if they had been left out of an exclusive town shindig.

As their neighbors joined ranks with Moragans to induct the new district, a few hundred Orindans remained a part of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District.

The exclusion was no derogatory snub. While the approximately 70 lots lie within boundary lines laid down when Orinda was incorporated in 1985, they just happen to lie outside fire district boundaries drawn years ago.

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District board decided officially last Tuesday to right the exclusion by extending a cordial invitation to residents along Tahos Road, Saint Hill Road, El Nido Ranch Road, El Castillo, Charles Hill Road, Oak Ridge Lane and in Lafayette on White Oak Drive and Juniper Drive.

If residents decide to accept, they are promised a higher level of service. According to the district's information officer, Bob Bratton, this means a decrease in transport time and an increase in paramedic service.

"No matter where you are in

Orinda, there will be six highly trained personnel on the scene to transport you," he said.

A medical call from the proposed annexed parcel would bring an ambulance from Station 45 with three paramedics along with the nearest engine company, also soon to be outfitted with trained paramedic staff. Current service from the county comes with an engine company and initial paramedics on scene, yet transport to a hospital is delayed until an American Medical Response ambulance arrives from Walnut Creek.

"There is no wait around time for AMR; there is immediate treatment and transport," Bratton said. "The initial paramedics can continue with patient treatment all the way to the hospital."

The district sent out an initial letter to affected residents asking if they would like to join the new district, and the response was overwhelmingly positive.

However, the annexation will not become official until the matter goes before the Contra Costa County Local Agencies Formation Commission. If passed by LAFCO, the matter will then appear on a mail ballot to receive a final OK, which includes approval of a fire-flow tax.



JOSE C. FAJARDO/SUN

County supervisor Gayle Uilkema speaks at last Tuesday's swearing-in ceremony for Moraga-Orinda Fire Protection District commissioners.

Orinda, Moraga mark fire marriage with ceremony

By Dan Halem

STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — The ceremonies on the border between Orinda and Moraga last Tuesday were short and sweet. Afterward, the five newly sworn-in commissioners of the Moraga-Orinda Fire Protection District made their way from the Miramonte High School parking lot to a nearby fire station and went to work.

In their first formal meeting as a body, the new commission had a laundry list of actions necessary for the district to function. Leading the agenda was to elect a president, but the commission first needed to decide how to do so and discussed possible term lengths.

Acting fire district attorney Bill Ross told commissioners it was their choice how to elect officers and establish the term length for a

commission president.

Currently, Ross explained the newly elected commissioner's own terms have no formal expiration date though Ross estimated terms would last between two and four years.

Commissioner Pete Wilson suggested commissioners "draw straws" for the position, saying all were qualified to act as president. Other commissioners moved for a more traditional nomination process.

"We need someone with the experience and the time to do the job off the bat," said commissioner Gordon Nathan.

Fire district commissioners ultimately agreed to nominate and vote for a president. In a 5-0 vote, commissioner John Wyro was elected to lead the body. Nathan was elected

FIRE

FROM PAGE 1

vice president and Wilson was named secretary, also by unanimous votes.

"While I will be chairing the meeting, we will all be doing a lot of work," Wyro said after the vote. Peter Scurr and Mike Cory are also commissioners within the new fire district.

Other actions taken were:

- Commissioners adopted the Uniform Fire Code which continues basic county procedure. Commissioners also adopted a conflict of interest code.

- The commission approved a resolution adopting rules of procedure for meetings and the formation of a subcommittee to explore future rule changes.

- District public meetings will be held on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month. The first meeting will be in Orinda; the second in Moraga.

- All district ordinances and resolutions will be posted and made available at the Orinda and Moraga libraries, all fire stations and at city offices.

- The fire district will continue to contract certain services from the Contra Costa Consolidated Fire Protection District and the county.

- The commission selected Los Gatos consulting firm Avery and Associates to lead the district's

search for a permanent fire chief.

After the meeting, Wyro called managing the district's budget and selection of a permanent fire chief the most important duties before commissioners. Orinda Battalion Chief Greg Holm and Moraga Battalion Chief Rob Goodyear were named temporary chiefs until an interim chief is selected.

Wyro said while commissioners have agreed an interim chief should come from outside the district, there are no restrictions on who could become the district's first permanent chief. Commissioners began interviewing candidates for the interim and permanent fire chief positions at their July 8 meeting, held after the Sun went to press.

Earlier last Tuesday, civic leaders joined with the public and fire trucks from Orinda and Moraga to swear in fire district commissioners at Miramonte High School. Moraga mayor Mike Majchrzak and Orinda mayor Sarge Littlehale called the merger a historic union of the two communities.

State assemblywoman Lynne Leach described the merger as a victory for local control over government.

County supervisor Gayle Uilkema said she was happy for the new district but described the evening as bitter sweet being a representative of the county.

"I feel like the British in Hong Kong," said Uilkema, alluding to the transition of power between Great Britain and China which happened earlier in the day.

Fire Chief Johnston Off to a Great Start

By LYNDA LEONARD
Editor

"I'm on a big learning curve," says Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) Chief Jim Johnston, talking about getting to know the people in both communities as well as learning the processes and systems that are in place within the district. Our interview with Johnston took place on a Sunday afternoon; he was getting acquainted with the staff on duty that day. Over time he will visit each of the three shifts in the five fire stations.

Johnston has been on the job for over two months, and he notes, "We've got a pretty full plate in terms of things that are going on." He refers to the developing paramedic service in Orinda; the seismic and functional upgrades to the fire stations; the fire hazard in Orinda; the purchase of a new ambulance and two new fire engines for Orinda.

Paramedics: A Life Saved!

"Paramedics on duty (at the Orinda Way station) were able to have a positive influence" recently on the treatment of a man having a heart attack, Johnston says. The man was being driven to the hospital by his wife when he asked her to take him to the Orinda Way fire station instead because he didn't think he could make it to the hospital.

Because of the recent merger, not only were paramedics on duty and ready to intervene, but recently acquired equipment – a Lifepak 11, capable of a 12-lead EKG – enabled the paramedics to fax the man's EKG to the hospital. Doctors were waiting for him when he arrived, ready to provide treatment, saving precious time. Johnston says that the Lifepak 11 is a "significant improvement" over the old equipment and notes that MOFD is the only fire district in the East Bay to have one.

Johnston says that the paramedic program is progressing well and that "our



Photo by Sally Hogarty

Fire Chief Jim Johnston

goal is to have a paramedic assigned to every engine company. . . . The quicker that intervention begins the greater the likelihood that you'll have a better outcome."

Fire Danger

In dealing with the fire danger in Orinda, Johnston says that water supply (see the story on page 1) is only one of the factors. Others include vegetation management, access for emergency vehicles and types of construction.

A large portion of Orinda is classified as a very high fire-hazard severity zone. Because those areas are adjacent to areas that the California Division of Forestry (CDF) is responsible for, Johnston and CDF are "redefining the threat zone areas." The benefit to Orinda? If a fire starts in OMFD's area and is considered a threat to a neighboring state responsibility area, then CDF responds immediately with up to four aircraft, including air tankers and a helicopter, plus three engines and a couple of hand crews.

"The concept is that you fight any fire immediately and hard with a lot of

resources so that it takes away the threat of it getting larger," Johnston says. "Hit it hard and fast now!"

Johnston emphasizes the importance of vegetation management. He hopes to have a permanent fire marshal hired by late May and then to begin a public education program. "We need to get a vegetation plan in place to help eliminate these hazards," he says. "You could have the best water supply system in the world, and if you don't take care of the vegetation it's not going to matter."

Working Together

"I've got a really good fire board to work with," Johnston says. "They're very astute as to the issues, and they're very committed to a high level of service."

The feeling is mutual. "We're very pleased with our selection," says board president John Wyro. "He's the right guy." Wyro also notes that Johnston has been well received by the district's personnel. "The energy is high, and it's positive."

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Rescue One Foundation Expands to Include Orinda

Now that the fire districts of Moraga and Orinda have merged, the Rescue One Foundation has expanded its board of directors from nine to 11 members and asks Orinda citizens to fill these two new openings. Since its establishment 20 years ago to foster donations for the then-beginning paramedic program in Moraga, the foundation has collected donations of supplies and equipment valued at more than \$100,000. Anyone interested may write to Rescue One Foundation, 1280 Moraga Way, Moraga, CA 94556. The deadline for applicants is April 1.

THE VALLEY • BAY AREA

Moraga, Orinda police cars to get defibrillators

By Andy Jokelson

TIMES STAFF WRITER

The Moraga and Orinda police departments soon will become the first in Contra Costa County to carry defibrillators in patrol cars to help heart attack victims.

Police sometimes reach a victim several minutes before an ambulance or fire engine, said police and fire officials. An officer equipped with the automated, battery-powered device can restore the heart's regular rhythm by delivering electrical shocks through pads pressed to the patient's chest.

"The rationale is that we are out already, actually driving around," said Orinda Police Chief Dan Lawrence.

"With early defibrillation, your chances of survival can go up 30 percent."

— Bob Bratton,
engineer-paramedic

"The whole key here is saving lives," said Bob Bratton, an engineer-paramedic for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, which will provide the defibrillators and train police to use them.

"With early defibrillation, your

chances of survival can go up 30 percent," he said.

The fire district, which has added to its paramedic force, initially will give two defibrillators to the Orinda Police Department and one to Moraga's, said Darrell Lee, an engineer-paramedic for the district.

Officers probably will be trained this month, Lee said. He aims to have police cars carrying defibrillators beginning the first week of December. Later, each police department will get one more, he said.

The nonprofit Rescue One Foundation, which raises money for the fire district to buy medical and rescue equipment, provided \$3,000 for one police defibrillator. The others

will have been purchased previously for the district, which carries them on an engine at each of its stations and on a backup ambulance, Lee said.

Police in the Peninsula city of Atherton early last year became the first in California to carry defibrillators. Four to seven patrol cars per shift each have one, said Chief Steve Cader.

Cader said Atherton officers have not had to use the devices because either patients didn't need them or police deferred to paramedics, but he has no doubt that the machines eventually will save lives.

"It's probably one of the best medical tools that we have," he said.

CONTRA COSTA • BAY AREA

Moraga man selected for fire board seat

■ Ben Ho, a reserve police officer for the community, will fill the vacancy; another candidate criticizes decision

By Andy Jokelson

TIMES STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — Retired Navy eye surgeon Ben Ho will join the Moraga-Orinda Fire District's board.

The board chose Ho on Monday to fill the vacancy left by former Moraga mayor Mike Cory, who died in September. Ho will serve the rest of Cory's term, slated to end in December 1999.

Ho is a Moraga reserve police officer, a board member of the Rescue

One Foundation and was senior eye surgeon for U.S. forces during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf War. He is medical director of the Oakland urban search-and-rescue task force and a medical adviser to state and federal search-and-rescue programs.

Board member Pete Wilson said Tuesday that Ho's background will be a great asset in helping the district deal with emergency medical service programs.

Other candidates for the board seat included Richard Olsen and Raymond Fish Jr., both former members of the old Moraga Fire District board.

Olsen, who served 12 years on the old Moraga district board, said in a written statement Tuesday that the

board should have appointed someone who had a long record of service to the old district, provided "strong positive participation" in merging the Moraga and Orinda districts and "has the demonstrated support and backing of the community's leaders."

Olsen said Ho did not attend most meetings of the former Moraga Fire Commission and the Moraga-Orinda board. Ho "did not choose to endorse the merger, chose not to participate in any of the planning and campaigning for the merger and did not contribute one dime to the promoter cause," Olsen said.

Ho could not be reached for comment.

Board President John Wyro told

the Times on Tuesday that the board was "blessed that we had three quality candidates come forward. Each had (his) own strengths but after deliberation amongst the four of us, we felt that Ben Ho was the best person to appoint. ... That's not to take anything away from Dick Olsen or Ray Fish.

"Any one of the three would have been a fine fire commissioner," Wyro said.

He said Olsen has "contributed an awful lot, and we hope that he will continue to contribute to the benefit of the district. I'm sorry that he feels that something didn't go right with the process, but we're satisfied that it did."

Police put heart into new training

By Emilie Karrick
STAFF WRITER

Local police officers are bringing new meaning to the age-old adage "to protect and serve."

As of this week, officers in the Moraga and Orinda police departments have the tools and training that will enable them to revive heart attack victims.

Joining forces with paramedics from the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, the two police departments are the first law enforcement agencies in the county to carry automatic external defibrillators (AED). When police officers respond first to a heart attack, they will be able to sustain the patient during critical life-saving minutes.

"Every minute that goes by when somebody's not breathing and has no pulse, you're looking at 10 percent less chance of survival," said paramedic-engineer Darrell Lee. "They have the tools to use and it will help us make a difference in the patient's survival."

Lee and Moraga resident Ben Ho — recently appointed as the new Moraga-Orinda fire board member — conducted training for all members of both police departments. Officers learned that if they are able to sustain the "chain of survival," they may be able to resuscitate a victim who minutes before was a nonbreather.

This chain of survival starts the moment a call for help is made. Upon arrival to a scene where the patient has no pulse and is not breathing, CPR will help temperate a heart that is in fibrillation — chaotic rhythm caused by extensive damage to the heart muscle.

If defibrillation — electric shock that sends the heart back into its normal rhythm — is started within seven minutes or less, chance of survival is 20 percent and greater. However, that shock must be administered within 10 minutes if it is to be effective at all.

"Electricity shocks (the heart), wakes it up and starts it beating again," Ho explained. "We try to get electricity to the heart sooner

and sooner."

Ho, a Moraga reserve police officer, first raised the possibility of such a program. After a year's worth of conversations between the two police chiefs, the fire chief, both city councils, the fire board, the police association, county Emergency Medical Services and Rescue One foundation — it was launched.

Four of the AEDs are on loan from the fire district, while Rescue One donated the \$3,000 cost of the fifth. The machines to be used by police officers (three in Orinda and two in Moraga) have been deemed "idiot-proof," with play by play instructions once the electrodes are attached to the patient's chest. Everything from when to do CPR and whether or not a shock is advised is dictated by the machine.

"At first we were a little leery because we're not paramedics or anything, but it seems like it's really easy," said Moraga Officer Randy Dickey. "We're excited to get a call, so that we can actually get out there

See AEDs, Page 2

CONTINUED ON BACK
SIDE OF PHOTO →

Wednesday, November 25, 1998

Contra Costa
SUN



Orinda Detective Craig Cooper attaches contacts to an automatic external defibrillator during training last Thursday with firefighter-paramedic Felipe Barretto, right, and Moraga Officer Julie Valdez.

KRISTOPHER SKINNER/SUN

e has testified at Environmental Protection Agency hearings and serves on the National Fire Protection Association, writing standards for fire departments. He is also a board member for County Connection.

See HORN, Page 2

Arson is suspected in Moraga bank fire

■ No injuries in 4:20 p.m. blaze at Bank of America, where three recent bomb threats have been made

By Celeste Ward
TIMES STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — A two-alarm fire broke out Wednesday on the roof of a Bank of America, and officials said they believe it was linked to three recent bomb threats.

Police and fire officials are investigating the blaze as arson.

More than 20 firefighters responded to a panic alarm call from the bank at 1400 Moraga Way at about 4:20 p.m., when smoke began billowing from the roof.

Several police and fire agencies were dispatched, bringing five fire engines, three battalion chiefs and investigators from the California Department of Forestry and the FBI. Police from Lafayette, Orinda and Moraga closed off the 1400 block of



KRISTOPHER SKINNER/TIMES

FIRE HEAVILY DAMAGED the roof of the Bank of America building at 1400 Moraga Way in Moraga on Wednesday afternoon.

Moraga Way and diverted traffic.

It took an hour to bring the blaze under control.

All bank employees left the building safely, said Battalion Chief Rob Goodyear.

"There are no injuries at this point," he said from the scene.

The bank will be closed for at least two weeks, said Battalion Chief Steve Rivers of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

The bank's safety deposit box area was intact, he said.

None of the employees standing outside the building would comment, citing company policy against speaking to the media.

The fire caused \$200,000 in damage to the building, said Fire Mar-

shal Tonya Hoover of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District. Most damaged was the roof, in a hollow area between the bank's ceiling and the rooftop, and a few windows broke out from the heat.

A helicopter from the East Bay Regional Park District hovered overhead.

Moraga police Sgt. Bob Priebe said the bank received three telephoned bomb threats recently, from three different people. Two of the voices were male and one female, he said.

The bank was closed for a short time Tuesday as Moraga police officers searched for a bomb.

See FIRE, Back Page



KRISTOPHER SKINNER/TIMES

FLAMES BREAK through the roof of the Bank of America, where about \$200,000 in damage was done.

Fire

FROM PAGE A1

Priebe said the cause of the fire and where it started were unknown.

"Officially that will be determined," he said, adding the bomb threats will be investigated as a link.

"It is certainly of the utmost concern," he said.

Rivers said investigators were concentrating on a shelving area in a back corner of the bank that had papers stacked waist-high.

The investigation could be a joint effort among several agencies, including the state fire marshal.

The blaze was in the center of Moraga's shopping district and drew a crowd of more than 100.

Dave Long of Moraga was nearby when he saw smoke coming from a

corner of the bank's roof.

"There were still workers inside the building, and they had no idea that the roof was on fire," he said.

Fourteen-year-old Patrick Faust of Moraga said the fire grew quickly.

"I first heard firetrucks, then I saw flames shooting out of the roof. The windows were breaking," he said.

Staff writer Andy Jokelson contributed to this story. 12/30/98

Moraga bank fire was set in error or intentionally

TIMES 1/1/99

■ Investigators rule out electrical problems as the cause of the blaze at a BofA branch that had been the subject of bomb threats

By Renita Sandosham

TIMES STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — Officials on Thursday ruled out electrical problems as the cause of a fire at a Bank of America branch as they pursued a criminal investigation at the bank, which has received three recent bomb threats.

That leaves only two options: a fire set by someone intentionally or accidentally, said Fire Marshal Tonya

Hoover of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

Federal investigators have joined the probe into the two-alarm blaze, which broke out in the single-story bank on Moraga Way about 4:20 p.m. Wednesday.

They had not determined Thursday if the fire was the work of an arsonist but said they had found no evidence of an incendiary device or accelerant.

"It is a criminal investigation," said police Sgt. Jeff Price. "But we could still find out it was accidental."

The fire's point of origin appeared to be a room used for storing office and janitorial supplies, Hoover said. It is not usually locked and is used only by bank employees.

Price said investigators will focus on interviewing employees to determine who had access to the storage room near the time of the fire.

Federal agents from the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms and the FBI were called because of the recent bomb threats and possible arson against a federally insured facility, said FBI Special Agent George Grotz.

The fire spread quickly from the supply room into a hallway and some restrooms before extending into the attic, Hoover said.

Since late November, there have been three bomb threats to the bank, including two Monday and Tuesday, said police Sgt. Bob Priebe.

On Tuesday, police searched the bank after a caller said that a bomb

TO HELP

Police want to talk to customers who were in the Moraga branch of Bank of America about 4 p.m. Wednesday and ask them to call Detective Mike Maes at 925-376-2515.

was set to go off at 9 a.m. Wednesday. No device was found, but the bank added security guards overnight, Priebe said.

Wednesday's fire caused an estimated \$600,000 in damage to the building and its contents, but the bank's vault and safe-deposit boxes remained intact.

10 • THE ORINDA NEWS • January / February 1999

PUBLIC SAFETY

Orindans Join Rescue One Board

■ Life of grateful new member saved by Moraga paramedics in 1997

By SALLY HOGARTY

Assistant Editor

July 4 will always be a special celebration for Carolyn Yancey and her husband Don. It was on that day in 1997 that the Moraga paramedics saved Carolyn's life. "I had been out in our back yard pulling weeds when a swarm of yellow-jackets attacked me," Carolyn recalls. At the time, Orinda contracted with the County for paramedic service. With ambulances dispatched from Walnut Creek, response time could be as long as 30 minutes. The Yanceys began driving towards John Muir Hospital. Just before she went into anaphylactic shock, Carolyn remembered that the Moraga Fire Department had a paramedic unit. Don drove to the station on Moraga Way, and within minutes life-sustaining fluids stabilized Carolyn. "The paramedics told me that if we had continued driving towards John Muir, I probably wouldn't have made it to Highway 24," Carolyn states.

Feeling that a simple thank-you would be insufficient, Carolyn found a more meaningful way to express her gratitude to the paramedics this past summer. "I saw a story in *The Orinda News* about Rescue One looking for board members from Orinda. I thought: I owe these people something. I owe them my life." Carolyn, along with fellow Orindan Dr. Eugene Gottfried, joined the board.

Rescue One, a unique nonprofit organization, aids and supports the fire district's emergency medical services (EMS). With the creation of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, the original nine-member Rescue One board was increased to 11 this past summer to allow for representation of Orinda residents.

Gottfried, a member of ComVan 45, an emergency communication network comprised of amateur radio operators, felt that being on the Rescue One board would be a natural progression. "It was also perfect timing," says Gottfried. "I had just stepped down as the director of San Francisco General Hospital's clinical laboratory and had a bit of time on my hands. This



SALLY HOGARTY

Dr. Eugene Gottfried

seemed like a good way for me to contribute." Gottfried will serve a two-year term and Yancey a one-year term.

Since its inception in 1977, Rescue One has purchased over \$115,000 in equipment and supplies for the EMS program through community donations. "Our first piece of equipment was an Amp Pak Heart Defibrillator/Monitor, and last year we bought a Lifepak 11 EKG machine to monitor a heart attack while the victim is being transported to a hospital," says longtime board member Gordon Nathan. Previously, such machines had only been available at medical facilities. "When seconds count, these machines can really make a difference," he adds. In addition to equipment, the organization has also supplied educational materials for CPR training and sent paramedics for specialized training at Stanford University.

Recently the group purchased compact defibrillators for use by the Moraga and Orinda Police Departments. "Often the Police Department reaches the scene of an emergency first," Yancey explains. "Having the defibrillator could mean the difference between life and death for the victim." Yancey knows from personal experience how important having the right equipment at the right place can be.

To learn more about Rescue One, or to have a member from the group's newly formed Speaker's Bureau talk to your organization, call Gordon Nathan at 376-4639.



SALLY HOGARTY

Paramedics from Moraga-Orinda Fire District (L to R) Felipe Barreto, Alan Mathews, Bob Bratton, Jeff Dittmer and Darrell Lee take time out to meet with new Rescue One board member Carolyn Yancey.

THE ORINDA NEWS

Gratis
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Bimonthly
March / April 1999

Volunteers of the Year



SALLY HOGARTY

The many volunteers from Moraga and Orinda, whose work resulted in the merger of the two fire districts, were honored at The Orinda Association's annual Volunteers of the Year awards dinner. Seated (L-R) are Jerry Meyer, Robert Nielsen, Pam Hall, Judy Shallat, Carol Gustafson, and Gayle Uilkema. Standing (L-R) are Gordon Nathan, Dick and Marsha Alfee, Merle Gilliland, Tom Hughes, Amelia Wilson, Carl Weber, Dr. Lee Nelson, Pete Wilson, Allan Tabor and John Wyro.

Orindan Wanted for Rescue One Foundation Board

The board of directors of Rescue One Foundation is seeking applicants from Orinda to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Dr. Ben Ho, who was recently appointed to serve the remaining term of the late Mike Cory on the Moraga-Orinda Fire District board.

The Foundation functions as the support group for the paramedic program for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District. In the 20 years since the Foundation was established, over \$115,000 has been collected and disbursed. Equipment for the emergency medical services and special programs not included in the District's budget has been provided by the Foundation through gifts of appreciation, memorials and annual donations.

Letters of interest should be received by March 15, 1999, and addressed to: Rescue One Foundation, 1280 Moraga Way, Moraga, CA 94556. For further information, please call 376-4939 or 376-6151.

—Jerry Meyer,
Rescue One Foundation

6 • THE ORINDA NEWS • March / April 1999

COMMUNITY



LYNDA LEONARD

Orinda Police Det. Craig Cooper with one of the semiautomatic defibrillators that are now standard equipment in patrol cars.

Police Equipped With Defibrillators

■ Quick response to a cardiac arrest increases the chance of survival

By DET. CRAIG F. COOPER
Orinda Police

The police patrolling in Orinda are now outfitted with special cardiac resuscitation equipment. The semiautomatic defibrillators will allow Orinda officers to respond to medical calls of possible cardiac arrest and increase the victim's chance of survival.

Cardiac arrest strikes approximately 360,000 Americans every year. Presently only one in 20 survives. Time is a major factor in surviving sudden cardiac arrest.

Normally the heart pumps blood by contracting and relaxing at regular intervals, with each heartbeat dictated by an electrical impulse that washes across the muscle in an invisible wave. In cardiac arrest, the wave stalls and a sort of eddy of electricity forms. As the current bounces around, the heart begins quivering instead of beating.

This phenomenon is called fibrillation, and if it paralyzes the heart's lower chambers, blood stops flowing through the body. Soon the brain and vital organs are permanently damaged by the lack of oxygen. If a normal heartbeat can be restored within the first 10 minutes, the odds of survival reach 57 percent or more. Upon determining that a person is experiencing cardiac arrest, medical personnel or police officers equipped with defibrillators can shock the heart back into its normal rhythm.

If an Orinda police officer happens to be the first on an emergency scene and sees somebody in cardiac arrest, the officer will be able to use the defibrillator immediately, rather than waiting for paramedic response, thereby increasing the victim's chance of survival.

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District has given Orinda police officers six hours of training, which included classroom and practical use of the semiautomatic defibrillators. Officers have completed both a written and a skills test showing proficiency in the use of the defibrillator.

3-4-98

Small Orinda area to join new district

By Emille Karrick
STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — When the Moraga-Orinda Fire District became official in July, residents in east Orinda wondered if they had been left out of an exclusive town shindig.

As their neighbors joined ranks with Moragans to induct the new district, a few hundred Orindans remained a part of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District.

The exclusion was no derogatory snub. While the approximately 70 lots lie within boundary lines laid down when Orinda was incorporated in 1985, they just happen to lie outside fire district boundaries drawn years ago.

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"There is no wait around time for AMR; there is immediate treatment and transport," Bratton said. "The initial paramedics can continue with patient treatment all the way to the hospital."

The district sent out an initial letter to affected residents asking if they would like to join the new district, and the response was overwhelmingly positive.

However, the annexation will not become official until the matter goes before the Contra Costa County Local Agencies Formation Commission. If passed by LAFCO, the matter will then appear on a mail ballot to receive a final OK, which includes approval of a fire-flow tax.

C C Seem
3-11-98

Bill would be boon to local firefighters

By Emille Karrick
STAFF WRITER

Though it was many years ago, assistant fire chief Rick Probert remembers a Danville house fire as if it were yesterday.

Flames were coming out of every window, explosions were popping all around and a 5-year-old child was trapped inside the house.

Although short one limb, that child is now able to walk around.

"We were able to (save that child) because those firefighters were in state of the art equipment," said Probert, who works for the San Ramon fire district. "Where people run away from a fire, we run into it."

In order to combat any sort of serious structure or wildland fire, firefighters need the right training and the right equipment. The former requirement takes time and hard work, while the latter takes what can amount to \$3,500 per firefighter.

Factored into the budget of a small district — such as our own Moraga-Orinda — that can

amount to a substantial financial burden. Yet most districts don't think it is an option to skimp on equipment that could someday save the life of a firefighter or even a 5-year-old child.

In 1979, it became a state constitutional requirement for firefighters to be suitably equipped. As dictated by a state mandate, the equipment would be paid for by the California government. As the law stated, local agencies could apply to be reimbursed for firefighter equipment expenditures.

When the state failed to fulfill several such obligations, they were taken to court in the so-called "Carmel Valley Case." William Ross, counsel for the Moraga-Orinda fire district, was an attorney in the case that made the state mandate universally applicable from 1987 to 1992.

However, in the budget crunching atmosphere of 1992, that mandate was suspended. Fire districts were once again on their own.

Following that budgetary slight, six districts sued the state and their cases are still in the

LAMORINDA BRIEFS

3-25-98 C C Seem

Fire district open house April 4

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District will host its second open house on Saturday, April 4, at Station 45 in Orinda.

Themes such as earthquake preparedness and weed abatement will be the focus, along with a special introduction to Orinda's first paramedics. Smokey Bear, Sparky the dog and Otto the Auto will join the fire district in a celebration of the district's first nine months.

Festivities will begin at 33 Orinda Way at 10 a.m. and continue until 2 p.m., with refreshments provided by the Rescue One Foundation. Free parking is available across the street at the Orinda Library. For more information, contact the fire district at 253-4770.

Fire district ordinance attacks weed problem

By Emilie Karrick
STAFF WRITER

Spring is in the air and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District is gearing up for what comes after the season of renewed growth and lazy, warm days — that time of the year when there is the greatest potential for fire danger.

At last Tuesday's meeting, the district board heard the first reading of an ordinance that would make weed abatement a mandatory task within district boundaries.

According to Fire Marshal Ron Garland, weed abatement is the best way to prepare for this impending danger. Weeds are fuel waiting to spread fire onto larger vegetation and homes.

"At the end of summer, when there has been no rain for six months, that grass will not stay green for long," Garland said. "The critical fire weather is the issue."

The proposed ordinance takes advantage of an authority to require weed abatement given as an option by the California Health and Safety Code.

According to the ordinance, if weed abatement is not completed after proper notification of the requirements, the district may go in and do the job itself. The district can then recover the costs of abating weeds from the party held responsible.

The district would begin the noticing process in the beginning of May, with weed abatement to be completed by mid-June.

Weed abatement is a vital concern throughout Lamorinda, but the gravest need is found in Orinda. The city is designated a high severity fire hazard zone because of its narrow, windy streets; a high density of ornamental landscaping, including

juniper and 50-year old pine trees; and a topography characterized as urban wildland interface. With its easier access and subdivisions with more up-to-date fire codes, Moraga is less of a problem.

Weeds are defined in the ordinance as bearing seeds of a downy or wingy nature, sagebrush, chaparral, poison oak, poison ivy, dry grass, stubble, brush or litter, and any other brush or weeds which attain such a large growth as to become a fire menace when dry.

The most important aspect of weed abatement is creating a defensible space. Limbs within 10 feet of a chimney or dead limbs overhanging a building must be cut away. All needles and leaves also must be cleaned off of every roof.

All weeds within 100 feet of a house or property line must be cut to no more than three inches high. It is also recommended that pine tree limbs in particular should be kept trimmed back, especially when sitting on a bordering area with weeds.

Beyond maintaining a defensible space, Garland recommends landscaping with fire safety in mind. Planting drought-safe vegetation and implementing a drip irrigation system to keep water needy plants from getting thirsty are viable options. Fire ladders (plants of varying heights that provide a fuel supply from the ground up) and fire pathways (horizontal paths of foliage that allow fire to move quickly across vegetation) should be eliminated.

The fire district will consider the weed abatement ordinance for approval at the April 28 meeting.

For more information on weed abatement, contact Ron Garland at 253-4782.

Fire district ready for East Orinda

By Samantha Negley
STAFF WRITER

In an emergency situation, having an ambulance nearby to respond could mean the difference between life and death.

That is the main concern for Judy Eben, a resident of east Orinda who is in favor of being annexed, along with about 74 other homes, to the Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

When Orinda split from the county fire district to join with Moraga last year, a few neighborhoods remained part of the Lafayette fire service area — which has ambulances based in Walnut Creek. As part of the newly merged district, affected residents would join their neighbors, just yards away, who already receive service from paramedics based in Orinda.

"I didn't feel unsafe, but it seems in our best interest to be part of a more local ambulance source," Eben said.

The Moraga-Orinda fire board agreed last week to hold a protest hearing for any east Orinda residents who don't want to become part of the new fire district.

If there are no objections at the July 28 meeting, residents will have to approve a mail-in vote on a 6 cent fire-flow tax already in place for other Orinda residents, before final annexation can occur. Affected areas include Tahos Road, Juniper Drive, Saint Hill Road, White Oak Drive and El Nido Ranch Road.

OPEN HOUSE

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District will host an open house at 2 p.m. today to celebrate the district's one-year anniversary and dedicate a new fire engine at Station 45, 33 Orinda Way, Orinda.

Fire board President John Wyro said he does not anticipate any complaints. "Of course, we've contacted everyone in that area, and everyone seems to be in favor of the change," he said.

Eben said she would support the tax. "If that's what it takes to get quality service, then I'm willing to pay," Eben said.

Also at last week's meeting, the board unanimously approved a 6 cent fire-flow tax for both the Moraga and Orinda zones. The tax, effective today, marks the first such payment in Moraga in four years. Orinda voters approved a 6 cent tax last year when the district was formed.

The cost will be \$81 a year for a homeowner with a house and a garage totaling 2,500 sq. ft. It's expected to generate about \$500,000 annually for each district.

Although the Moraga zone has a \$1.8 million reserve fund, the district plans improvements which will deplete the entire fund, and then some. A large portion of funds generat-

ed from the tax, combined with the reserve money, will be used to help pay for renovation or reconstruction of Station 42, along with other long-term improvements.

An engineering firm found major deficiencies at the station in 1997, according to Battalion Chief Greg Holm.

"There is water leakage under the station ... and existing health hazards to the employees," he said.

The building renovation alone is estimated to cost between \$1.3 million and \$1.4 million.

In a preliminary budget approved at last week's meeting, Fire Chief Jim Johnston outlined other possible expenses — such as acquisition of more land next to the Rheem Boulevard station and miscellaneous improvements such as a district E-mail intranet server.

The fire board also wanted the tax increase to help replenish the reserve fund.

"We need to start collecting now to rebuild funds, rather than wait until we absolutely need it," said fire board director Mike Cory.

Wyro reiterated that money raised in Moraga would only be spent there, and money raised in Orinda would only be spent in Orinda — until the two cities are on equal financial ground.

The fire board will meet again at 7 p.m. July 28 at the Orinda Community Center for the protest hearing and regular business.

Agreement strengthens local firefighting

By Emilie Karrick
STAFF WRITER

The Moraga-Orinda fire district board recently added another tool to the district's firefighting belt. They signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the California Department of Forestry, cementing an automatic aid agreement between the two jurisdictions.

When there is a fire within a certain sector - West of Moraga Way, East of Moraga Road and North of Highway 24 - CDF will now automatically respond with helicopters, air tankers, fire engines, bulldozers and hand crews. The Moraga-Orinda district will receive no charge for such resources.

"We'll get a quicker response," Chief Jim Johnston said. "It is critical for us to get those resources on red flag days."

Previously CDF would automatically respond only if there were a fire within sectors they are charged with, known as state responsibility zones. Assistance within a local responsibility zone would require a mutual aid call, meaning that local fire personnel would assess the fire before deciding whether or not to call CDF. If called, a charge would be levied for their services.

"We're enhancing our responsibility to all areas where there is a threat of a wildland fire,"

said CDF division chief John Ferreira.

From CDF's point of view, this new philosophy not only helps protect resources but it also saves money.

"A fire in those local threat zones could easily come into a state responsibility zone," Ferreira said. "If it spread we'd spend millions containing that fire."

Those fires are now less likely to spread because CDF's advanced equipment would arrive sometimes twice as fast. Local fire fighter will also be more likely to call for their help.

According to Ferreira, an air tanker for example can cost \$2,000 to \$3,000 per hour.

"We're saying don't hold off, we're paying for it," he added.

CDF resources will be especially accessible to the Moraga-Orinda district. They have invited the state agency to use Station 45 as a base for a CDF reserve engine on red flag days.

Ferreira said that the closest CDF engines are currently in Clayton or Sunol. This additional staging area will benefit all districts on this side of the county as well as Alameda County.

"This is just another feather in our cap to show that the new district is doing everything possible," said Director Gordon Nathan. "We are one of the first in the area to do this."

Fire flow tax to be discussed this month

The Moraga-Orinda fire district board will decide how much money taxpayers may be shelling out in a fire flow tax, at their June 23 meeting. They will also establish a plan for spending that potential capital.

At a recent meeting, Chief Jim Johnston outlined a hypothetical plan of over \$10 million in spending over the next eight years. He recommended to the board that the district continue to collect the tax used to fund improvement projects, ranging up to 30 cents in the Moraga zone or six cents in the Orinda zone.

"We have to work out a plan so that we can get these items and be able to afford these things," Board President John Wyrto said. "These districts have been functioning under crisis management for too long. We're finally able to plan ahead."

-Emilie Karrick

Seismic problems cited at fire stations

By Emilie Karrick
STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — While the Moraga-Orinda Fire District board considers conditions at Station No. 42 unlivable, firefighter Ken Mannshardt chooses to look at the situation objectively. Things could be much better, but, he figures, they also could be much worse.

However, on a recent tour of the facility he called his home-away-from-home the dingiest of all the district's stations.

He pointed out the soggy layer of dampness that runs the length of the station's floor, the cramped office space, and the apparatus bay with its substandard ventilation, closet-size exercise space, slippery floor and pinched equipment capacity.

The firefighter's living quarters were also of concern. Aging dorms and a small bathroom do not accommodate a staff that now includes women.

While these and other issues have contributed to the district's decision to replace the 40-year-old station, one overriding problem that has received recent attention is unacceptable seismic standards.

"The (apparatus bay) would just have to bend a little and the doors wouldn't go up,"

Mannshardt said. "In an earthquake, you are going to want your firefighters to respond immediately."

The state building code requires that essential services facilities meet higher standards in terms of seismic capability, said Joel McDonald, chief of seismic and special programs for the state Architect Office.

While the exact application of this criteria is complicated for Station 42 because it is constructed out of various types of materials, a December 1997 functional analysis report by Loving and Campos Architects Inc. calls the facility's seismic requirements substandard. Station 41 was also found to be below seismic standards, but further investigation is needed to determine the extent.

Local governments are required to meet seismic standards as soon as feasible. The district has budgeted for the renovation in the 1998-99 budget.

Dick Olsen, a former Moraga fire commissioner, remembers proposing work in 1984 to ensure that Moraga's stations could withstand a major earthquake. After securing funds from the fire-flow tax, the work was awarded to a local contractor in 1988 — while Moraga was still part of the county fire district.

Additional money was also

paid to have a county inspector make sure that all the work was done according to plan.

After the Moraga and Orinda districts merged in July '97, a consultant was hired to make sure that Moraga's stations were still in conformance with seismic standards. Dewell and Associates looked at the plans for the 1988 work and determined that certain things at Station 41 and 42 had not been done according to plan.

"The question in our mind is did (the county) inspect all of the things they were supposed to inspect under the contract of work," said fire board member Gordon Nathan.

The contract in question, however, has yet to be located.

"If we can find the contract and we can look at all the facts, then we'll be in a better position to draw conclusions," Nathan added.

If the misplaced contract shows what is currently a hunch — that work was not completed or inspected correctly — the district could entertain the possibility of seeking damages from the county. The clock is ticking, however, because of a 10-year statute of limitations on the work.

"We're looking at doing some research," said Fire Chief Jim Johnston. "There are some things that were done incorrectly."

9-2-98

CC Ben

Fire district opening window to the future

By Emille Karick
STAFF WRITER

With its one-year birthday just past, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District is starting to decide what it wants to be when it grows up.

The board of directors gave the organization a little nudge into the future by voting unanimously last week to implement a districtwide strategic planning process. Under the direction of strategic planning coordinator Cynthia Tablak, the district will outline a vision — with goals and strategies to achieve it.

"I think we're coming to a very critical juncture for the organization," said Chief Jim Johnston. "We need a vision for the future to help people get on the same page for goals. We will be one of the few fire districts to be out there on the cutting edge."

The board decided to hire a facilitator to make the process more productive. "This is a road map to the future," said director Pete Wilson. "To get there and do that takes a great deal of work, which would fall on (Johnston's) shoulders. That would put an awful burden on his shoulders if this is going to be done right."

Tablak, chosen for her experience with fire districts and interpersonal skills, launched the process on Sept. 1. At a fee of \$25,000, she will undertake four basic steps to make sure that the strategic plan will be "accurate, effective and implemented."

She will meet with each crew, board member and administrative staff member as well as hold a public forum to identify all concerns. She will then hold four days of off-

site meetings to develop everything from a status report and mission statement to strategies for each measurable objective and individual tasks to fulfill those strategies. A fifth off-site meeting will create a short-term critical priorities plan.

After the brunt of the brainstorming, Tablak could then work with the district to come up with a tracking process. Or, the district could decide to take this on itself.

Orinda resident Betty Murphy reminded the board to make sure the public is involved in the process. "I really think since the community is paying for it, the community should be involved from the get-go."

In other news, the board held a required protest hearing on the annexation of 53 east Orinda homes. The homes are still part of the Contra Costa Fire District. When no one came forward or made comments known, the board voted to go ahead with the process.

LAFCO will now send out a mail ballot asking residents to approve the 6 cent fire-flow tax currently levied throughout the rest of the city. If passed via the ballot, those 53 sites will then be official.

The board also voted to hire architect Don Dommer Associates to complete the renovation or reconstruction of Station 42 in Moraga. The firm was chosen for its experience, proven technical know-how and ability to blend the future fire station with the local neighborhood. They also offered a better value for services than other finalists for the job, with a cost estimate of \$108,000.

Fire district celebrates its independence

By Pete Wilson

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District and all its citizens can be extremely proud of the accomplishments made in our first year. Your fire district has been able to provide an increasingly high level of service to the community and remain fiscally responsible in doing so.

Everything is ahead of the schedule in the five-year plan laid out in the LAFCO application for creating the independent district.

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District was born July 1, 1997, the result of an overwhelming majority (80 percent) of Moraga and Orinda citizens voting to create an independent district. The district now is governed by a board of five locally elected directors in five zones: two in Moraga, two in Orinda and one zone half in Orinda and half in Moraga and Canyon.

The first important step the new directors took was the hiring of recently retired San Ramon fire chief Mel Deardorff as the interim chief. Mel's years of experience got the district quickly and efficiently up and running. The district is deeply indebted to him for his leadership in those critical early months.

In the fall of 1997, an extensive search for a chief culminated in the Jan. 1 hiring of Jim Johnston as the first permanent fire chief. Jim had been deputy fire chief in the Alameda County Fire District.

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District has just concluded another personnel search and by mid-July hopes to announce the new permanent fire marshal. Also this year, the third battalion chief position was filled by promoting from within the ranks of the district's own employees.

Two years ahead of what was promised to the voters, the paramedic program (engine based) is well on its way to being implemented and should be up and running in Orinda in 1999. The paramedic program already in place in Moraga continues its high standards.

The Orinda 4th of July parade was led last week by the district's brand-new fire engine. This is the first new engine in Orinda this year.

In a few weeks, the district will take delivery of a second new engine — completing the replacement of our three old engines in each of Orinda's three fire stations.

Rounding out the new equipment list will be the



KRISTOPHER SKINNER/SUN

Gene Gottfried admires the new fire engine at the anniversary party for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

new paramedic ambulance due for delivery this September. The ambulance will be based at Station 45 in downtown Orinda.

There is much to be proud of and cheer about in just the first 12 months of the district's new history. However, 1998 and 1999 will also see the district tackle tough problems.

One of those is the East Bay Municipal Utility District water pipe problem in Orinda. A joint fire district-city of Orinda-EBMUD water pipe study committee has already been formed and it has commissioned a hydrologic study to identify the water pipe problems and various solutions. This is an extremely important issue to all Orindans, no matter where in the city one lives.

Another tough problem involves our stations. All five fire stations need work and repair; some may be totally replaced. This will be a huge capital expense program to ensure seismic safety and protection of the district's firefighters. It will be spread out over the next five to 10 years.

Meeting all these challenges will enable the district to provide the best fire, rescue and emergency medical services in the most economical way to the citizens of Moraga and Orinda. All of us who are involved with the district greatly appreciate your support and involvement as we enter the second year of our independent Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

Wilson, an Orinda resident, is a member of the fire district's board of directors.

Center Costa Box 7-8-98

Fire safety board looks beyond pipe problems

By Emille Karrick
STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — The Fire Safety Committee met last Thursday to discuss aspects of fire protection that go beyond water.

Made up of representatives from the East Bay Municipal Utility District, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and the city of Orinda, the committee was formed primarily to address Orinda's chronic lack of the requisite amount of water pressure necessary to fight a fire.

While EBMUD reported on the progress of a comprehensive engineering project — identifying specific water pressure problems and potential solutions, others provided information about what residents can do to decrease risks.

"What started this study here was the Oakland Hills fire and all the things that went wrong," said Moraga-Orinda fire board director Pete Wilson. "We're trying to mitigate against that type of disaster."

According to Moraga-Orinda fire marshal Tonya Lea Hoover, the water pressure issue — technically known as fire flow — is contingent on fire apparatus access, overall vegetation fuel load, distance from the fire station and types of structure involved.

Hoover previewed an upcoming vegetation management plan that will outline ways to reduce potential fuel load. While weed abatement

programs already in place address quick ignition debris, vegetation management will address other types of flammable vegetation.

"If you've got coyote brush, you might want to think about removing it as a part of the vegetation management," Hoover said.

Members of the public also re-raised the issue of prohibiting parking on El Toyonal during red flag days.

Susan Gortner, of the Orinda-woods Homeowners Association board of directors, reminded the fire district that Orindawoods has only dead-end streets. She asked for ways that they could improve access. "You tell us how to respond, what to do," she said.

Gortner will join approximately 20 other Orinda residents on a citizens advisory committee. The group will get together monthly to learn about more solutions. They will educate themselves as well as the organizations they are a part of on all aspects of fire prevention.

"This is a way for citizens to participate in the process," Wilson said.

The Fire Safety Committee's next meeting will be at 6:30 p.m. Sept. 24 at the Orinda Community Center, 26 Orinda Way.

The citizens advisory committee will hold its first meeting at 7 p.m. Sept. 28 at the Orinda Community Center. For more information or to sign up for the committee, contact Mary Lou Lucas at 287-0144.

9-2-98 CC Sun

Fire panel reviews \$57 million project

By Emille Karrick
STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — With the seven-year anniversary of the Oakland Hills inferno as a haunting reminder, the Orinda Fire Safety Committee contemplated the cost of fire safety on Thursday.

The committee, made up of representatives of the East Bay Municipal Utility District, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and the city of Orinda, reviewed draft results of a Comprehensive Engineering Study.

Through Orinda-wide hydrant tests and computer model calibration to determine the city's existing hydraulic capacity, the EBMUD-led study spelled out system upgrade scenarios and determined cost estimates for three primary alternatives.

The most expensive plan, at \$57 million, would provide 2,250 gallons per minutes from three adjacent hydrants. The other plans call for 1,750 gpm from two hydrants (\$49 million) or 1,500 gpm from two hydrants (\$43 million). For all three options, EBMUD already has \$7 million in improvements planned.

"We've been able to bring the numbers down from what was presented in the reconnaissance study,

but they're still pretty high," said Marilyn Miller of EBMUD. "In order to cut costs, we have to be either looking at cutting the scope or expanding the schedule."

The estimated costs include improvements on 36.7 miles of pipeline for the most expensive option; the latter two would fix 31.3 miles and 26.7 miles.

With pipelines consuming the majority of the cost, other necessary repairs identified were hydrant improvements, a new storage reservoir, a new regulator and three possible regulator upgrades (for the 2,250 scenario only).

Orinda Councilman Sarge Littlehale said that in order to spread out costs, upgrades should be prioritized in terms of which areas need them the most.

Moraga-Orinda fire marshal Tonya Hoover noted that in some areas, upgrades won't do any good because firefighters are unable to access the system in the first place. Therefore, additional fire prevention

measures — such as vegetation management and increased street access — must go along with any level of system repair.

Before the committee can look ahead to an actual improvement project, it must first decide which level of fire flow is right for Orinda.

Moraga-Orinda fire board director Pete Wilson asked the pivotal question, "How is the choice going to be made for which scenario is most realistic for Orinda?"

Hoover's reply was that the decision has already been made. "2,250 under the current situation is standard, but if we can all get together and do (this multi-faceted program) we can go as low as 1,500," she said. "But that's as low as we go."

The next Orinda Fire Safety Committee meeting is tentatively scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Dec. 9 in the Community Center, 26 Orinda Way. The committee's Citizen's Advisory group will meet again at 7 p.m. Nov. 5 in the same location. For more information, call 253-4200.

10-28-98 CC Sun

Moraga man selected for fire board seat

■ Ben Ho, a reserve police officer for the community, will fill the vacancy; another candidate criticizes decision

By Andy Jokelson

TIMES STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — Retired Navy eye surgeon Ben Ho will join the Moraga-Orinda Fire District's board.

The board chose Ho on Monday to fill the vacancy left by former Moraga mayor Mike Cory, who died in September. Ho will serve the rest of Cory's term, slated to end in December 1999.

Ho is a Moraga reserve police officer, a board member of the Rescue

One Foundation and was senior eye surgeon for U.S. forces during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf War. He is medical director of the Oakland urban search-and-rescue task force and a medical adviser to state and federal search-and-rescue programs.

Board member Pete Wilson said Tuesday that Ho's background will be a great asset in helping the district deal with emergency medical service programs.

Other candidates for the board seat included Richard Olsen and Raymond Fish Jr., both former members of the old Moraga Fire District board.

Olsen, who served 12 years on the old Moraga district board, said in a written statement Tuesday that the

board should have appointed someone who had a long record of service to the old district, provided "strong positive participation" in merging the Moraga and Orinda districts and "has the demonstrated support and backing of the community's leaders."

Olsen said Ho did not attend most meetings of the former Moraga Fire Commission and the Moraga-Orinda board. Ho "did not choose to endorse the merger, chose not to participate in any of the planning and campaigning for the merger and did not contribute one dime to the promerger cause," Olsen said.

Ho could not be reached for comment.

Board President John Wyro told

the Times on Tuesday that the board was "blessed that we had three quality candidates come forward. Each had (his) own strengths but after deliberation amongst the four of us, we felt that Ben Ho was the best person to appoint. ... That's not to take anything away from Dick Olsen or Ray Fish."

"Any one of the three would have been a fine fire commissioner," Wyro said.

He said Olsen has "contributed an awful lot, and we hope that he will continue to contribute to the benefit of the district. I'm sorry that he feels that something didn't go right with the process, but we're satisfied that it did."

Fire board reconsiders appointment

By Emille Karrick

STAFF WRITER

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District board voted last Tuesday to reconsider and confirm a controversial action taken during two closed sessions.

Assistant district attorney Jim Sepulveda said the board's selection of a new board member in closed session violated the Brown Act. The district attorney's office launched an investigation into the matter after the Sun reported on the action in its Dec. 2 issue and Orinda resident Ray Davis filed a complaint on Dec. 7.

Davis said that the process undertaken to appoint Ben Ho to fill a board seat vacated by the death of Mike Cory should have allowed for public participation.

"In my opinion the public trust, and the breach thereof, would best be served by requiring them to redo their public process so that public input and review can be a part of the overall equation," Davis wrote.

The board interviewed three candidates and discussed their decision in two closed session meetings on Nov. 10 and 16. According to the Ralph M. Brown Act — a chapter of the California government code enacted to ensure that public entities conduct business openly — the process should have been open to the public.

*Contra Costa Sun
12-30-98*

Incoming board president Gordon Nathan voted against the reconsideration and reconfirmation because he thought that the board was only acting in the district's best interests.

"I'm just upset that the district was cast in a bad light," he said. "I think we should move on from this."

The board decided to conduct the selection in closed session based on advice from legal counsel William Ross.

Ross cited attorney-client privilege due to pending litigation as one of the primary reasons he directed the board to conduct the process in closed session. In an interview with the Sun, Ross reiterated that he advised the board based on years of experience and the best of his knowledge.

"In certain situations, the method of selection would be subject to litigation," he said. "If the potential exists, then I am going to raise the issue — with the potential being potential litigation and the issue being attorney-client privilege."

Sepulveda sent Ross a letter informing him that the board needed to revoke or the D.A. would seek action against them. Ross said that he did not see the letter until the day after last week's board meeting.

However, he informed the board that the complaint would be righted if the action was reconsidered and reconfirmed. Sepulveda agreed, as long as it was done in an open forum.

Members of the public advised the board to evaluate the ramifications of their actions. Moraga Town Councilman Mike Majchrzak said that the board should look at legal, moral and perception implications.

"We, as a district, want to know a little more about the candidates that are being interviewed. People need to know what the candidates are saying and what position they are coming from," he said. "With the whole process being under the purview of closed session, it sends the wrong message."

Orinda resident Betty Murphy said that the board needed to re-examine its practices in order to reestablish the public's confidence and trust.

Outgoing board president John Wyro said that he hoped that the district as a whole would grow from the experience.

"We felt honestly in our hearts that this is the best way to do our job," he said. "I hope that we can dispell that there is any agenda here that we are trying to push."

OA Honors MacKinnon, Fire Merger Volunteers

The evening of January 10, 1999, will be a time of celebration as The Orinda Association, at their annual awards banquet, honors residents who have served the community. Cinda MacKinnon and the Friends of Orinda Creeks will receive the William Penn Mott Jr. Environmental Award. This year's Volunteers of the Year are the many leaders and volunteers who shaped the future of Orinda's fire protection service.

Cinda MacKinnon, Friends of Orinda Creeks

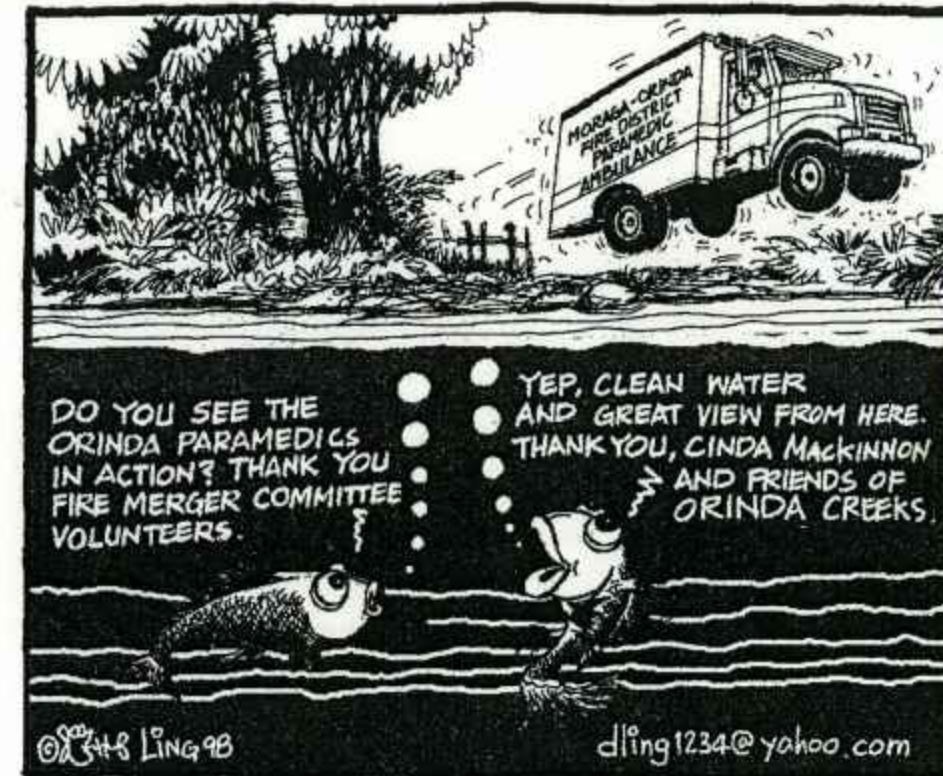
MacKinnon, an environmental consultant, has been a tireless advocate for Orinda's creeks. Acutely aware that Orinda creeks were a precious resource that was not being managed properly, she founded the Friends of Orinda Creeks in 1994. The Friends sponsored the first creek cleanup day. As garbage, tires and other obstructions were pulled from San Pablo creek, an awareness and appreciation of that valuable resource arose among the volunteers.

The Friends help provide environmental education in Orinda schools, including instruction on creek ecology, hydrology and riparian habitat. They have donated tapes to the Orinda Library, including *Home Composting*, *Save the Salmon*, and a book titled *California's Wild Heritage: Threatened and Endangered Animals in the Golden State*.

Thank you, Cinda, thank you Friends of Orinda Creeks! Your work has made Orinda a better place for all who live here.

Moraga-Orinda Fire District

As a result of the work of members of the fire merger committees, in June of 1997 Orinda voters overwhelmingly sup-



DICK LING

ported a merger of the district with Moraga's, forming the new Moraga-Orinda Fire District and delivering control of the new district to the citizens it serves.

The fledgling district is ahead of schedule in carrying out its five-year plan. Within a few months of the merger, paramedics were on duty in Orinda for the first time. Antiquated equipment has been replaced by two new fire engines and a paramedic ambulance based at the Orinda Way station. Work has begun on renovating and retrofitting the stations.

Now it is time to honor and thank those volunteers who took wishes for

paramedic service and a merged fire district and turned them into reality. It took leaders like Carl Weber, who chaired the Orinda Fire Protection and Emergency Services Advisory Committee, the joint Moraga-Orinda committee and co-chaired the campaign committee; Pete Wilson, vice chair of the advisory committee, joint committee member and Orinda Fire Protection District commissioner; and Amelia Wilson, who co-chaired the campaign committee, along with Weber and Judy Shallat, who also served on the advisory committee.

But these leaders are the first to say that they were only a part of a team of other leaders who must be recognized, and they quickly tell a story about someone who "made a difference." And there are many such stories.

Also serving on the advisory committee were Robert Evanhoe, John Laye, Robert Nielsen, and Tom Wright. Orindans who served on the joint Moraga-Orinda committee also included fire commissioner John Wyro and Orinda City Councilmembers Joyce Hawkins and Allan Tabor. From Moraga there were Town Councilmembers Mike Majchrzak and Frank Sperling; Gordon Nathan, Moraga fire commissioner; and Dick Olsen and the late Mike Cory, both from the Moraga fire committee.

Additional members of Orinda's election campaign committee included Michael Dugan, Peter Erlin, Steve Glazer, Carol Gustafson, Pam Hall, John Laye, Robert Nielsen, Ted Smith and John Wyro.

Other leaders serving from Moraga include Bob Merritt, Bill Combs, Dick and Marcia Allee, Linda Borrelli, Glen Furlow, Tom Hughes, Jerry Meyer and Lee Nelson. Orinda City Manager Bill Lindsay and Moraga Town Manager Ross Hubbard provided valuable support, as did County Supervisor Gayle Uilkema.

In two and a half years these individuals contributed thousands of hours of work, addressing arguably the most urgent issues ever confronted by the community. They played starring roles in making Orinda a safer place, and now it's time for the community to say thank you and give them a standing ovation. Please join us at the awards banquet on the 10th! (Call 254-0800 for reservations.)

Fire board seeking input on five goals for district's future

By Emille Karrick

STAFF WRITER

Brimming with goals and directives, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District board proudly unveiled its draft five-year strategic plan last Tuesday.

While encouraged by the district's optimism, members of the public expressed concern that the community has not been adequately included in the planning process for the district's future.

"I hear a lot of internal enthusiasm, but I think you need to give this time to reach out to the public and really let it sink in," said Orinda resident Betty Murphy. "You own this plan. I would like to see the public own

this plan."

Based on such concerns, the board delayed final approval of the plan until the public could speak at a Feb. 23 hearing.

However, board members included one request themselves — asking that more than the regular six or seven public participants come for this meeting.

"If you believe that we have not made a strong enough effort to communicate this information to the public, I would not be opposed to having another meeting," said board president Gordon Nathan. "And be able to present (this plan) to a much larger group — if they will attend."

While the public was included in the plan's development through a community

outreach meeting, much of the work was done by a nine-member team comprised of management, staff and board representatives.

The group derived a mission statement: "With pride and professionalism, the MOFD will provide the highest level of emergency and public service in response to the needs of our community."

They then produced five main goals: unification; public service; organization and effectiveness; apparatus, equipment and facilities; and finances and revenue.

Each goal is bolstered by objectives, strategies and actual tasks. In the plan's second part, the tasks are detailed with names of the parties responsible and target dates for

their ultimate achievement.

Among the plan's most difficult points is the unification goal. The board has already put together a subcommittee that will be going out to the community to identify concerns associated with bringing the district's Moraga zone and Orinda zone together.

"My observation, in all candor, is that you're still far away from achieving parity," said Moraga resident Dick Olsen.

Board members defined the strategic plan as a "road map" that will continue to be modified.

"The public does not run the district, the board does not run the district, the chief does — and to do that he needs a game plan," board member Pete Wilson said. "I think you

have to recognize this for what it is and what its purpose is. It's a management tool."

Consultant Cynthia Tablak, who has been facilitating the process, assured the public that further plans will be drawn up when the district gets down to the strategy and task levels. There will be plenty of opportunity for input and change along the way, she said.

"This plan has one of the best chances to succeed on time. The reason is that you didn't have to take a giant step sideways," Tablak said. "You're already headed that direction. This is already in motion."

The strategic plan will be considered at 7 p.m. Feb. 23 at the Moraga Fire Station, 1280 Moraga Way.

Orinda's need to upgrade water distribution cited

■ EBMUD study shows cost at \$36 million to \$50 million for better pipes to aid firefighting

By Andy Jokelson
TIMES STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — Upgrading Orinda water pipes, reservoirs, hydrants and other facilities to improve firefighting capabilities could cost \$36 million to \$50 million, according to a study released Tuesday.

The East Bay Municipal Utility District study does not discuss how to finance the improvements. The Orinda Fire Safety Committee, composed of representatives of the city, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and EBMUD, will discuss the study tonight.

The committee is pursuing ways of minimizing fire dangers in a hilly city with old, deteriorating water pipes, low water pressure in some areas, vegetation near many buildings and narrow roads that can limit access or evacuations.

"We're a long way from coming up with a comprehensive program," said Pete Wilson, who serves on the fire district's board and on the fire safety committee.

The study's cost estimates for improving EBMUD's water distribution system vary with water flow levels in three scenarios.

To provide 2,250 gallons per minute of water for at least two hours from three adjacent or reasonably close hydrants in use at the same time, the improvements would cost about \$50 million, says the study, based on computer modeling.

The estimated costs total \$42 million for a system that would produce 1,750 gallons per minute from two hydrants and \$36 million to provide 1,500 gallons per minute from two hydrants.

Providing fewer than 2,250 gallons per minute would be considered only if residents actively participated in reducing fuel by clearing vegetation near their property and removing dead and dying trees and shrubs, the report says.

The utility district has about 610,000 feet of water pipes in Orinda,

MEETING

■ **WHAT:** Orinda Fire Safety Committee.

■ **WHEN:** 7 p.m. today

■ **WHERE:** Room 11, Orinda Community Center, 26 Orinda Way.

■ **TOPIC:** Study on upgrading water distribution system.

most of them installed between 1940 and 1960, with some dating back to the mid-1930s. Most are from 4 to 12 inches in diameter.

The study calculates improving between 142,000 and 192,000 feet of pipe at costs of \$24 million to \$35 million. It projects about \$2.8 million worth of reservoir, pump and other improvements, plus \$900,000 for 367 new or upgraded hydrants. Orinda has about 750 hydrants.

Wilson and Orinda Councilwoman Joyce Hawkins called for EBMUD to pay most of the costs of improving the city's water distribution system.

The study lists \$6.9 million worth of current EBMUD maintenance projects in Orinda and says the district estimates it will spend \$1.5 million to \$2 million over the next 25 years to replace leaking pipes. But Wilson called that estimate unrealistically low.

If EBMUD spends perhaps \$1 million a year on Orinda water distribution system improvements, that would greatly reduce amounts needed from others, he said.

EBMUD board member John Coleman said the agency's practice has been to pay for restoring water flow to standards that existed at the time pipes were installed, but not for upgrading.

William Kirkpatrick, manager of EBMUD's water distribution planning division, said "where there's a specific localized improvement that goes beyond" original design standards, "others would have to pay for the improvement."

However, when the district replaces leaking pipes in maintenance projects, the new ones meet current standards, he said.

Obstacle course for fire vehicles

By Emille Karrick
STAFF WRITER

Whenever engineer John Pierce gets behind the wheel of one of Moraga-Orinda's 18-ton, \$300,000 fire engines, he takes on an inordinate amount of responsibility. Before saving lives or fighting fire, Pierce must ensure that the apparatus and its occupants arrive in one piece.

In some parts of Lamorinda, this is easier said than done.

"The engines carry notices that read: 'We were in your area and the way in which your vehicle was parked impedes access. We couldn't get around you and we couldn't get to you,'" said Moraga-Orinda Fire Marshal Tonya Hoover. "People tend to look at it subjectively, if they can get a car around it. I look at it more as if I can get an 18-ton apparatus around it."

Residents of Orinda and Lafayette claim narrow, windy streets as an essential aspect of the area's charm. However, for local firefighters, this aesthetic point conjures up images of tight roadways made impassable by parked cars and overgrown vegetation.

"We are always planning for the worst-case scenario," said Contra Costa Fire Capt. Dave George. "In Lafayette, there's a general rule: When we get a call, it's probably going to be in a tight situation with not a whole lot of room to operate."

Pierce remembers one time in Orinda when the ambulance couldn't make its way up a steep, moss-covered driveway. Paramedics had to carry the patient to the vehicle on a gurney, their feet in danger of slipping out from underneath them on the treacherous way down.

"That's got to be one of your worst fears, dropping a patient," he said with a sigh.

Officials say fire access has become a major problem in Orinda. Moraga, with its grid-like streets and planned neighborhoods, does not present the same challenge. Lafayette is more of a combination of the two.

"All of the vehicles that serve Lafayette have scratches and

More study of Orinda's water woes

By Emille Karrick
STAFF WRITER

ORINDA — The not quite year-old Fire Safety Committee just completed the first step in understanding the depth of the city's water flow problem.

Last Wednesday, the committee scrutinized results of the Orinda Fire Flow Comprehensive Engineering Study — which identified 192,000 feet in new pipes to achieve 2,250 gallons per minute from three adjacent hydrants. In addition, the study calls for replacement of almost half of the city's hydrants, as well as \$2 million in major facility improvements.

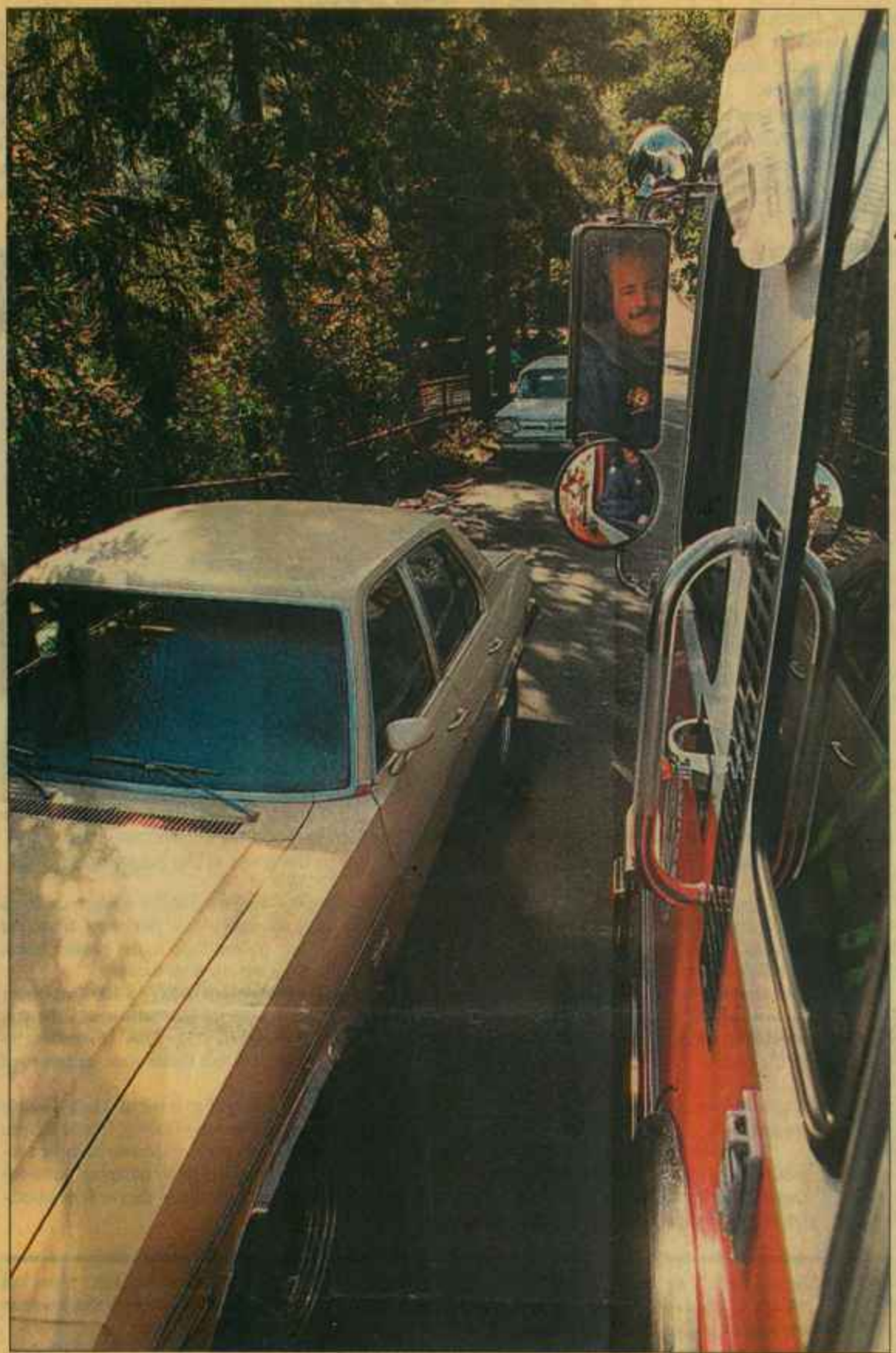
Made up of representatives from the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, the city of Orinda and the East Bay Municipal Utility District, the group has been charged with bringing enough water pressure to a city with all the ingredients for a full-scale fire disaster. Current pipes — placed under city soil more than 50 years ago — can't handle the water pressure required.

"We don't have a water pipe problem if what we do is burn down one house at a time. It's when you get a whole bunch of things

See WATER, Page 2

gouges — battle wounds from the narrow lanes and driveways," George said.

The newest fire engines and ambulances in the Moraga-Orinda district are about 8 feet wide. Taking into account tires, ladders and antennas that may hang over the vehicle, there should be at least 14 feet of maneuvering space.



Engineer John Pierce maneuvers a fire truck down a typical narrow street in Orinda.

"Most people driving down these streets assume there is probably going to be another car coming, but they almost never expect a fire truck," said Moraga-Orinda firefighter-paramedic Matt O'Brien. "We often have to make a split-second

decision to pull over and end up scratching up the truck."

Turning around requires more space and even greater skill. While engine drivers spend hours learning how to master this feat, a lack of space to reverse direction can

prevent engines from getting on the road to another emergency.

Some roads are deemed unapproachable. In these situations, firefighters are forced to "drop hose" a

See OBSTACLE, Page 2

OBSTACLE

FROM PAGE 1

good distance from the scene.

"There are at least a dozen places in Lafayette that crews have identified. They've looked at houses down long driveways and decided how we are going to attack these areas," George explained.

Moraga-Orinda paramedic-engi-

neer Ken Consiglio said that fire personnel are constantly coming up with contingency plans and taking apparatus on dry runs.

"We drive around and ask, 'What if this house were to burn, what would we do?' We don't just wait for the bell to ring," he said. "Our job is to get to the call safely."

For more information on access, call Hoover at 258-4520 or George at 906-7530.

Moraga wants roof rules in fire code

By Emilie Karrick
STAFF WRITER

MORAGA — The Town Council wants the fire district to incorporate a townwide roof standard into the updated fire code.

Last Wednesday, officials from the Moraga-Orinda Fire District discussed amendments to the fire code with the council in preparation for April's update process.

Every three years, the district is required to review the California uniform code and make any local additions that may be necessary. Proposed standards include updates in terms of road access, water supply and weed abatement.

After reviewing those sections, council members brought up the possibility of updating the town's fire-safe roof requirements. The current ordinance, passed in 1987, requires Class C roofs on all new homes built throughout the town.

Fire Chief Jim Johnston pointed out that wood shake roofs were the main contributing factor in the town's two major house fires in recent years.

Fire Marshal Tonya Hoover would like to see a Class B roof requirement in Moraga. When 50 percent or more of a roof is replaced in one year, a Class B requirement would call for the utilization of roofing materials that offer limited protection.

Orinda already has a Class B requirement in effect, except for homes in the city's very high fire hazard severity zone — which are mandated to have Class A roofs.

The council decided that Moraga's new standard should be incorporated into the fire code rather than be written into a new ordinance initiated by the town.

"I think the expertise would lie more in their area than our area," said Councilman Ron Enzweiler.

The council agreed with the other proposed fire prevention standards. Additions include a requirement that all town roads have a minimum of 20 feet in width, a turning radius of 30 feet as well as a maximum grade of 20 percent.

The water supply system must be capable of carrying 2,250 gallons per minute from three adjacent hydrants — a standard currently met in Moraga but not in Orinda.

Weed abatement is also slated to be spelled out in the updated document, requiring all district residents to remove vegetation or other flammable material that creates a fire hazard.

The fire district will be taking the fire code amendments to the Orinda City Council sometime next month. Both councils will then have another chance to review the entire document — along with the fire board — with final ratification necessary by June 31.

Fire board moves forward on strategic plan

By Emilie Karrick
STAFF WRITER

The Moraga-Orinda Fire Board implemented the district's five-year strategic plan last week amidst calls for increased public scrutiny.

"We've been making every effort to keep the community apprised of what's going on," Board President Gordon Nathan told the Sun. "We've worked on this almost eight months now, we've got to get off the dime. If we keep talking about it, that's all we're going to do."

The document — primarily contrived by a nine-member team made up of management, staff and board representatives — is meant to provide an outline of the district's future. The plan includes five main goals: unification; public service; organization and effectiveness;

apparatus, equipment and facilities; and finances and revenue. Each goal is bolstered by objectives, strategies and actual tasks.

According to Orinda resident Pat Dunn, there was one goal left out of the document. "I urge you to modify the Moraga-Orinda strategic plan by adding a water element," Dunn wrote in a letter. "I encourage you to develop a program for improving water fire flow in areas poorly served."

Board member Pete Wilson said that fire flow should not be made a focused priority of the fire district because overall responsibility should be shared with the East Bay Municipal Utility District and the city of Orinda.

Despite a second public hearing on the document following a request from several residents, there was also continued concern that the public was not sufficiently involved in

the plan's development process.

"There wasn't really much public participation," said Moraga resident Dick Olsen. "I walk away from that with the idea that they are not so clear on the concept of participatory democracy."

Board members and district staff emphasized that the plan is a work in progress. Public input will be solicited throughout the implementation stage.

The board also drafted a cover letter for the plan that mentions the water problem as well as the public participation issue.

Fire Chief Jim Johnston will be selecting a staff member to take the lead on tracking the implementation process. "If certain things need to get done, then we can put that in," he said. "Even though everybody didn't get everything they wanted personally for their own taste, they had to be happy with the end result."

*Moraga Paramedics
3-3-99
Contra Costa Sun*

LAMORINDA BRIEFS

Moraga boy released from hospital

A 3-year-old boy from Moraga, who fell into his backyard pool over the weekend, was released from Children's Hospital on Monday.

Doctors determined the boy had recovered and released him to his parents. The toddler was unconscious when taken by ambulance to the hospital Saturday afternoon. He had no pulse and was not breathing when paramedics arrived on the scene.

Family members, who had been gardening in the front, noticed the boy was missing shortly after noon Saturday.

His father pulled him out of the pool and began resuscitation, fire officials said.

Teen in hospital after bike crash

A Lamorinda teen-ager suffered minor cervical and spinal injuries due to a bike accident Saturday on Pinehurst Road near Canyon. He is in stable condition at Children's Hospital in Oakland.

The 15-year-old was treated by Moraga-Orinda paramedics and transported by air to the hospital.

Fire spokesman Rob Goodyear said the boy is in a halo, which immobilizes his head and spinal column. The child has several cervical and spinal fractures. Goodyear said the injuries could have been life-threatening and permanently immobilizing.

Moraga-Orinda Fire District 1998 Annual Incident Summary

What does a firefighter do? Put out fires, you say, but take a look at the statistics. In 1998 the Moraga-Orinda Fire District responded to 2,175 alarms. Of that number 516 (23 percent) were fire alarms but 1,136—over half of the calls—were medical emergencies!

Incidents by Alarm Type	Number
Fire Calls	
Exterior fire (misc/refuse)	10
Fire alarm (automatic)	270
Grass, brush, tree fire	23
Investigation of smoke	91
Structure fire	47
Vehicle fire	75
Subtotal	516
Hazardous	
Hazardous condition	135
Hazardous materials	2
Odor investigation	39
Subtotal	176
Medical	
Medical call (no trauma)	851
Medical call (trauma)	285
Subtotal	1136
Miscellaneous	
Accident, vehicle	164
Aid call (mutual/automatic)	4
Not coded	14
Public service call	150
Water problem, flooding	15
Subtotal	347
Total calls	2,175

*March-April 1999
Orinda News*

FIRE DISTRICT

Fire District's 5-Year Strategic Plan

■ The plan sets forth the goals, objectives and tasks for the district

By LYNDA LEONARD
Editor

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) is nearing completion of a five-year strategic plan and is seeking further public input on Tuesday, February 23, at 7 p.m. at the Moraga Way fire station. Fire Chief Jim Johnston said, "Our mission is to provide the highest level of service to the community and everything in the strategic plan takes us in that direction. . . . It will give us a road map. . . and help us reach our goals and objectives."

Johnston said that in order to establish an assessment of the present state of the district, the planners went to great lengths, getting input from the community, firefighters, paramedics, clerical staff and board members. "We interviewed our reserves in order to get as much input as possible." He says that all of the ideas and issues garnered from that process are addressed in the plan.

The Strategic Plan

The five goals and objectives of the plan are:

- Unification of the Moraga and Orinda zones by combining them politically and financially, creating one district operationally and administratively, and creating the Moraga-Orinda Fire District identity;
- Public service by establishing the highest possible level of emergency services and creating progressive fire prevention and proactive public education programs;
- Organizational effectiveness by supporting and inspiring personnel, enhancing communication, continuing participation by all members in the development of the organization, emphasizing development

and training of all personnel, and streamlining the organization;

- Apparatus, equipment and facilities will be maximized by ensuring optimal performance of apparatus at least 95 percent of the time, providing equipment required by district personnel to improve efficiency by at least 20 percent, and improving facilities with regard to health, safety, comfort and function; and,

- Finances and revenue will be managed by meeting operational and capital needs in a manner that ensures the district's financial stability.

For each of the five goals, objectives are defined, strategies are identified and a series of tasks listed that are necessary to achieve the goals.

Seeking Public Input

"I want to hear what the community thinks about the plan," MOFD board president Gordon Nathan said. Besides scheduling the February 23 public hearing, the planners have presented information about the plan to the Orinda City Council, the Moraga Town Council, Rescue One, and the League of Women Voters.

The MOFD board has appointed Nathan and vice president Pete Wilson to address the issues involved in unification of the two districts. Wilson said, "I want to try to identify real and imagined issues that could be a concern about ultimate unification of the two districts, then draw up a game plan to address each of the identified concerns."

Currently the district operates as two zones—Moraga and Orinda—politically, financially, operationally and administratively, with a goal of unification when parity between the two zones is reached.

Wilson said that there are a lot of things, not obvious to the public in day-to-day operations, that need to be unified. Standards and work rules must be integrated. (What equipment should be sent, and how long should it take to reach the

scene?) A single standard should determine location of equipment on the fire engines. Nathan notes, however, that in other ways the two zones merged long ago: For many years they trained together and provided one another with mutual aid.

Ultimately, unification will be realized when the district becomes a unit financially and politically. Currently, three sets of books are kept: one for Moraga, another for Orinda and a third for the merged district. This procedure is cumbersome, time-consuming and costly. Politically, board members are now elected by district. Wilson raised the question of whether they should eventually be elected at large.

Orindans Betty Murphy and Pat Dunn, in separate interviews, expressed concern. Murphy said that "public involvement is essential" to this process and urges the district to get more input from the community. Dunn said that the strategic plan should address the need for improved water flow for firefighting purposes.

The Strategic Planning Team

The nine-member strategic planning team, facilitated by consultant Cynthia Tablak, included two board members, Nathan and Wilson, as elected officials representing the community; two employees, Steve Anaya and Ken Consiglio, representing the firefighters and paramedics; the three battalion chiefs, Rob Goodyear, Greg Holm and Steve Rivers; Fire Marshal Tonya Hoover; and Chief Johnston.

Nathan called the plan a very useful tool for the district and said that "Chief Johnston gets a lot of credit for putting this together."

Johnston himself notes that the work has just begun. "Over the next fire years we track and implement the plan," he said. "I'm very proud of the plan; I'm very proud of the process."

FIRE FLOW

◆ FIRE FLOW from page 1

Assessing Fire Flow Needs

need to be upgraded. The price tag: \$50 million.

The report also includes costs for two other standards: 1,750 gpm from two adjacent hydrants (\$42 million) and for 1,000 from one hydrant (\$36 million). There are other approaches, however, that Moraga-Orinda Fire Chief Jim Johnston must consider in determining the fire flow needs of specific neighborhoods and these other approaches would bring down the cost.

"Fire flow is based on a number of different factors," Johnston said. These factors include, among others, vegetation, access, topography, climate, construction materials and distance from a fire station. For example, less water is needed to put out a fire in a small structure standing by itself than for a large structure built on steep terrain surrounded by pine trees.

Over the next several months Moraga-Orinda Fire District Fire Marshal Tonya Hoover will begin collecting data, neighborhood by neighborhood, and assessing risk. Using that information, an index will be created, pinpointing neighborhoods that need attention first.

At the February meeting of the Orinda Fire Safety Committee (composed of representatives from EBMUD, the City of Orinda and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District) Councilmember Gregg Wheatland said, "We have to be careful with an index. We don't want to assign labels to a neighborhood." Orindan Michael Dugan asked whether insurance companies might use the information to justify an increase in rates. Hoover said that she wouldn't give the information to insurance companies.

Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) board member Pete Wilson said, in an interview, that indexing is a useful tool which assigns a mathematical value and will enable the district to prioritize work. The district will identify non-water solutions that can be addressed now, such as

clearing vegetation from roadsides to improve access. At the meeting MOFD board member John Wyro said that once they have this data, "We can sit down with people from an area and decide what to do."

Hoover heads the Fire Safe Citizens Committee, a group of residents who are identifying ways of reducing fire risk through education and fire safe strategies. (See "Citizens Committee Addresses Fire Safety" on page 6.) Chief Johnston said that the citizens committee is moving forward in the area of vegetation management and that they will consider escape routes. "The work we want to get started on now will have some bearing on the type of water supply that's required," he said, referring to the other factors that determine fire flow needs. "In some areas we cannot avoid improving the water system" because there isn't enough water to put out a simple structure fire.

Meanwhile, in addition to weed abatement and vegetation management, Hoover is working on codes that will meet the requirements of the Bates Bill. The codes need to be ratified by both the City of Orinda and the Town of Moraga.

Funding for water system improvements is uncertain. EBMUD officials steadfastly maintain that EBMUD, as a public utility, is responsible for household-use water only and not for fire flow use.

Our officials are following the example set by Marin County, which faced the same problem and lowered their initial water upgrade estimate from \$250 million to \$55 million by addressing the other factors (i.e., vegetation, access, etc.). The Fire Safe Orinda Citizens Committee meets on the second Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m. in the Community Center. The next meeting of EBMUD, the fire district and the city will be in April. Call 258-4599 for the date, time and location.

Your Neighborhood Fire Hydrant Has a Story to Tell



The Moraga-Orinda Fire District paints fire hydrants so that firefighters can quickly determine the capability of each hydrant in an emergency. While there are different colors on fire hydrants, the color on the top indicates the amount of water available.

Red means less than 500 gallons per minute (gpm), which is grossly inadequate; orange, 500 to 999 gpm, marginal; green, 1,000 to 1,499 gpm, good for typical single-family dwellings; blue, 1,500 gpm and above, excellent for residential areas.

According to EBMUD's comprehensive engineering study of the water system in Orinda, hydrants alone would cost \$900,000. That amount would cover 115 new hydrants and upgrading 249 existing hydrants.

EBMUD Water System Report; Assessing Fire Flow Needs

■ Fire flow is based on many factors, including vegetation, access, topography and climate

By LYNDIA LEONARD
Editor

EBMUD's long-awaited report on Orinda's water system is complete, and to bring the entire system up to the fire district's highest fire flow standard

(2,250 gallons per minute—gpm—from three adjoining hydrants), 192,000 feet of pipe must be upgraded; major facility improvements (new reservoirs, regulators, etc.) are required; 115 new hydrants need to be added and 249 existing hydrants

[See FIRE FLOW, page 11]