

Moraga-Orinda Fire Protection District



BOARD OF DIRECTORS SPECIAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES

July 17, 2019

(Approved September 18, 2019)

1. The Board of Directors convened in Open Session at 6:01 p.m. on July 17, 2019 at the Sarge Littlehale Room, 22 Orinda Way, Orinda, California. President Danziger called the meeting to order. Present were the following Directors and Staff:

Director Baitx
Director Donner
Director Jex

Director Jorgens
President Danziger
Dave Winnacker, Fire Chief

Admin. Services Director Gloriann Sasser
HR Benefits Manager Christine Russell
Jonathan Holtzman, District Counsel
Patricia Edwards, Interim District Clerk

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

President Danziger opened the public comment. There were no requests to address the Board. President Danziger closed the Public Comment.

3. SPECIAL CALENDAR

3.1 Discussion of Increased Suppression Staff

Chief Winnacker provided the report. During the FY20 budget process members of the board asked for information regarding increasing daily minimum suppression staffing from the current level of 17 to 19. President Danziger stated that the main issue was increasing suppression staffing from 17 to 19 for the ambulance at Station 45. He asked the Chief to explain the cross-staffing model. Chief Winnacker stated that District staff is assigned to a specific station not to a specific apparatus. Staff is dispatched on the appropriate apparatus for the type of call. Station 45 is cross-staffed so staff responds with the engine or ambulance depending on the service call. Station 41 has a dedicated ambulance. The crew assigned to the engine only responds to calls requiring the engine and the crew assigned to the medic unit only responds on the medic unit. For calls in Station 41's district, when a call is received requiring emergency medical services (EMS), both the engine and medic unit respond to calls. The engine returns when it is no longer needed and the medic unit transports the patient to the hospital. There is no gap in coverage after the on-scene care is provided but there is a gap in medical coverage.

President Danziger stated that, on a medic call for Station 45, all three firefighters respond. He asked if all District Captains are Paramedics. Chief Winnacker stated that there are Paramedics I and Paramedics II. The majority of Engineers and Captains are Paramedics II. The District uses firefighters/paramedics to deliver primary medic care. This enables the Captain to focus on their responsibilities. President Danziger asked if an officer who is a paramedic can work down. Chief Winnacker responded yes. President Danziger stated that Station 41 has ambulance staff that responds with the engine staff. All other stations responding to a medical call have only three staff responding. Director Jorgens asked for the capabilities of Station 43 staff. Chief Winnacker stated that there is no distinction in the medical care between an engine's staff versus an ambulance staff. The distinction is the ability to transport. The engine is not set up for transport. Director Donner noted that all of the equipment and medical supplies provided on an ambulance are included on an engine. Chief Winnacker stated that primary patient care can be provided on all the District's apparatus. All firefighters are, at a minimum, Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT). It is unlikely that the three responding staff would all be EMTs. Director Jorgens questioned the difference between service delivered by an ambulance or an engine and if Paramedics I and Paramedics II had the same qualifications. Director Jorgens asked how many people could fit in an ambulance. Chief Winnacker responded six. Director Donner asked, if Station 41 is on a medical call and both the ambulance and engine are on scene and another medical call comes in for Station 41's district, can Station 44 take the call if it is not a serious medical call? Chief Winnacker responded that the Captain makes the decision based on the circumstances.

Director Donner noted that Orinda residents are not aware that Orinda does not have a designated ambulance. He noted that this creates a hole and delay in the MOFD service at this end of the District.

A full staffing model is important for the citizens and for District staff. It is important for the District to look at how to increase the staffing from 17 to 19 for safety reasons. President Danziger asked why the increased staffing is safer for District staff. Director Donner responded that more manpower at a fire is more efficient to extinguish the fire and is safer for staff. Director Baitx noted that travel distance also increases response time. Director Jorgens noted a delay in transporting a patient due to waiting for an ambulance. Director Baitx clarified that the response model for north Orinda is Station 45 backed up with Stations 43 and 44. Director Donner stated that, eliminating the medic element, more boots on the ground and additional apparatus, increases the chance of success rate in fighting fires. Chief Winnacker stated that Medic 41 responds to a fire but is ready to depart if needed elsewhere. Director Jorgens asked how the MOFD model compares to its surrounding communities. Chief Winnacker stated that it depends on the setting (rural, suburban, or urban) and density of population and miles. The community has elected to have a higher level of fire protection per capita. There are several unique elements to the community which makes comparisons difficult. Director Baitx noted that time and distance for staff to get to an emergency increases the danger for citizens and staff.

President Danziger questioned the statistics for Response Totals and Transports for 2018 versus 2019 for 42 and 43. Chief Winnacker responded that there were ambulance mechanical issues, staff at training, and quirks with the timing and location of the calls.

President Danziger noted that staff is not available if the Board changed the policy for daily staffing at 19. Chief Winnacker stated that there are five authorized unfilled vacancies. Four candidates are currently being processed. There are currently 17 assigned staff plus one unassigned. Last year, there were only 88 days when extra staff were available. Chief Winnacker added that beds are available at 45 for staff. Director Donner clarified the five vacancies are five of the six floats. All of the stations are fully assigned.

Director Jorgens noted that there are significantly more ambulance calls than fire calls. He suggested that additional staffing for fire purposes was not the correct priority. The District needs to spend money on fire prevention, OPEB, PRST, and increasing reserves. The District does not have the luxury of increasing staffing in light of its other needs. Director Jex did a six-year review of response totals and incident types to identify demand. He noted that the gross activity numbers have changed very little. The demand for EMS rescue activity is about the same. The response time has improved. Gross numbers for the demand for services and ability to provide the services on a timely basis have both improved. If the District had the financial ability, it could discuss priorities. However, MOFD has obligations and these are the priority. The District is not meeting the actuarial contributions for OPEB and PRST. The General Reserves need to be increased. All previous District capital expenditures have been funded with debt service and not reserves. The District needs to be financially viable and meet its current obligations.

President Danziger opened the public comment.

Dr. Gene Gottfried, Orinda resident, stated that Orinda voted to join Moraga in 1997. One of the largest incentives was to get an ambulance attached to the District instead of getting EMT service from AMR in Walnut Creek. The expectation was that Orinda would have facilities equal to those of Moraga. He noted that it seems as though the Orinda residents are being shortchanged because Moraga has better service. He recognized the staffing issues. He stated that it would be fair to share or move Medic 41 staff to Station 45 or Station 44. He asked the Board to consider dedicated staff at Medic 45.

President Danziger closed the Public Comment.

Director Baitx stated that the District has a balanced budget with a staff of 19. If it cannot be done now, the District needs to find a way to get ambulance staff for Medic 45. Director Donner stated that increasing the staff at Station 45 would increase the District's medical abilities. This would be safer and better for the District. He noted that most residents in District 4 do not understand the significance of not having the dedicated ambulance at Station 45.

President Danziger noted that this meeting is the first of future discussions for this issue. He agrees that the District needs to work towards staffing at 19. He asked staff to check the property tax revenue and see how the District stands. He believes the District is doing well funding its unfunded liabilities. He requested that the item be continued at the September meeting. Director Jex stated that the Board sets

a 50% reserve goal and this gives flexibility to finance and fund the District adequately. If the District loses the progress it has made, it may default. He noted that the actuarial contributions for existing obligations have not been met. He stated that existing financial obligations are the priority. President Danziger stated that the discussion will continue and that the Board has more work to do on staffing.

3.2 Discussion of Third Ambulance Response and Provide Direction to Fire Chief

Chief Winnacker provided the report. During the May, 2019 meeting, the Board requested a report on MOFD's practice of responding a third ambulance to medical incidents when the two primary ambulance units are unavailable. At the June 2019 meeting, the Board requested an action item to be presented at the July 2019 meeting to provide direction on this issue. The June 19, 2019 staff report was presented to the board and contains detailed information regarding response times and frequency. Allocation of limited resources is a zero sum process, where resources dedicated to one task are not available to carry out other tasks. With the exception of Medic 41, the District cross-staffs ambulance units with the same firefighters that respond on the engine assigned to that station. With an average medical transport call lasting 90 minutes, the crew responding on a cross-staffed ambulance is taken out of district for an extended period, creating a gap in first responder coverage. In these cases, there is a competition for resources between two compelling uses of district units: 1. Maximizer engine based first responder coverage for the possibility of a subsequent call for service; 2. Provide ambulance transport to a receiving facility. The question of how to prioritize these two items, as they relate to third ambulance response, is a policy question on which the board can provide direction.

President Danziger asked if there have been any discussions with County EMS or ConFire. Chief Winnacker stated that the local EMS agency does not care how many ambulances the District has as long as the District's contract response times are met. Eliminating the third ambulance from the District results in increased response time from AMR by approximately two minutes. The state relationship between fire service and EMS agencies is confrontational. The second meeting was with the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District EMS Chief. They were not enthusiastic about taking MOFD's calls and requested more information. He noted that they are under no obligation to run MOFD's calls. They were concerned about how providing service to MOFD's jurisdiction would impact their unit availability and reliability for their response area and the contracted response time. When faced with a conflict, they would meet their internal obligations first. MOFD is responsible for responding to medical emergencies within its jurisdiction and exclusive operating area as part of Section 201 Rights under the EMS Act.

Director Baitx asked for details on the contract. Chief Winnacker provided the information and noted it includes transport time. Director Donner asked how many times MOFD helps ConFire annually. Chief Winnacker replied about 50% of the times that they come to this District. President Danziger asked if eliminating the third ambulance meant going out of District or responding. Chief Winnacker stated that Medic 41 and 45 would be the District's only ambulances if the third ambulance was eliminated. Currently, if these two units are not available, Medic 42 or 43 would respond if Medic 41 and 45 are on another call. Director Donner noted that this happened eleven times last year and leaves a gaping hole in the District for suppression services. Chief Winnacker stated that the discussion is to eliminate the third medical transport ambulance. Director Baitx summarized that, if Medic 41 and 45 were on a call, an engine or truck would respond to a new medical call. Director Jorgens heard that AMR staff are less trained and less experienced than MOFD staff for medical services. Director Baitx stated that if MOFD staff feel that the AMR staff are not adequate, MOFD staff can accompany the transport. President Danziger noted that the chart for Response Time reports AMR at 16.49 minutes and MOFD at 14.24 minutes. He noted that the engine staff cannot transport but they can provide all the needed medical care.

President Danziger opened the public comment.

Richard Olsen, Moraga resident, stated that eliminating the third ambulance advocates the ConFire model. He added that MOFD historically cannot depend on ConFire. He commented that it is not likely that three units would be out simultaneously. He noted that AMR ambulances are located where it best suits ConFire not the District.

President Danziger asked if the District could cancel a request to AMR if AMR states that their ambulance is not located close by. Chief Winnacker stated that it could be done theoretically but it is not practical.

The dispatch computer uses a complex algorithm to dispatch ambulances. ConFire handles dispatch for MOFD. MOFD needs simple, repeatable procedures. President Danziger remarked that this happens 20-25 times a year. He suggested trying it with ConFire and going back to the old system if it does not work. Chief Winnacker stated that an increase service level is to transport which is currently being done. The other increase service level is to maximize engine based first responder coverage for the possibility of a subsequent service call. The most important consideration is getting the paramedic to the patient.

Vince Wells, President of Local 1230, stated that having increased suppression staff fixes the third ambulance response issue. He noted that the Fire Flow Tax was established for paramedic services. He stated that going to 19 staff should be a priority for the Board.

President Danziger closed the Public Comment.

Director Jorgens asked about the status of California's SB 438 legislation on emergency medical services. Chief Winnacker replied that he did not have an update. Mr. Wells noted that SB 438 limits the local agencies ability to dispatch mutual aid.

President Danziger asked Counsel for clarification regarding direction for policy items. Counsel Holtzman responded that this is not an action item but was presented to get a sense of the Board. Director Jorgens noted that, based on the stats, using AMR delays transport by two minutes and this is a bad policy concept. Director Baitx stated his concern is getting the first responders on the road. Director Jorgens stated that it is a tradeoff and increases transport time by two minutes. Chief Winnacker stated that there would be no circumstance when MOFD would send a fourth ambulance. Director Baitx supports eliminating the third ambulance. President Danziger suggested that the District continue its discussions with ConFire. Chief Winnacker stated that the District does not have any leverage and needs to maintain a collaborative relationship with ConFire. Counsel Holtzman noted that having the third ambulance remedies the problem of increased suppression staff with two permanently staffed models. President Danziger stated that if the District staffing is at 19, there is no reason to discuss the third ambulance. Director Baitx stated that keeping the third transport takes an engine out of service as a first responder. Director Donner stated that patient assessment and stabilization is the priority. President Danziger directed the Chief to continue his discussions with ConFire and put this item on the August agenda. Chief Winnacker noted that there are two changes: an outside ambulance in the District and the billing element (Who pays the transport to AMR? MOFD or the patient?). It could result in a loss of District revenue. President Danziger stated that MOFD will continue the discussion with ConFire and consider the factors of cost and time.

4. ADJOURNMENT

At 7:29 p.m., President Danziger adjourned the Special Meeting.

For an audio recording of this and other Board meetings, please visit the MOFD District Board Meeting webpage <http://www.mofd.org/board/meetings>