

# Rodeo-Hercules fire district candidates differ widely on pay, resource deployment

November 12, 2014  
Agenda Item 14c

By Tom Lochner [Contra Costa Times](#)

Posted: [10/08/2014](#) 01:54:59 PM PDT Updated: about 18 hours ago

The Rodeo-Hercules Fire District, with about 35,000 residents spread over 32 square miles, is small by California standards, but it looms large as the testing ground for an alternative funding tool to parcel taxes and their two-thirds majority threshold for passage.

An \$82-a-year benefit assessment for single-family houses, approved by a 57 percent, weighted majority of property owners in May and imposed by the district board in June, is being challenged in court on the premise that using the mechanism to pay for districtwide general benefits rather than a special benefit to certain properties would violate the state Constitution.

On Oct. 1, just five weeks before the Nov. 4 election, the district reopened the Rodeo station thanks to a \$2.5 million federal grant over two years and appointed eight new firefighters.

The Rodeo station had been shuttered since 2012 for budgetary reasons.

Five candidates, including the three incumbents, are vying for three board seats. Two of those incumbents, Raemona Williams and Manly Moulton, voted as part of a 4-1 board majority to impose the benefit assessment. The third incumbent, Bill Prather, cast the lone no vote. The other candidates are Ernie Wheeler and Teagan Clive.

Williams did not respond to requests for an interview.

Fire Chief Charles Hanley has blamed the district's financial woes mostly on reduced property tax receipts because of the recent recession, coupled with the allotment of tax increments over the years to the now-defunct Hercules Redevelopment Agency. But Prather, Clive and Wheeler blame what they see as a combination of unsustainable salaries and benefits and excessive deployment of resources, such as sending a heavy fire apparatus staffed by three people to medical calls.

The district's 2014-15 operating budget is \$6.5 million, which includes almost \$1 million projected from the benefit assessment and \$1.25 million from the first year of the federal SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) grant. The eight new firefighters bring the staff to 23, including the chief and the administrative services officer.

Eleven district employees realized \$250,000 or more in total pay and benefits in 2013, led by Hanley, with just over \$395,000, according to data on the Transparent California website. Hanley additionally got almost \$144,000 in retirement pay last year from Santa Rosa for his service there as deputy fire chief.

Moulton said Rodeo-Hercules firefighters are the lowest-paid in Contra Costa County. He said the district needs to increase revenue, something he said will occur naturally as the district's population grows, especially in Hercules, which has ambitious plans for waterfront development. The district also should look for grants and other alternative funding, he said.

Clive wants the county to reassess the Phillips 66 refinery.

Prather, Clive and Wheeler want to see increased deployment of reserve firefighters. Moulton said the cost-savings of using reserves must be balanced with the cost of training them.

Prather, Clive and Wheeler want to look at deploying two-person medical vehicles on many medical calls. Moulton said national standards call for four firefighters for all responses.

The candidates also differ sharply on whether the district is transparent enough. Prather, Clive and Wheeler said the district should televise or archive meetings online and post more printed information on the district website. Moulton said the district makes information available for the asking.

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

candidates

Raemona Williams

Residence: Hercules

Occupation: Assistant deputy chief and director of training, San Francisco Fire Department

Background: Incumbent; elected to the board as a first-time candidate in 2010; backed by firefighters union Local 1230

Manly Moulton

Residence: Rodeo

Occupation: Battalion chief, Richmond Fire Department

Background: Incumbent; elected to the board as a first-time candidate in 2010; backed by firefighters union Local 1230

Bill Prather

Residence: Hercules

Occupation: Real estate broker

Background: Incumbent; first elected to board in 1994, re-elected in 1998, 2002, 2006 and 2010; retired Richmond fire captain

Teagan Clive

Residence: Rodeo

Occupation: Television writer, artist, researcher, consultant

Background: First-time candidate; civic and environmental activist, member of Crockett-Rodeo United to Defend the Environment (CRUDE); concerned about plans at the Phillips 66 refinery to produce propane and butane and the prospect of trains carrying crude oil from the Midwest and Canada to Central California via the Capitol Corridor tracks that traverse Rodeo and Hercules

Ernie Wheeler

Residence: Hercules

Occupation: Retired military fire official and safety inspector

Background: First-time candidate; retired as military assistant fire chief in charge of training and operations at Travis Air Force Base in 1984; also was Cal-OSHA safety inspector, Federal Emergency Management Agency employee, private industrial safety and oil spill consultant and volunteer with Solano County Office of Emergency Services and Cordelia Volunteer Fire Department

# Richmond looks to earmark \$15 million to save Doctors Medical Center

By Jennifer Baires [Contra Costa Times](#)

Posted: [10/08/2014](#) 10:20:55 AM PDT Updated: about 16 hours ago

RICHMOND -- A decision this week to try to steer \$15 million in promised community grants from Chevron toward Doctors Medical Center has raised hopes that the cash could keep the troubled hospital afloat at least through 2015.

But even with City Council support to earmark that money for DMC, the question remains whether a one-time cash infusion can buy enough time for the San Pablo hospital to survive. And it's not clear when the money might be available because it is tied to approvals for a Chevron refinery modernization project.

The hospital runs an \$18 million annual deficit and has drastically reduced services in recent months.

Even if the \$15 million materializes before the hospital is expected to run out of cash at the end of February, DMC is unlikely to reinstate emergency ambulance traffic that was halted in August -- a diversion that speakers at Tuesday's City Council meeting claimed had already resulted in the loss of lives because of longer transport times to other hospitals. Officials said the money likely would allow the pared-down DMC to operate as-is for less than a year after it becomes available but not restore recently cut services.

"It would take six to eight months just to restore services and staffing that have been reduced over the last three to four months," said Eric Zell, chairman of the West Contra Costa Healthcare District board, which manages the hospital. "It can't happen overnight."

The cash infusion could put on hold proposals to restructure the hospital into a satellite emergency room or advanced urgent care center, either of which would lack inpatient services.

"It gives us a bridge to the possibility for a long-term solution," Zell said, adding that many of the options the council recommended -- partnering with other government entities and hospitals -- have been tried repeatedly without success by the district over the years. "Our goal is to keep a full-service hospital open. We'll do anything, and we'll do it as many times as we need to. We will talk with everybody again if that is what it takes."

Kevin Keane, a spokesman for the stakeholders group of local health care officials and hospitals that is working to find long-term solutions for DMC, said a one-time cash infusion won't change much. "While we welcome the effort from the Richmond City Council, it doesn't change the fact that we need to stay on course to look for viable alternatives to a full-service facility," he said.

The City Council's vote late Tuesday stipulated that the money could only be used to support a full-service hospital, but Zell reiterated Wednesday that trying to sustain such an operation long term with the hospital's current payer mix of largely Medicare and Medi-Cal patients "is almost impossible."

"(DMC) needs to be part of a larger system," he said.

So far, there hasn't been any interest from other networks, including nearby hospitals or the county, to partner with DMC and take on its deficit. Hospital advocates hope that could change if the Chevron money goes through and DMC is able to leverage it for additional funding. It would also allow time to pursue legislative options, including higher reimbursement rates for Medicare and Medi-Cal patients, that have so far failed.

Doctors and nurses continue to lobby Contra Costa County to take over funding the hospital, but county officials say the money does not exist.

Speaker after speaker on Tuesday urged the council to restructure the \$90 million Chevron benefits package -- negotiated as a condition of the company's \$1 billion refinery modernization project -- to include a lifeline for the area's only public hospital. Recent cutbacks in emergency services, they said, have already resulted in Kaiser Permanente's Richmond emergency room -- the only other ER in West County -- being flooded with patients.

"Richmond Kaiser cannot accommodate the additional load," said Rachelle Bradley, director of transitional care at DMC, during the meeting. "People are still coming to us from all over; they're walking in, being driven in or wheeled in."

The \$15 million would be carved out for the hospital by taking an equal percentage cut of all the programs in the community programs section of the benefits agreement, but the bulk of it would come from a \$35 million college scholarship fund for Richmond public school students. One-third of the investment package is earmarked for environmental programs that are required as mitigation for refinery greenhouse gas emissions.

As part of the resolution, the city will also lobby other West Contra Costa agencies and cities to contribute to saving the hospital. The council directed city staff to meet with Chevron about reallocating the money and report back Oct. 21.

Chevron has said previously that it would allow city leaders to decide how to spend the bulk of the money in the agreement. But most of the grants, including any earmarked for DMC, would not be made available until all legal challenges to the refinery modernization are resolved and the company is given the go-ahead to start construction.

In an email Wednesday, Chevron spokeswoman Melissa Ritchie wrote, " ... we will not entertain changes to the total funding level, the length of the funding period and the implementation date."

Under the best-case scenario, Chevron would start construction during the first quarter of 2015 -- which would mean that it would start paying out 60 days later -- but pending litigation and the permit process could push that date back months, or even years.

Contact Jennifer Baires at 925-943-8378. Follow her at [Twitter.com/jenniferbaires](https://twitter.com/jenniferbaires).

# Quiet race for contentious West Contra Costa Healthcare District seats

By Jennifer Baires Contra Costa Times

Posted: 10/16/2014 12:38:16 PM PDT

Updated: 10/16/2014 02:05:42 PM PDT

SAN PABLO -- The fate of Doctors Medical Center looms large in the election for three seats on the board of the West Contra Costa Healthcare District, which manages and runs the area's only public hospital.

If Doctors Medical Center continues to operate at its current capacity, it will run out of cash by the end of February, according to administrators. Community members, nurses unions and local officials have spent the past few months calling on the health care district board and its stakeholders to find a solution that would keep DMC as a full-service hospital, and criticizing them for not doing enough.

The hospital, which mostly cares for Medi-Cal and Medicare patients, has been losing money for years, due in part to low reimbursement rates, and now faces an \$18 million annual deficit.

Amid the controversy, the three directors seeking re-election are facing one challenger. Incumbents Irma Anderson, Nancy Casazza and Beverly Wallace are running for another term against Marilynne Mellander, a retired laboratory scientist from El Sobrante.

At a recent round-table discussion hosted by the League of Women Voters and Contra Costa Television, Mellander was the only candidate to appear, and she told the moderator, Tom Barnidge, a columnist with this newspaper, that she is running for one reason: to represent residents who are tired of paying for DMC.

"District taxpayers are now burdened with years of long-term debt due to the decisions of the current health care board," Mellander said, when asked what inspired her to run. "If elected, I intend to oppose next year's likely bond measure and any tax measures that would come later."

In an interview following the round table, Mellander was even more candid about her opposition to the district. "I don't think it should exist," she said, adding that DMC's closure is inevitable and she'd like to ensure that once it closes, the special district is shuttered, too.

During the round table, she said the county should take control of DMC, but that option has been consistently ruled out by county supervisors because of budget constraints.

Casazza and Wallace did not respond to repeated requests for interviews and did not attend the round table. Anderson said she wasn't able to make the discussion because of prior commitments but said in a follow-up interview that she's running to continue the fight to save DMC.

"I'm very interested in us having a hospital," she said. "The only way we are going to survive is if we have another hospital that partners with us. They say they don't want to, but they can't handle the patients in West County."

Anderson, who has served on the board for six years as a director and former chairwoman, said that despite the odds, she hasn't given up hope that a deal to save DMC will come through.

"We have until February," she said, adding that perhaps talks with UC San Francisco Medical Center could be revisited as a potential partnership.

Mellander gave a less rosy outlook for DMC and the district. "Regardless of what happens to DMC, district taxpayers will be saddled with debt for years to come," she said.

The round table airs on KCRT (Comcast Channel 28 and AT&T Channel 99) at 3:02 p.m. and 10:40 p.m. Saturday and 2:40 p.m. Sunday. For additional broadcast times, go to <http://bit.ly/1nUQFZL>.

Contact Jennifer Baires at 925-943-8378. Follow her at [Twitter.com/jenniferbaires](https://twitter.com/jenniferbaires).

Marilynne L. Mellander Age: 69

Occupation: Retired laboratory scientist

Professional background/elected history: Mellander served on El Sobrante Municipal Advisory Council from 2000 to 2004. She has authored ballot arguments against the district's Measure C parcel tax for West Contra Healthcare District. Mellander was a licensed clinical laboratory scientist and worked with Chevron for almost 20 years doing fuel and solar cell research.

Personal background: Lived in West County since 1973, in El Sobrante

Education: Bachelor of science in microbiology, Louisiana State University; graduate of Center for Advanced Medical Technology, San Francisco State

Irma Anderson

Age: Not provided

Occupation: West Contra Costa County Healthcare District director; retired nurse

Professional background/elected history: Anderson has been on the board for six years. Before that, Anderson was mayor of Richmond and served on the City Council for eight years.

Personal background: Lived in the area for 40 years and has worked in the public health arena for more than three decades

Education: Bachelor of science from Cornell University; master's of public health, UC Berkeley

The other candidates did not respond to requests for information.

# Barnidge: No more outrage in Lafayette over Plan Bay Area

[By Tom Barnidge Contra Costa Times Columnist](#)

Posted: 10/19/2014 07:18:06 AM PDT Updated: a day ago

Thirteen months ago, about 200 people at the Lafayette Veterans Hall heated to a slow boil as community activists railed about Plan Bay Area, the regional growth and land-use strategy that emphasizes more housing near public transit.

Attendees of that meeting, arranged by the grass-roots group Lafayette First, jeered at the mention of the Association of Bay Area Governments and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission -- the agencies that approved the plan -- and at the notion of high-density, affordable housing in Lafayette. The takeaway from the evening was that Lafayette residents, bearing pitchforks and torches if need be, would storm City Hall before they'd accede to zoning for the anticipated affordable housing needed for the next eight years.

So how do you explain what happened at Tuesday night's City Council meeting, when it came time to give the so-called housing element its final review? There were only three people in the audience -- four, if you include me -- and nary a pitchfork in sight. The council took less than 20 minutes to approve the document and forward it to state officials for review.

Unrest over Plan Bay Area has not been unique to Lafayette. Danville residents were up in arms much earlier, and many arms remain raised. Orinda residents more recently raised a royal ruckus about stack-and-pack housing tarnishing their village.

Peace in Lafayette can be traced to three community workshops last spring, when Mayor Don Tatzin and the city staff explained housing element law to all who cared to listen.

Residents learned that zoning for growth does not necessarily mean anything will be built, and the number of proposed units is just a forecast.

They learned the state-mandated process has been around for four decades, and ABAG is a facilitator. City maps were laid out, and residents were invited to rank development sites. Density guidelines were explained and questions were answered.

"We try to do a good job of being open and explaining why we're doing things," Tatzin said. "The workshops were a component of that, but there's more to it. It's the city's specific plan, it's that we take the RHNA (Regional Housing Needs Assessment) numbers seriously, and when we studied them and found errors we protested and got them reduced.

"People understand now that we're doing something that we need to do by state law, and we're doing it in a way that's going to make the community better. We've tried to make people who might be upset about this more knowledgeable."

That transparency extended to City Manager Steve Falk, who met privately with those who had concerns.

"About a year ago, a group was mobilizing," he said, "so the planning director and I sat down with them for two hours and went through everything -- what ABAG does, why it does it, how the housing element works -- and the education helped.

"That's why the workshops were important. They defanged people. It made them feel like they were participating rather than having something crammed down their throats."

Thirteen months after Plan Bay Area stirred the residents' wrath, it didn't make a ripple at Tuesday's council meeting.

More people cared about earlier agenda items -- an ordinance to allow parking meters on public property and one to ban plastic bags in retail stores.

If either of those ordinances outrages you, contact city officials. They don't mind explaining things.

Contact Tom Barnidge at [tbarnidge@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:tbarnidge@bayareanewsgroup.com).

INFORMATION

News

- + San Diego
- + California
- + National

MarketInk

Water

Construction

Defense

Economy

Education

Finance

Government

Health

Hospitality

Law

Real Estate

Technology

Commentary

RESOURCES

Attorney Directory

Awards & Programs

Business Directory

Digital Edition

Media Center

Newsmakers

Online Plan Room

Roundtables

Soaring Dimensions

SourceBook

Special Reports

Water

RESEARCH

Classifieds

Public Notices

Source Sales Tools

COMMUNITY

Arts and Entertainment

Communities

Events

Landmarks

Movies

Restaurants

Traffic

Weather

CORPORATE

Advertising

Company Info

Contact Us

FAQ

Feedback

Site Index

The Transcript Store



## County to consider next step in consolidating fire districts

By JAMES

PALEN, The

Daily Transcript

Monday, October 20, 2014

0

Article	Comments
---------	----------

The San Diego County Board of Supervisors this week will consider taking the third step of a plan developed in 2008 that consolidated several rural fire agencies under the San Diego County Fire Authority.

That plan, known as the Hybrid Plan from the Fire and Life Safety Reorganization Report, began with bringing six volunteer fire companies under the San Diego County Fire Authority. It also provided fire and emergency medical services within County Service Area 135, or CSA 135.

The Board of Supervisors took the second step, expanding the boundaries of CSA 135 to include five dissolved fire service areas, in 2011. On Tuesday the supervisors will consider the third step, which would authorize the San Diego Local Agency Formation Commission to expand CSA 135's boundaries to include the San Diego Rural and Pine Valley Fire Protection Districts.

The financial cost of taking the third step is unknown, county staff said, but expanding the latent powers in the subarea "may result in a fiscal impact."

A review of assets and liabilities will be conducted as due diligence during the LAFCO process, the county said. When the two fire protection districts are dissolved, their property tax and assessment revenue will transfer to CSA 135.

The Board of Supervisors' meeting is scheduled for 9 a.m. Tuesday at the County Administration Center, 1600 Pacific Highway, in the board's North Chamber, Room 310.

### Leave Your Comment

Name:

E-mail:

Comment:

1000 char.

max.

Submit

Comments are moderated by SDDT, in accordance with the SDDT Comment Policy, and may not appear on this commentary until they have been reviewed and deemed appropriate for posting. Also, due to the volume of comments we receive, not all comments will be posted.

SDDT Comment Policy: SDDT encourages you to add a comment to this discussion. You may not post any unlawful, threatening, defamatory, obscene, pornographic or other material that would violate the law. All comments should be relevant to the topic and remain respectful of other authors and commenters. You are solely responsible for your own comments, the consequences of posting those comments, and the consequences of any reliance by you on the comments of others. By submitting your comment, you hereby give SDDT the right, but not the obligation, to post, air, edit, exhibit, telecast, cablecast, webcast, re-use, publish, reproduce, use, license, print, distribute or otherwise use your comment(s) and accompanying personal identifying and other information you provide via all forms of media now known or hereafter devised, worldwide, in perpetuity. SDDT Privacy Statement.

# Richmond council weighs options for cash-strapped hospital

By Jennifer Baires Contra Costa Times

Posted: 10/21/2014 11:37:51 PM PDT

RICHMOND -- The City Council took a unanimous step forward Tuesday night to allocate \$15 million in promised community grants from Chevron toward the beset Doctors Medical Center, with the aim of keeping the community hospital open as a full-service, acute care facility.

The deal, proposed by Richmond City Manager Bill Lindsay after the council directed him two weeks ago to look for solutions, is a three-year plan that would include contributions from a number of community partners.

To close the \$18 million annual funding gap DMC faces, Lindsay proposed yearly contributions of \$5 million from Richmond via the Chevron Environmental and Community Investment Agreement, nearly \$3 million in debt forgiveness from Contra Costa County, \$4.3 from nearby hospitals to pay down the rest of the debt service, \$5 million from a new parcel tax and \$800,000 in cost reductions at the hospital.

In his presentation to the council, Lindsay stressed that none of the proposed partnerships were certain and to save the hospital the package would have to come together before the new year because the hospital will be out of operating costs by the end of February and will begin a transition plan in January.

"If this is going to work a lot of moving parts have to come together, very quickly," Councilmember Jael Myrick said during his motion to approve that city staff continue to try and find partners for the plan, and move quickly to get \$4 million to DMC by the end of the year to cover further operating costs.

"If it makes DMC a full service, stable hospital then I believe it's worth the sacrifice," he said, referring to the \$10.5 million that would be diverted from Richmond Promise, a college scholarship program for public school students in Richmond, to fund DMC.

Eric Zell, director of the West Contra Costa Health Care District that manages the hospital, said that he and other administrators have been working for years to find a long term funding solution for the hospital. Much of what was presented to the council were plans that he and others in the district, and in its stakeholders group, have been considering and trying to negotiate.

"We the district are continuing to work toward saving a full service hospital," Zell said, in a phone interview before the meeting. He added that the proposed plan could buy some time, but is not an ultimate solution.

For the funding to come together in time, the city would need to ensure that Chevron begins construction on its \$1 billion modernization project at the Richmond refinery by January -- a feat made more difficult by pending litigation.

"The availability of that money is linked to the ability to implement our modernization project," Heather Kulp, a spokeswoman for the company, said during public comment. She added that the two environmental community groups, Communities for a Better Environment and Asian Pacific Environmental Network, involved in litigation against the oil giant are an obstacle. "Ask CBE and APEN to stop standing in the way of this project," she told the council.

In addition to the difficulty of getting the needed Chevron money in time, the proposal also hinges on attempts that have failed in the past, including convincing nearby hospitals to further support an unsustainable model and levying a parcel tax on residents. A parcel tax that would have saved the hospital by bringing in \$20 million annually failed earlier this year to gain the necessary two-thirds vote.

Mayor Gayle McLaughlin provided some levity and optimism toward the end of the discussion with an unusual analogy.

"How do you eat an elephant?" she asked, "One bite at a time."

Contact Jennifer Baires at 925-943-8378. Follow her at [twitter.com/jenniferbaires](https://twitter.com/jenniferbaires).

# Rodeo-Hercules: Contract benefits chief, not district, open government expert says

[By Tom Lochner Contra Costa Times](#)

Posted: **10/31/2014** 02:19:45 PM PDT Updated: 3 days ago

Related Stories

- Oct 10:
- [Document: Rodeo-Hercules fire chief's contract extension](#)

HERCULES -- A contract extension for the fire chief, hastily approved by the Rodeo-Hercules fire board in a recent split vote, is "poorly written" and likely not in the best interest of the fire district, a leading open government expert says.

The 15-month contract extension gives fire Chief Charles Hanley a base salary equivalent to \$185,952 a year, plus benefits. It stipulates that Hanley "shall not be terminated within 14 months after the November 4, 2014 statewide election," except in the event of gross criminal misconduct. And it provides for 12 months of severance pay at \$15,496 per month if Hanley is terminated without cause during the 15-month contract period, and six months if he is terminated after the first 15 months.

"In short, this contract is written in a way that significantly benefits the fire chief to the detriment of the district," said Terry Francke, general counsel at Californians Aware.

The contract also stipulates that "the fire chief will not be subject to undue oversight, work speedup or other abusive conduct" and that "open hostility or other forms of harassment by any board member shall constitute a termination without cause."

That clause, says board member Bill Prather, appears to target him. Prather largely blames Hanley for the district's shaky financial state, which includes a \$1.15 million deficit in a \$6.7 million 2014-15 budget.

In 2013, 11 Rodeo-Hercules employees made \$250,000 or more in total pay and benefits, led by Hanley with \$395,600 that included a base salary of \$177,838.

An \$82-a-year benefit assessment, imposed by the board in June over Prather's dissent, is being challenged in court.

Hanley responded to criticism over his new contract last month with a written statement, published in this newspaper, in which he took credit for bringing more than \$3.8 million into the district, including \$3.1 million in federal grant money to reopen the Rodeo fire station on Oct. 1 after it had been shuttered since 2012.

The flap over Hanley's contract comes as three board members -- Prather, Manly Moulton and Raemona Williams -- are running for re-election on Tuesday. Two challengers, Teagan Clive and Ernie Wheeler, also seek one of three seats at stake.

Prather was the lone dissident in the Oct. 8, 4-1 board vote to approve Hanley's contract. Moulton and Williams voted in favor, as did Beth Bartke and John Mills.

"As to the contract itself, it is poorly written. Did the chief write it himself?" Francke said, adding that "the termination provisions are internally inconsistent and contradictory."

He noted that some provisions would make it virtually impossible to terminate Hanley, with or without cause, before the term of the contract and without paying him the full amount.

Hanley and district counsel Richard Pio Roda did not immediately respond to a question from this newspaper as to who wrote Hanley's contract.

Prather also objected that a summary of the contract was shredded immediately after a closed session that preceded the Oct. 8 vote. Pio Roda said this was done to prevent disclosure or leakage of attorney-client or other privileged records.

Francke said the district was on firm legal ground.

"Any notes or outlines considered or discussed probably should have been retained," Francke opined, "but unlike cities or counties, special districts are not under any minimal retention period mandated by state law."

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

# San Ramon: Fiscal reform, curbing pension liabilities top issues in four-way race for fire district board

By Joyce Tsai Contra Costa Times

Posted: 10/31/2014 05:12:17 PM PDT

Updated: 10/31/2014 05:38:42 PM PDT

SAN RAMON -- For years, as a wealthy district, the San Ramon Valley Fire District could rely on healthy property tax revenues.

But as property values declined during the recession and the district saw less revenue, officials realized they needed to tighten their belts and pay down unfunded pension liability.

The district also faced criticism for pension-spiking when it was discovered that two fire chiefs, a deputy chief and an assistant chief were each making \$245,000 or more per year in retirement.

But over the past four years, the district has been working to clean up its fiscal house -- and it's making progress.

In June 2013, with new fire Chief Paige Meyer at the helm, district employees signed a labor contract in which they upped contributions to their pension and medical benefits to 20 percent of salaries for the first time in years. The district has eliminated nine firefighting and seven administrative positions and implemented a 12-year capital improvements plan.

Amid that backdrop of fiscal reform, four candidates are vying for two open seats on the fire district board -- which serves Alamo, Blackhawk, Danville, Diablo, San Ramon, the southern part of Morgan Territory and the Tassajara Valley -- in Tuesday's election.

Glenn Umont, the current board president, is facing three challengers: Chris Campbell, Donald R. Parker and Dale A. Price, who is no relation to Jennifer Price, whose seat is also up for grabs and is not running for re-election.

Umont, a retired mechanical engineer from Alamo, said he wants to continue the work he started four years ago. He was elected after vowing to ferret out "fiscal extravagances." At that time, he'd promised to "pursue reform within the system."

Before he got elected, three out of five board members were either retired or local firefighters, and the board was controlled by unions. Now the district has achieved financial stability, he said. But there's still more work to be done: The district needs to further pay down its unfunded pension and health care liabilities, he said.

The district's unfunded pension liability was \$126 million but now is \$90 million.

Two years ago, Campbell, 50, who lives in Alamo, became a firefighter for the city of San Francisco. He said his background as a real estate broker, business owner and firefighter helps him understand what it's like to run a department that is fiscally responsible and still doesn't compromise the level of service.

"I want to make sure that the relationship between the board of directors and fire personnel and the community all work together for the same goal, and I've noticed that hasn't been the case in the last several years," said Campbell, who has the support of unions.

Parker, a retired Vallejo fire chief and former Oakland assistant fire chief, highlighted his more than 40 years experience managing the day-to-day operations and budgets of fire departments.

Parker retired in 2007 after city officials said he didn't put a stop to firefighters abusing union leave time, a year before the city filed for bankruptcy.

"I have to say what was going on in that period wasn't unique from anything that was happening in other places," Parker said in August.

"There are things I might do differently, but there's nothing I'm ashamed up," the Danville resident said. "There is no way I would apologize about being a fire chief. And I have strong opinions about spiking going on, and I haven't been part of that."

Price, a commercial real estate broker, said his goal would be to keep supporting the current fiscal reform policies and long range planning that has helped the district balance its budget. The Danville resident has the endorsement of current board members H. Jay Kerr and Matt Stamey.

"This is the best balanced situation we have had, with the union, in many years" he said, "which is why it is important not to give a majority of the board's directorships to the union."

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

# Karl Wandry, Contra Costa Water District board member, dies

[By Denis Cuff Contra Costa Times](#)

Posted: 11/01/2014 03:00:08 PM PDT Updated: about 7 hours ago

Karl Wandry, a Contra Costa Water District board member for more than a decade after a career in land use planning, has died after a long illness.

Wandry, 76, of Oakley, represented Oakley and much of Antioch on the five-member board overseeing the water supply system for 500,000 people in 13 cities.

The specific cause of death was not given. Wandry died early Wednesday morning at an Antioch board and care home where he was recuperating from a foot infection, the water district reported Saturday. Private services will be held.

The water board on Wednesday will consider whether to appoint Wandry's successor or hold a special election.

Wandry was remembered for his calm, respectful approach and smarts in sorting through emotional debates about land use, the environment and water.

"He was the voice of calm. I'm going to miss him terribly," said Joe Campbell, the water board president. "Karl didn't play politics. He would sort through emotion to get at the facts."

Wandry was appointed in February 2003 to fill a water board vacancy created by the death of Noble Elcenko.

An experienced planner, he helped guide the district through securing environmental approvals to expand Los Vaqueros Reservoir.

Wandry had worked as the Contra Costa County Community Development Department's deputy director, Antioch supervising planner and Rio Vista community development director.

Wandry also was known for his sense of humor. During one board meeting near Christmas a few years ago, he waited for his turn to comment and said nothing. Instead, he leaned into the microphone and activated his bright-colored bow tie to play a holiday song.

Years ago, after having his gall bladder removed, Wandry lightened up one dry board meeting with several less-than-subtle references to his missing body part. "He would say, 'It takes a lot of gall to do this,' or 'That's galling,'" Campbell recalled.

Wandry graduated from Antioch High School, Diablo Valley College and Cal State Hayward and received a master's degree in geography from the University of Victoria in British Columbia.

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

Published **November 5th, 2014**

## Lamorinda Fire News Briefs

*By Nick Marnell*

### MOFD Pension Bill Drops

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for fiscal year 2013-14 was presented to its board of directors Oct. 15 by administrative services director Gloriann Sasser, who noted that MOFD is only the seventh California fire district to produce the document. The audited report confirmed that the district ended the fiscal year with \$17.8 million in revenue, \$17.3 million in expenses and a \$565,000 balance in its general fund.

Not revealed in the report, however, is the district's \$45 million unfunded pension liability. "Those charges affect our liability," said director Steve Anderson. "Even though they are not required to be in our financials until next year, they should be publicized."

The Contra Costa County Employees' Retirement Association recently adopted new employer contribution rates for the pension plan. Effective July 1, 2015, the MOFD employer contribution rate will decrease from 80 percent to 71 percent of payroll. The new rate is projected to reduce the district's pension expense approximately \$700,000 in fiscal year 2015-16, and to reduce its pension liability to \$40 million.

### Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District and the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District crafted agreements over the summer for the construction and operation of proposed fire station 46, an option for improved delivery of fire and emergency medical services to Lafayette. Both the Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force and the Lafayette City Council support the proposed station.

"Draft agreements from both sides are on the table, and both districts are on the same page," said ConFire assistant chief Lewis Broschard, addressing the task force at its Oct. 21 meeting.

As the group discussed ConFire's interest in acquiring the available county ambulance service contract in 2015, task force member Jim Cunha suggested that, in its request for proposals for the new contract, the county include the requirement that ambulances be allowed to cross district boundaries. Under the current ambulance contract, because MOFD would operate station 46 it could not be dispatched to medical calls in Lafayette, which is served by American Medical Response.

"We want to deliver fire-based ambulance service throughout the county," said Broschard. "If ConFire wins the ambulance contract, and if MOFD is the closest available unit to an incident, MOFD will get dispatched. We aren't concerned about boundaries; that's a profit issue. Our ambulances would be dispatched just like fire engines."

In an Oct. 23 letter to the Board of Supervisors, the task force requested a 30-day public comment period once the fire districts agree upon a common draft of the station 46 agreement and before the board considers it for approval.

The task force also requested, in a letter to Contra Costa County Health Services Department EMS director Pat Frost, that the ambulance RFP require that the winning vendor honor borderless boundaries and use a common communication system in the service area. "The closest available ambulance should always be dispatched, regardless of private compensation issues or other non-critical health related factors," the letter stated.

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)