

Drought plan doesn't change water allocation to California farms, cities

By Karina Ioffe and Denis Cuff Bay Area News Group San Jose Mercury News
Posted:

May 14, 2014
Agenda Item 15c

Thursday, April 10, 2014
ContraCostaTimes.com

Bay Area News Group

State and federal agencies on Wednesday officially unveiled a joint plan detailing how they will tackle the ongoing drought that has raised difficult questions about how California farmers, residents and wildlife share the dwindling supply of water.

The plan, which various agencies have been hammering out since December, does not call for changes in agreed-upon reduced water allocations to farms and municipalities and does not address the contested emergency drought barriers meant to keep brackish bay water from contaminating drinking supplies.

Two-thirds of California is in extreme drought, prompting Gov. Jerry Brown in January to issue a proclamation urging residents and businesses to voluntarily reduce water usage.

On Wednesday, officials hailed the newly named the 2014 Drought Operations Plan as an important milestone that creates a single response plan for managing the drought during the next seven months.

"We've been working together to eke out regulatory flexibility as quickly as possible and adapt quickly to weather and environmental conditions to bolster water supplies to the extent possible ... even as we know that many users and wildlife will suffer hardship this year," said Mark Cowin, director of the California Department of Water Resources.

The State Water Project will continue to withhold water from agricultural water service contractors, a first in more than 50 years since it was created. Most people who get their water from the Central Valley Water project will also not get their allocations.

Federal wildlife refuges and senior water rights holders along the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers will continue to receive 40 percent of their contract totals and water rights holders along the Feather River will get 50 percent of water promised them, the least amount permissible under the terms of their contract with the state.

Meanwhile, late season storms have made it less likely the state will erect rock barriers across three Delta waterways to repel salinity intrusion that could degrade drinking water supplies for 25 million Californians, according to Cowin.

The state has considered the \$25 million in dams an emergency measure to prevent having to make large releases of reservoir water to repulse seawater intruding deep into the Delta because of low river flows.

While the state hasn't abandoned the barrier plan, Cowin said, "It would appear to be less of a likelihood than we would have thought a couple months ago."

State officials expect to finalize water allocations later this month.

Karina Ioffe at kioffee@bayareanewsgroup.com. Follow her at [Twitter.com/kioffee](https://twitter.com/kioffee). Contact Denis Cuff at dcuff@bayareanewsgroup.com. Follow him at [Twitter.com/deniscuff](https://twitter.com/deniscuff)

Modesto Bee

[Previous Story](#)

[Next Story](#)

MRFA chief who was on the hot seat takes job with Stanislaus Consolidated

By Ken Carlson

kcarlson@modbee.com **April 10, 2014** Updated 15 hours ago

[Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Google Plus](#) [Reddit](#) [E-mail](#) [Print](#)



Despite being retained by the Modesto Regional Fire Authority, Randall Bradley has become chief of the Stanislaus Consolidated Fire Protection District. ELIAS FUNEZ — Modesto Bee |Buy Photo



Just two months after his bosses at the Modesto Regional Fire Authority voted to retain him, Randall Bradley

accepted a job Thursday as chief of the Stanislaus Consolidated Fire Protection District.

At its meeting Thursday evening, the Stanislaus Consolidated board voted 4-0 to give the top job to Bradley, who ran into a rough patch after starting work as MRFA's chief in July. He will start for his new employer Thursday under a one-year contract paying him \$157,000 annually. MRFA was paying him the same amount.

It became evident in January that Bradley's job with MRFA was in jeopardy. The regional authority's board met four times in closed session from November to early February to discuss Bradley's performance, and his supporters in the Modesto City Firefighters Association said board members had asked Bradley to resign.

MRFA's three-member board voted 3-0 at a Feb. 5 special meeting to retain Bradley. But with everything that happened during that period, Bradley decided to talk with Stanislaus Consolidated, he said Thursday.

With a \$9 million annual budget and 54 full-time employees, Stanislaus Consolidated is a smaller agency compared with MRFA, which has a \$31.9 million budget and 160 employees. The district serves Riverbank, Empire, Waterford and the Beard Industrial District near Modesto, but Bradley also will have management duties over the Oakdale fire district and that city's fire department under a contract.

"It's just a better fit," Bradley said. "It's nobody's fault. My firefighters were absolutely incredible in the way they supported me. The hard part is leaving a great group of guys."

Bradley said earlier that he had been offered the position and had negotiated terms of an employment contract before Thursday's closed session, which was held to get board approval for the agreement.

Bradley said he had spoken with the city of Modesto's personnel manager to let the city know what was coming. "I have been working hard to make sure the transition is smooth. I don't think they will have a problem with the short notice," Bradley said.

The news didn't seem to sit well with the Modesto and Stanislaus County representatives on the MRFA board.

"I am shocked," Modesto Councilman Dave Lopez said. "We went through this whole evaluation. We felt like we worked hard and that firefighters wanted him as their fire chief. They worked hard to keep him on board and now he's leaving. I am a little disappointed."

County Supervisor Bill O'Brien said he had heard rumors in the past two weeks that Bradley was talking with the district. O'Brien said things had gone smoothly with Bradley after the February vote to retain him. "MRFA is more than one person and we have a lot of great people there," O'Brien said. "We will move forward."

Bradley said several people contacted him about the Stanislaus Consolidated job in January when his future with MRFA was unclear. He attended Thursday's meeting in Riverbank with his wife, Dana; Stanislaus Consolidated firefighters who were there applauded their new chief.

Stanislaus Consolidated has been without a permanent chief since Steve Mayotte was placed on paid administrative leave more than a year ago. Mayotte retired in December and has filed a lawsuit challenging the disciplinary action. Lawsuits brought by current and former employees accused Mayotte of sexual harassment, sexual favoritism and age discrimination in his dealings with employees.

District officials said about 20 applicants for the job were considered during two recruitment rounds. Bradley is "an experienced and seasoned fire service leader," Board President Dave Woods said in a prepared statement. "This is an exciting time for the fire district and its partners as the discussions regarding increased regionalization ... have continued to gain momentum."

Bradley will leave MRFA as the partners in the regional authority explore a different model for the agency formed in early 2011. The agency combining the Modesto, county and Salida fire services is considered to have made strides toward efficient service, but some believe a change in bylaws and governing structure is needed.

MRFA firefighters who supported Bradley said the chief ran into friction with those who backed another candidate for the position. Before coming to Modesto, Bradley was chief of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District in Contra Costa County for four years and previously managed the Lawrence Livermore Fire Department.

Bradley's contract will be reviewed after a year, Woods said.

Rodeo-Hercules Fire District proposes new property taxes

By Tom Lochner *Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times*

Posted:

Sunday, April 13, 2014

ContraCostaTimes.com

The Rodeo-Hercules Fire District is proposing new property assessments to raise almost \$1 million a year to beef up fire protection and emergency medical response as well as reopen a shuttered fire station.

Single-family houses would pay \$82 a year while condos and apartments would be charged \$46.93. Stores would pay \$60.30 per one-fifth acre.

Industrial properties would pay varying rates, based on their fire risk and the replacement cost of structures.

The levy, technically a benefit assessment under state law, is subject to majority approval with each owner's ballot weighted according to property type. It would come on top of two existing benefit assessments, of \$59 and \$52 per single-family house, that bring in a total of \$1.34 million a year.

Ballots were mailed to property owners in late March and must be returned by May 14, the same day the district board will hold a public hearing.

The Phillips 66 petroleum refinery would pay approximately \$45,500 a year for 29 parcels it owns in the district, according to a preliminary estimate by SCI Consulting Group of Fairfield. In addition to its Rodeo refinery, Phillips owns a coke plant along Highway 4 outside Hercules as well as vacant land and other buffer properties, including a ranch.

The \$45,500 in benefit assessments on Phillips 66 property would be far less than what the refinery stood to pay under two school parcel tax measures that it campaigned against in 2010 and 2011. Both measures failed.

Refinery spokesman Mark Hughes could not say what stance the company would take toward the proposed tax, even as he praised the fire district.

"At the present time our business analysis group is researching the impacts the tax measure will have upon our Rodeo Refinery," Hughes said in an email Wednesday. "We greatly appreciate the fire protection services provided to the community by our local fire district, and we consider them a valued community partner."

There are about 11,500 parcels in the fire district, which covers 32 square miles and encompasses the city of Hercules and the unincorporated town of Rodeo.

The current fiscal year budget is \$5.05 million. The district employs 12 firefighters plus the fire chief, battalion chief and administrative services officer.

There are two fire stations, one in Hercules and the other in Rodeo. The latter has been shuttered since May 2012.

A \$2.48 million federal grant, to be spread over two years, will enable the district to hire seven firefighters and reopen the Rodeo fire station, but the district needs a funding source to keep the station open beyond the grant period.

The proposed tax has no sunset clause, but it would need to be reauthorized annually by the fire

district board. Annual adjustments for inflation would be capped at 4 percent.

Phillips 66 stood to pay \$700,000 a year under a 2010 parcel tax measure that would have raised \$1.7 million a year for four years for the John Swett Unified School District, with residential parcels paying \$96 a year.

The refinery would have paid about \$400,000 a year under another school district measure in 2011 that was supposed to raise \$990,000 a year and tax most residential parcels \$60 a year for four years.

The John Swett school district encompasses Rodeo, Crockett, Port Costa, Tormey, Franklin Canyon and the Foxboro section of Hercules.

Contact Tom Lochner at 510-262-2760. Follow him at twitter.com/tomlochner.

Barnidge: Fitch Report, the Sequel, is better than the original

By Tom Barnidge Contra Costa Times Columnist Contra Costa Times
Posted:

Monday, April 14, 2014
ContraCostaTimes.com

If you remember the independent study commissioned by the Board of Supervisors seeking remedies for the Contra Costa County Fire District's financial woes, you already have been introduced to Fitch & Associates LLC.

Their 13-month, fact-gathering, data-crunching exercise produced a 150-page report that came up with recommendations for just about everything except what was needed. It said four, three-person firefighting teams could be turned into six, two-person medical response units. (My fourth-grade granddaughter confirms that the math is correct.) It said dispatch protocol could be improved. It said response times could be better.

What about the district's budget problems? The report said to get more revenue.

Thanks, that's a big help.

Now comes the sequel, Fitch Report II: The Contra Costa County Emergency Medical Services Project Report. I opened it with exceedingly low expectations, so I was surprised at what I found.

The report said the county's emergency medical response operation would benefit by limiting all dispatchers to 8- to 10-hour shifts rather than the 12-hour shifts that lead to weariness. It said a better job can be done of distinguishing severe from less urgent calls. Sending advanced life support teams for basic life support needs is inefficient and costly.

The report also urged the implementation of community paramedics who can supply on-site treatment for lesser ailments and refer patients to treatment centers. In other words, not every medical emergency call needs to end with an ambulance trip to acute care.

Fitch also recommended that the county improve its medical data collection and sharing capabilities so that all dispatchers, responders and caregivers can access the same patient information.

The system in place now has grown randomly as needs have changed -- 14 communication centers, 11 fire agencies, three emergency ambulance providers and nine acute care facilities are in the mix -- so this pause to assess and coordinate makes some sense. Fitch estimates that \$3 million could be saved if every one of the suggestions in its report is implemented.

That's not to suggest, however, that Fitch II answered every question that needs answering. Clayton City Manager Gary Napper, who serves on the Emergency Medical Care Committee, brought one to the fore at a town-hall meeting last week. He wanted to know if Fitch had examined the option of dispatching only medical teams -- paramedics in ambulances -- to emergency calls, without involving other first responders.

Put another way: Does the fire department need to be involved in every medical emergency?

"One of the invisible gorillas in the room," Napper said, "is the finance component. I don't know if we can resolve this problem without blending the first responders with the emergency medical system agency.

"We have a platform that relies upon first responders coupled with ambulance response. What I don't see here is the capability of the EMS to provide first responder emergency medical services without the benefit of (fire department) responders."

Fitch II, the Sequel, was better than the original. It stirred some thought, made some good suggestions, and at 91 pages was a quicker read.

It will be interesting to see how county supervisors react. They're the ones who authorized \$400,000 for the two studies.

Contact Tom Barnidge at tbarnidge@bayareanewsgroup.com.

Hercules: Sale of municipal utility ends multimillion-dollar fiasco

By Tom Lochner Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times
Posted:

Thursday, April 17, 2014
ContraCostaTimes.com

HERCULES -- Hercules has sold its municipal utility to PG&E for \$9.5 million, putting an end to a decade-long, multimillion-dollar misadventure.

Last week, after Hercules Municipal Utility staff members did a final reading of its meters, some 700 residential customers along with Hercules City Hall, senior center, library, about three dozen businesses and the Pinole-Hercules sewage treatment plant, became customers of Pacific Gas & Electric.

The deal was a bit of a cliffhanger as the city needed some bondholders to accept less than par value for their bonds. The combined outstanding principal of two Hercules Public Financing Authority 2010 bond issues -- one intended to pay off bonds issued in 2003 and fund some infrastructure, the other to fund construction of an electrical substation -- stood at about \$12.8 million.

The council on April 8 endorsed the deal 4-0; Bill Kelly recused himself because he was an HMU residential customer.

"I'm glad this portion of the Hercules history will be ending," said Councilman Dan Romero, a critic of the HMU even before he ran for office in 2011.

Romero called the 2010 council votes to approve a substation project and the bonds to pay for it, "the beginning of the end," when "the cards started folding."

Mayor Myrna de Vera, acknowledging Romero, said, "You were at the podium, telling the council not to do it -- and they did it anyway. And here we are."

How much exactly the city lost on the utility business could not immediately be determined this week. Finance Director Nickie Mastay said in an email that the cumulative operating loss from fiscal year 2002-03 through 2009-10 was \$3.8 million. In February 2011, John Stier, then municipal services director, pegged the city's combined, accumulated capital and operating losses from the HMU up to that date at \$9 million.

The utility was created as an enterprise fund in 2001, when Mike Sakamoto was acting city manager. He became city manager the following year.

In 2003, the HMU started buying power on the wholesale market, receiving it through PG&E lines and selling it to its customers on the promise that it would be able to do so at competitive rates while making a profit for the general fund.

That scenario was based in part on assumptions that Hercules would grow by several thousand homes in the ensuing years while adding businesses. But by the time Sakamoto retired as city manager in early 2007, development had all but ground to a halt in Hercules and the promised profits never materialized.

The following year, Sakamoto resurfaced in Hercules as administrator of the HMU, and the City Council approved a \$100,000-a-year contract with Sakamoto's company, Municipal Management Enterprises. Sakamoto's contract was terminated by the city in November 2010, but not before he

recommended, and the council approved, \$2.3 million in equipment purchases for an electrical substation that was never built. The city canceled the substation contracts in 2011, absorbing part of the costs, and public pressure built to find a way to bail out of the HMU mess. In accordance with state law, the city had to get the voters' OK to put the utility up for sale. That happened, by a large margin, in 2012.

In May 2013, PG&E agreed to buy the HMU for \$9.5 million, subject to approval of the state Public Utilities Commission; that came in January.

Contact Tom Lochner at 510-262-2760. Follow him at [Twitter.com/tomlochner](https://twitter.com/tomlochner).

San Ramon: More than 300 residents sign petition opposing Faria housing development

By Joyce Tsai Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times
Posted:

Thursday, April 17, 2014
ContraCostaTimes.com

SAN RAMON -- A petition signed by more than 300 residents opposing the Faria Preserve housing development was presented to the city Tuesday night, during the Planning Commission's public hearing on the controversial project.

Several residents voiced their concerns about the 740-unit housing development that is planned in the northwest part of the city, near Interstate 680, north of Crow Canyon Road and east of Bollinger Canyon Road. They urged the commission to consider the environmental and aesthetic impacts of the hillside development, as well as what they claim will be a lack of schools and excessive traffic that would result from the project.

The project would include a mix of single-family houses, townhouses, apartments, senior housing and parcels for a church and sports fields. Lafferty Communities is trying to build the development on 450 acres once owned by Claremont Homes. The Planning Commission and City Council originally approved Claremont's plans to build 786 units there in 2006, but it had to alter its plan after lawsuits were filed in 2008 by the East Bay Regional Park District and Sierra Club.

After the hearing, the commission voted unanimously to continue the public discussion to its May 6 meeting, where it will present its order of conditions for the project and decide whether to send the plan to the City Council for a final vote.

Check back for updates.

Contact Joyce Tsai at 925-847-2123. Follow her at [Twitter.com/JoyceTsaiNews](https://twitter.com/JoyceTsaiNews).

Moraga-Orinda Fire District firefighters get new contract

By Jennifer Modenessi Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times

Posted:

Friday, April 18, 2014

ContraCostaTimes.com

MORAGA -- Automatic salary increases and largely unchanged health care benefits for firefighter-paramedics approved this week by the Moraga-Orinda Fire District board have erased the threat of a 9.5-percent across-the-board pay cut and health care benefits reductions.

MOFD directors on Wednesday approved a tentative agreement and terms for a successor memorandum of understanding between the district and members of United Professional Fire Fighters of Contra Costa County Local 1230 for the next four years. Board President John Wyro, Vice President Alex Evans and director Kathy Famulener voted for the contract; director Steve Anderson -- troubled by the district's commitment to automatic salary increases despite past economic ups and downs -- voted against. Director Fred Weil was absent and did not vote, although he indicated his support in a written statement.

The agreement comes a little more than a month after the district agreed to enter mediation and restart contract negotiations that stalled in January, when district officials declared an impasse following nearly four years of talks. The union ratified the tentative agreement April 4.

The approved terms include:

-

A 3.5 percent across-the-board salary decrease effective July 1, followed by a 1 percent across-the-board increase July 1, 2015. According to the tentative agreement, salaries will increase 4 percent in 2016 and could rise up to an additional 3 percent if the district meets certain revenue targets. Salaries will increase again by 4 percent in 2017 and an additional up to 3 percent raise could also be available if the district again hits specific revenue goals.

-

The district will employ single-role paramedics, who will replace a dozen firefighter-paramedics who leave the district through retirement or attrition. These new hires, at between \$18 and \$21 per hour, will be brought on after six safety members have left -- a move that will increase overtime costs. The district estimated that the new staffing model could save \$1.2 million annually once fully implemented.

District contribution toward health care premiums for active and retired employees will stay the same as called for in the expired 2010 contract. However, those contributions won't surpass current amounts, meaning firefighters will continue to pay increases exceeding the district's maximum obligation.

And while new terms for future retiree health care will save money, the district still has outstanding retiree health care debt estimated in 2009 at about \$24.1 million, the last year for which the district says numbers are available. It is deferring payments on that debt, including a \$2.6 million contribution this year.

Fire Chief Stephen Healy said there was compromise by both the district and the union. Representatives of the union did not comment publicly this week, but indicated earlier that although

pleased with salary adjustments after nearly six years of frozen wages, they were less enthusiastic about the health care terms.

"Over the last four years health care costs have gone up," Local 1230 President Vince Wells wrote in an email. "By the end of the contract, it will have been eight years of paying all the cost increases."

Former MOFD director Dick Olsen told the board he felt the union got the best of the deal.

"If sacrifice were needed, it should be shared equally between the union and the public. That obviously did not happen here," Olsen said. "This is one of the most one-sided documents -- contracts -- I have ever seen anywhere, anytime, in my lifetime."

Tri-Valley water suppliers to consider drought rates soon

By Denis Cuff and Jeremy Thomas Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times

Posted:

Tuesday, April 22, 2014

ContraCostaTimes.com

Water suppliers for Livermore, Dublin and part of San Ramon have proposed drought rates on homes and businesses that would sharply increase bills for customers who fail to slash their water use by 30 to 35 percent.

The Tri-Valley is the first place in the East Bay where suppliers are considering rationing rather than sticking with voluntary conservation programs. The Tri-Valley's main water source, the State Water Project, has cut its water deliveries to 5 percent of normal this year.

The Dublin San Ramon Community Services District Board will hold a special meeting at 6 p.m. Tuesday at 7501 Dublin Blvd. to publicly discuss its proposed drought rate increase, aimed at reducing water use 35 percent. A vote will be postponed until May 5 at the earliest.

The Livermore City Council is scheduled to consider and possibly vote on its drought rates at its meeting 7 p.m. April 28, and Pleasanton city staff also are developing proposed drought rates expected to go to that council May 6.

While the different rate proposals vary slightly, they share a goal of using stiffer rates to get people to conserve.

"We want to send a signal to our customers to reduce water use," said Bert Michalczyk, general manager of the Dublin San Ramon Services District, which supplies tap water to 67,000 people in Dublin and San Ramon's Dougherty Valley.

Under the district proposal, a typical household bill over two months would increase from \$112.11 to \$132.03, a \$19.92 increase. The bump would be bigger for those who use more water; small-volume users who continued to hold down water use would be mailed a rebate check for \$12 at the end of the year to reward them for their conservation, Michalczyk said.

The Livermore City Council on April 28 will consider raising water rates in an effort to reach a mandatory 30 percent reduction in usage among the 29,000 or so people it serves. Aimed at higher-volume customers, Stage 3 of that city's conservation plan would hike monthly bills from \$57.49 to \$79.59 for households that use around 11,000 gallons per month and don't reduce consumption, according to the city's public works department.

Average households that use 20 percent less water would see a monthly increase of about \$8.53 over normal rates. Customers who reduce usage by 30-35 percent will pay roughly the same per month as before, according to assistant public works director Darren Greenwood.

"If the customer achieves the reduction we're looking for, then it should be a wash," Greenwood said. "If we don't conserve, we won't make it."

For low-volume users, like customers who use about 3,700 gallons per month, bills would go from \$27.84 to \$34.34 if usage stayed the same, Greenwood said.

The city has targeted a 50 percent reduction in outdoor use and a 5 percent reduction in indoor use.

If passed by the council, the conservation rates would take effect April 29.

The California Water Service Company, which serves about two-thirds of Livermore residents, is also considering a mandatory conservation program, Greenwood said.

Contact Denis Cuff at 925-943-8267 or dcuff@bayareanewsgroup.com. Follow him at [Twitter.com/deniscuff](https://twitter.com/deniscuff).

Published **April 23rd, 2014**

At Long Last, a Labor Agreement

By *Nick Marnell*

No corks popped out of champagne bottles. No confetti fell from the ceiling. No party banners unfurled at the April 16 district meeting after the ratification of the tentative agreement between the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and the United Professional Firefighters of Contra Costa County.

In fact, the mood was downright funereal.

Local 1230 officials and a smattering of the rank and file sat silently in the back of the room as Moraga resident and past MOFD director Dick Olsen assailed the proposed labor agreement. "I am absolutely astonished," said Olsen, the only member of the public to speak out. "This is one of the most one-sided documents that I have ever seen." He noted that the contract terms included a potential increase in firefighter pay of over 12 percent (see sidebar) along with a reduction in district service of 21 percent, as the number of on duty firefighters has recently decreased from 19 to 17. "The sacrifice should be shared equally between the union and the public," he said.

Director Alex Evans agreed that there will be service cutbacks, and he also acknowledged that the contract was not perfect, but he stressed that the district had to make the deal in order to continue as a sustainable entity. Along that same line, fire chief Stephen Healy later said that in order to produce an agreement, the district agreed to the revenue sharing compromise: The district needed an early wage reduction to help stabilize the general fund, and "asking the union to agree to pay cuts - with no guarantee of restoration or future wage increases - when they hadn't had a raise since 2008 and their health care rates capped since 2010, was never going to lead to an agreement," said the chief.

A big concern for director Steve Anderson was the automatic nature of the wage increases. Anderson noted that not long ago, the district was close to becoming insolvent; should tough times reoccur, the district will be forced to pay the wage increases promised in the agreement. "We could be in a position where we will have no choice but to lay off people," said Anderson. He cast the sole dissenting vote, as the motion to approve the tentative agreement passed 3-1, with director Fred Weil absent.

By a two-thirds majority, the union ratified the agreement earlier in April.

"I lose sleep that we agreed to this contract," said Vince Wells, Local 1230 president, after the meeting. Sounding similar in tone to Evans, he continued. "We didn't agree because we think it's best; we agreed to it because it would settle a labor dispute."

He explained that the union had no idea what contract terms the district may have imposed had mediation not succeeded. "If MOFD had imposed the 9.5 percent pay cut, that could have continued forever," said Wells. So the union proposed the incremental increases and the revenue sharing idea. "If things get better, we will finally be able to at least recoup some of our losses from years ago," added Mark DeWeese, MOFD's union representative.

Board president John Wyro called the agreement a turning point in the history of the district, and he added that the district will benefit from a significant decrease in its unfunded pension liability as a result of the new labor contract.

In keeping with the non-celebratory tone of the meeting, free cookies provided by the district were barely touched.

Summary of the Tentative Agreement between MOFD and Local 1230

Term: through June 30, 2018

Salary:

Year One (July 1, 2014-June 30, 2015) - 3.5 percent decrease

Year Two - 1 percent increase

Year Three - 4 percent increase PLUS up to 3 percent more based upon district property tax increases

Year Four - 4 percent increase PLUS up to 3 percent more based upon district property tax increase

An additional 1 percent increase effective June 1, 2018

Health Care: district obligation capped at 2010 premium amounts, which is the district's current contribution

Retiree Health Care: current level for current employees, and a lower tier for future employees

Staffing Model: the ability for the district to hire up to 12 non-safety paramedics at a much lower pay scale to replace firefighter-paramedic vacancies

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Published **April 23rd, 2014**

Lamorinda Fire News Briefs

By Nick Marnell

Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force

Task force member Jim Fajardo outlined the basics of the service model of a typical fire department at the group's April 9 meeting. Discussion ensued over the benefits of two-person crews versus three, where best to locate a fire station, and the risk of the occurrence of an Oakland Hills type of fire.

"The Oakland Hills fire is a misleading concept thrown in to these meetings," said task force member Rich Cunningham. "It's all about fear. It's used to manipulate the political process."

The abstract discussion clearly frustrated Vince Wells, Local 1230 president. "This is all well and good," he said. "But tell me exactly. What does Lafayette want?"

"Apparently, they don't know what they want," said Lafayette fire commissioner Bill Granados after the meeting.

The task force was created by the City Council to check out alternative delivery of fire and emergency services to the city. The investigation will continue at its May 15 meeting.

MOFD Meeting Schedule Revised

After a short trial of conducting public meetings once a month, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District will revert to its twice monthly meeting format.

"The present schedule has become problematic," said Fire Chief Stephen Healy. Meetings will now be scheduled for the first and third Wednesdays of each month.

The revised schedule, approved at the April 16 board meeting, kicks in with the district meeting of May 7.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA

Print this page

Published April 23rd, 2014

One Man Show

By Nick Marnell

The annual Special Joint Meeting of the three Lamorinda civic councils was held at Saint Mary's College April 7, and there was little doubt as to who was the showstopper.

Moraga-Orinda Fire District chief Stephen Healy opened with an update on the increased number of community emergency response teams in Lamorinda, but the Soda Center audience did not let him off that easily. Healy fielded a wide range of fire questions from the public and officials for nearly three quarters of the two-hour meeting.

He relayed the history of proposed fire station 46, from the directive of prior chief Randall Bradley to check out the possibilities, to the use of software in determining resultant overall response times that he confirmed will be improved because of the new station. "Some will be positively impacted and some negatively," said Healy. "But I'm looking at the big picture, over 4,400 properties. Overall (station 46) will be a benefit to the community."

The jointly operated station between MOFD and the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District has been in discussion for over one year. "It's the right thing to do, and I hope it is successful," said the chief.

The recent murmurs of replacing firefighters with civilians to operate ambulances in both fire districts concerned Moraga resident and past MOFD director Dick Olsen. Healy made no bones about the reason: cost. And he said that yes, the districts have been exploring the idea, and that the public will soon be hearing more about it.

"And as long as I'm talking about how expensive firefighters are, I want to stress that they are worth it," said Healy. "And they do not deserve the blame for the high district retirement costs." He explained that the majority of those costs accrue to the benefit of retired firefighters.

Moraga Town Council member Dave Trotter asked if the elimination of firefighters will make the communities vulnerable. "It's always been 'value added' to have firefighters on all of our calls, as 63 percent of our calls are medical," said Healy. "Because of our low call volume, we are nowhere near an unreasonable situation with our deployment model."

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA

Antioch couple reimbursed after erroneously paying three decades of sewer charges

By Paul Burgarino Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times
Posted:

Sunday, May 4, 2014
ContraCostaTimes.com

ANTIOCH -- When there's a questionable charge on a utility bill or store purchase, Louis Ramos promptly asks his wife, Irene, whether it's legit.

But when it came to their property bill, there were no surprises.

Or so they thought.

Last year, the Antioch couple learned they were being charged for Delta Diablo Sanitation District sewer service despite never being connected to the district's system. Their home, built in 1980, is on a septic tank.

"We were shocked," said Irene Ramos, 64, a retired mortgage professional. "I looked at it and said, 'What's all this about.' You would think we would have paid attention, but we didn't."

According to records, the couple had paid taxes to the sanitation district for sewer service and street sweeping since 1987.

Recently, the Ramoses received a refund of about \$5,700 from Delta Diablo. The total included an annual interest calculation of 5.1 percent.

Such billing errors are unfortunate but happen on occasion, especially with public agencies being understaffed, county Assessor Gus Kramer said.

Because of confusion over annexations, dividing parcels, school district borders or other snafus, there are one to two dozen Contra Costa cases each year of taxes being incorrectly assessed, he said.

Computerization has minimized but not eliminated errors.

"Computers and human beings are not infallible," Kramer said. "It comes down to property owners doing a little homework on their bill."

Louis Ramos, a retired sheet metal worker, says he and his wife acquired the land for their home in 1979 and moved in a year later. When Antioch annexed the land south of Oak View Cemetery in the 1980s, the Ramoses were given a choice of connecting to sewer or keeping their septic tank.

"I guess I took it for granted," Louis Ramos, 78, said.

Delta Diablo's sewer lines were installed in the mid-1980s for the Almondridge subdivision, located across the street from the Ramoses' Willow Avenue home. An explanation of the situation to Delta Diablo officials led to an investigation by the company's finance department.

It's a district's responsibility to maintain parcel records and inform the county if an assessment needs to be corrected, said Bob Campbell, the county's auditor/controller.

"We get our information from the county tax rolls, so as soon as it was brought to our attention, we looked into it and took it very seriously," said Angela Lowrey, the sanitary district's spokeswoman. "We see it as a relationship and honoring our customers."

The Ramoses received a refund for four years without interest, which is the district's policy. They later requested a full refund for the sewer services they had erroneously paid.

The district board granted their request, as state law has special refund provisions for a property where no service was provided.

The Ramoses' property tax bill still includes a charge for street sweeping, which they are pleased to receive.

Pittsburg, Antioch and Bay Point receive sewer service from Delta Diablo, though rates differ based on the number of scheduled street sweepings and collection systems.

The Ramoses hope the ordeal serves as a cautionary tale to others.

"People have to be astute and be sure to check both online and the hard copies," Irene Ramos said.

Contact Paul Bugarino at 925-779-7164. Follow him at [Twitter.com/paulbugarino](https://twitter.com/paulbugarino).

ConFire will study feasibility of bidding to become county's ambulance service provider

By Tom Lochner *Contra Costa Times San Jose Mercury News*
Posted: Mon May 05 17:36:40 MDT 2014

Tuesday, May 6, 2014
ContraCostaTimes.com

MARTINEZ -- The Contra Costa County Fire District will study the feasibility of bidding to become the county's ambulance service provider, a role currently fulfilled by a private contractor, American Medical Response.

The agency will select a consultant to prepare the study, ConFire Chief Jeff Carman said Monday. Three bids have been received so far, and a choice could be made by the end of the week, Carman said.

The district's move parallels a recommendation for the fire district's emergency medical services by consultant Fitch and Associates LLC. The recommendation is contained in an EMS report, which will be presented to the county Board of Supervisors on Tuesday.

ConFire covers much of Central County and parts of East County and West County in a 304-square-mile territory, with 23 stations and 23 three-person crews. Two other fire agencies in the county, the Moraga-Orinda and San Ramon Valley fire districts, are ambulance service providers.

Under the current arrangement in ConFire territory, the fire department and AMR respond to the same emergencies within minutes of each other. The fire department arrives first about 70 percent of the time, Carman said.

Critics describe that response model as redundant, but proponents defend it as necessary to assure quick lifesaving interventions. The Fitch EMS study notes that the volume of emergency medical calls is increasing, even as revenue growth slows and will likely decline amid changes in insurance reimbursement rates.

ConFire's fiscal 2014-15 budget is projected at about \$110 million, with a \$10.2 million deficit.

Carman noted that there are other changes brewing in the industry, including an interest in "community paramedicine" and other models that could involve treatment at the scene by paramedics, nurse-practitioners or physician's assistants without the necessity of transport to a hospital.

Contact Tom Lochner at 510-262-2760. Follow him at [Twitter.com/tomlochner](https://twitter.com/tomlochner).

IF YOU GO

What: Contra Costa County board of supervisors

Where: County Administration Building, 651 Pine St., Martinez

When: 9 a.m. Tuesday

San Pablo: Voters reject tax to fund Doctors Medical Center

By Robert Rogers Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times
Posted: Wed May 07 06:52:18 MDT 2014

Wednesday, May 7, 2014

ContraCostaTimes.com

SAN PABLO -- Doctors Medical Center looks destined for closure after voters on Tuesday rejected a mail-in parcel tax measure that supporters had said was needed to keep open the area's only public safety-net hospital.

Only 51.93 percent of voters -- about 16,000 residents -- supported the tax, which needed two-thirds approval to pass.

Measure C would have generated an estimated \$20 million annually for the hospital, which is hemorrhaging about \$1.5 million every month despite cost-cutting and new revenues that have cut the operating deficit in half in recent years. Hospital officials said they would vote to close the hospital if the tax, which required two-thirds approval, failed.

Parcel taxes passed in 2004 and 2011 already pump \$10.9 million annually into the hospital but have proved insufficient to keep the facility solvent.

The California Nurses Association sent out a statement after the vote was made public, saying that the closure of a hospital that has almost 80 percent of the West Contra Costa region's hospital beds would create a "dire public health crisis."

"As a registered nurse who has worked for many years at Doctors Medical Center, I am intimately familiar with the critical need for a fully operational hospital (in the region)," said registered nurse Seung Choo. "Many neighborhoods in the community we serve border the refineries and people live in close proximity to heavy industries which has caused asthma rates among children to skyrocket.

Choo added that more than 15,000 people sought treatment from hospitals in the region after the August 2012 explosion and fire at the Chevron refinery in Richmond, saying that "the incident was not the first of its kind nor will it likely be the last."

Ballots were mailed to roughly 107,000 registered voters in the West Contra Costa Healthcare District and were due back by Tuesday evening.

The board in January authorized the mail-in ballot election in hopes of averting closure and making the long-struggling hospital more attractive to potential partners. The proposed parcel tax would have been 14 cents per square foot of developed property, or about \$210 annually on a 2,000-square-foot house, and would raise about \$20 million a year.

The hospital's \$143 million operating budget is strained under the weight of its mostly uninsured and underinsured patients. DMC is the leading provider of hospital care to the area's Medicare and Medi-Cal patients, and cuts to Medicare reimbursement rates have exacerbated the fiscal straits, hospital spokeswoman Remy Goldsmith said.

The only other emergency room in West Contra Costa is Kaiser Richmond, which has only 15 emergency beds. DMC has 25.

If DMC closes, the results would be "catastrophic" to the region, according to a 2011 report commissioned by Contra Costa Emergency Medical Services.

Check back for updates to this story.

Print this page

Published May 7th, 2014

The Tangled Web of Lamorinda Ambulance Service

By Nick Marnell

Shortly after sunrise on Nov. 12 the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District responded to an emergency medical call in Lafayette. A child was determined to be in serious condition and Captain Gil Caravantes asked for an ambulance to transport the patient to the hospital. ConFire's ambulance provider, American Medical Response, relayed that it was 20 minutes away, said Caravantes, so he asked for mutual aid from the Moraga-Orinda Fire District. MOFD Medic 141 arrived in less than 10 minutes and transported the child to John Muir Hospital, where he was treated and released.

How does something seemingly so obvious become a news story, let alone the lead paragraph of one? Because ConFire has a contract with AMR to provide its ambulance service and Caravantes technically violated that contract by calling for MOFD. The incident illustrates one of the many complexities of the county emergency medical service system.

"By the letter of the law, AMR is the one authorized to ask for mutual aid," said ConFire battalion chief Ben Smith, EMS division. "Technically, we should wait for the AMR ambulance."

"I didn't feel comfortable with that," said Caravantes. "MOFD was right around the corner, so I asked to dispatch the MOFD ambulance. I realize ConFire has a contract with AMR, but, we're all about care and safety first."

Erik Rohde, the AMR general manager for Contra Costa County, did not respond to questions for this article. As counter intuitive as the contract situation may seem, MOFD chief Stephen Healy explained the rationale.

"We have to stay within our operating area," he said. "That's the way the system is designed - to prevent chaos. We don't have a right to go into AMR's exclusive operating area to provide ambulance transport; we went because we were called."

"AMR has provided us with a lot of mutual aid; I don't want them to think we were poaching."

The chief added, "What if one of our district residents called for an ambulance, but we were unavailable because we were occupied where we should not have been?"

Unlike ConFire, MOFD has no contract with AMR. MOFD has the exclusive right to provide ambulance service in its district under the California health and safety code because the district provided its own ambulance service prior to June 1, 1980.

"I called Chief Healy and explained what we did and told him the reasons why," said Caravantes. But the captain said he was questioned by his superiors about his actions.

"'Why would you do that,' they asked," said Caravantes. "'Well, you weren't there,' I said. They thought I might catch some flak for it, but that I should be okay. I should be okay? For going above and beyond? 'Don't worry,' I told them. 'I'm okay.'"

"I would do it again in a heartbeat," continued the captain. "Would I get called on the carpet for doing it? Absolutely. Is what I did the right thing to do? Absolutely."

"That's the way the system should run, but that's not the way the system is set up," said Smith. "I support what captain Caravantes did. If I were the captain, I would have done the same thing."

"If the ambulances were operated by the fire districts in the county, this type of situation would not occur," said ConFire chief Jeff Carman. "The fire service is very good at sharing resources and always sends the closest resource regardless of what agency it comes from. This situation is not unique, and in the best interest of our customers I support captain Caravantes' decision to call for the closest resource."

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)