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Agenda Item 14c

Annexation of land northeast of Antioch has hit delays

By Paul Burgarino Contra Costa Times San Jose Mercury News

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ANTIOCH -- Annexing a large piece of land to the city's northeast as part of a power plant project is proving more complicated than first envisioned.

Progress toward annexing the 678 acres of mainly industrial land has been slowed by revisions to some environmental documentation, delays in reaching a tax-sharing agreement with the county and higher-than-anticipated costs for engineering work.

Antioch wants to absorb the land where GenOn Energy is building a 760-megawatt natural gas-fired power plant. But city and Contra Costa County officials must first agree how to split property taxes for the plant and how needed utility and road improvements will be funded.

The complex deal also includes annexing the neighborhood off Viera Avenue that drew international attention in 2009 because of the Jaycee Dugard kidnapping case. That land was added to Antioch's plans in June to satisfy county land-planning requirements.

"There are a lot of moving parts. It's kind of like the game Jenga; if one piece gets pulled out, then the whole structure gets wobbly," said Rich Seithel, the county's senior administrator.

Because of the unforeseen complications, GenOn has extended an incentive it offered the city and county of \$1 million apiece to complete the annexation by the end of 2012.

"They indicated they would be flexible and know that we didn't backburner it. It's good for all of us to keep pushing," City Manager Jim Jakel said. The annexation delays won't affect GenOn's construction, he said.

Antioch and the county were nearing agreement on a deal when other issues arose.

The city is taking a more thorough look at environmental documents for the northeast area in response to concerns raised from West Coast Home Builders, an arm of the Seeno construction family.

Antioch's proposed environmental documents do not comply with state law, and more review of the area, including aesthetics, soils, noise and utilities, must be conducted before rezoning can be approved, Kristina Lawson, an attorney representing West Coast, told the city in April.

Victor Carniglia, a city-hired consultant, points out the area's use is not changing. Individual developers that want to build in the area would be subject to environmental review, he said.

Though Jakel says West Coast's objections came "out of the blue" because it has no financial stake or property in the area, the company's concerns forced the city to reexamine its documents amid the specter of possible legal action.

With the addition of the Viera area in the annexation package, Antioch needs to add water and sewer utilities and amend its environmental documents to specifically show that work, Carniglia said.

Antioch must make the improvements before annexation to comply with state case law, he said.

A "stronger, more complete" version of the city's rezoning document is expected to be completed in mid-November, Carniglia said. The public would have 30 days to comment on it, he said.

Another snag came when cost estimates to extend 1,425 feet of sewer line on Wilbur Avenue to the GenOn property made by a city engineering consultant underestimated the project's cost by several hundred thousand dollars.

The soil conditions and high water table in the area make installation of the pipe more complex, Carniglia said.

Because GenOn is locked into a cost cap of \$700,000 at this point, Antioch agreed last month to put up \$500,000 from its sewer fund to cover expenses.

That work, however, can't start until the environmental documents are approved, Carniglia said.

A typical property tax split, according to a master tax agreement set in the 1980s, would be about 62 percent for the county and 38 percent for Antioch. However, when a property in question is worth more than \$10 million in annual property tax, the county can choose to negotiate.

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Contra Costa Fire prepares to shutter stations in wake of parcel tax defeat

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times

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Voters torched the Contra Costa Fire District's parcel tax Tuesday, a decision that will shutter four of 28 fire stations in January, close up to another half-dozen by 2015 and scale back responses to low-priority calls.

Measure Q won a majority of the votes but fell a substantial 14 percentage points shy of the two-thirds threshold it needed to pass.

Negative public sentiment about firefighter pensions, competing tax measures and the steep two-thirds voter threshold all damped the temporary \$75-a-year parcel tax's chances at the polls.

It's the second fire agency defeat in Contra Costa in less than a year.

East Contra Costa Fire District voters turned down a parcel tax in June, which led to the closure of half of its six stations. The federal government later awarded the district a two-year grant, but the lengthy hiring and training process has delayed reopening the first of the three closed stations until mid-November.

"Twice now, voters have looked into firefighters' eyes and checked the no box," said Contra Costa Taxpayers Association Executive Director Kris Hunt. "Many people feel they are trading pensions for service, and they resent that. This is a pretty clear case of voters being faced with a concrete decision."

Measure Q contained no pension cost reductions. New legislation recently cut benefits for new hires, but current firefighters have vested rights that courts have said cannot be taken away once promised.

Firefighters have gotten the message, said union Local 1230 President Vince Wells.

"We have fought this battle twice, and twice now voters have said they aren't willing to pay to keep up the service levels," said Wells, a fire captain and paramedic. "Contra Costa has already lost nine fire stations in the past few years, and now we'll lose four more. There will be a significant change in the level of fire service in this county. But we tried."

Without the roughly \$17 million a year from the tax, Contra Costa Fire District officials must trim its budget to \$88 million, a 15 percent reduction.

No firefighters will lose their jobs when the first four stations close in January because the district has numerous unfilled positions and has been covering shifts with overtime. Future layoff numbers will depend on attrition rates for retirement and other departures.

The district hasn't yet said which stations will close, but when it looked at possible shutdowns in 2010, it identified stations in Martinez, Concord, Lafayette and Pittsburg. The Board of Supervisors is expected to make the decision next month.

The 304-square-mile district includes Antioch, Clayton, Concord, Lafayette, Martinez, Pittsburg-Bay Point, Pleasant Hill, San Pablo, Walnut Creek and unincorporated areas.

Fewer stations and firefighters will lead to greater fire damage, more severe injuries and higher numbers of deaths, Contra Costa Fire Chief Daryl Louder has repeatedly warned.

With 265 sworn personnel for 600,000 residents, the district is already staffed at half the industry standard. Throughout the county, only East Contra Costa and the Rodeo-Hercules fire agencies have lower staffing levels.

The district began in 2008 seeing unprecedented recessionary financial losses and has been burning through its reserves despite 10 percent pay cuts, a lower pay scale for new hires, numerous unfilled positions and widespread deferred equipment repair and purchases.

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Deceased incumbent elected to Los Medanos Community Health Care District board

By Eve Mitchell Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times
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ContraCostaTimes.com

Darnell Turner received the most votes to secure a seat on the Los Medanos Community Health Care District board, even though he died in September.

In Tuesday's election, of which final results are still pending, Turner received 8,906 votes. Three candidates were vying for two seats on the district, which distributes community grants to support health and wellness services targeted to low-income communities in Pittsburg, Bay Point, Clayton, Clyde and unincorporated Antioch.

Incumbent J. Vern Cromartie was re-elected to his seat with 7,799 votes, followed by former district board member Joe Rubi, who received 5,619 votes. To fill Turner's spot, the district will either appoint someone or hold a special election, which would be expensive and have to be paid for by the district. There are 36,524 registered voters in the area served by the district, and a special-election ballot would have to be mailed to every voter.

Turner, a well-known community activist in East County, was up for re-election at the time of his death in early September. It was too late to take his name off the ballot.

Willie Mims, a longtime friend of Turner's, was among those who voted for him.

"The people I spoke to told me they voted for him out of respect," Mims said. "He was a friend. I had to vote for him."

So did his mother, Birdine Turner.

"I sure miss my child," she said. But she questions why others might cast a vote for him, even if they meant to show respect.

"It makes sense for someone alive" to be elected, she said.

People vote for deceased candidates for a variety of reasons, according to Corey Cook, an associate professor and director of the Leo T. McCarthy Center for Public Service and the Common Good at the University of San Francisco.

"So there's a combination of possible explanations -- people who might recognize the name but not know that he had passed away, which is certainly more likely in a low-intensity down-ballot (such as a special district) race, than say in a statewide race, then there are also likely people who wanted to honor him by voting symbolically for him," he wrote in an email.

Other motives can include just not liking the other candidates.

In Contra Costa, there was a previous case involving a deceased candidate. That happened in the June 1994 election when Gus Kramer and Dan Hallissy were competing for the assessor's office. Hallissy died shortly before the election and his name remained on the ballot, and voters elected Kramer to the office. In that election, incumbent Assessor John Biasotti so opposed Kramer that he urged voters to cast ballots for the deceased candidate.

Marilyn Condit, president of the district's board of directors, said board members will hold a special meeting to discuss appointing someone to the post or holding a special election.

"We have to make a decision," said Condit, adding that the board is still able to carry out its business and vote on grants and other matters with the current four members.

As far as Turner getting the most votes of the three candidates, Condit said it does reflect a way of honoring and remembering him.

"It kind of warms my heart to think the community thought so highly of him to vote for him in his honor. Now we'll be making a decision on how to fill his position. We've never had this happen before."

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Tough decisions ahead for new San Ramon Valley fire board

By Jason Sweeney jsweeney@bayareanewsgroup.com San Jose Mercury News

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SAN RAMON VALLEY -- The three candidates elected to the San Ramon Valley Fire District board of directors have their work cut out for them.

The district, which provides fire, rescue and emergency services in the San Ramon and Tassajara valleys, has been running a budget deficit for the past four years. In addition, it has been mired in contract negotiations with the firefighters union for the past year and a half.

Of the five candidates running for the board, Alameda fire Captain Gordon Dakin received the most votes, pulling in 32 percent of the total. Incumbent and board Vice President Matt Stamey received 25 percent. Newcomer H. Jay Kerr received 22 percent.

Not all mail-in votes have yet been counted but Dakin, Stamey and Kerr have safe leads over the two other candidates, Gerardo Peniche, at 12 percent, and Stephen Mohun, 9 percent.

Dakin served on the board from 2000 to 2006. When he left, the district was flush with cash, but it's now relying on a dwindling reserve fund to balance the budget.

"My feelings this go-round are a little different than last go-round," Dakin said of returning to the board. He said when he was elected in 2000 he felt pride in having the chance to give back to his community. "This time I'm feeling that there is a ton of work to be done, and things need to be righted. I have a much more sobering take on what's at stake here."

For the 2012-13 fiscal year, the district is projecting total revenues of \$56.4 million, mostly from property taxes. Its largest expense is salaries and benefits for its 190 personnel. Pensions alone account for 25 percent of the general fund budget.

The district has been seeking concessions from the union on pay and benefits, with no deal reached.

Dakin and losing candidates Peniche and Mohun were all backed by the firefighters union. Dakin said that although the union supported his candidacy, he is first beholden to the taxpayers.

"My goal is to get the district fiscally sound," he said. "My focus is going to be cutting expenses, and some of those cuts will have a direct affect on the union membership."

He said he does not favor asking voters for a parcel tax to increase revenue. "The funding coming from this community should be more than adequate to provide the very best services of any emergency response agency," he said.

Stamey, a CEO of an agricultural-related business, and Kerr, a veterinarian, are both fiscal conservatives who were opposed by the union. They both said balancing the budget are their priorities.

"It's just a question of how we get there," Kerr said, adding that he is looking forward to getting the inside scoop on the district's finances now that he has been elected.

Stamey said one of the first things the board must do is tackle the labor agreement. "We need a contract that allows for a larger contribution from the employees for their retirement costs," he said.

"We have one of the most highly rated fire districts in the state of California," Stamey said. "The agency is doing a great job. If we could figure out all the financial issues, things would be terrific."

The new board will be seated at its first meeting Dec. 19. One of its first responsibilities will be replacing outgoing Chief Richard Price, who retired last year and is serving as acting chief for \$1 a month.

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Fire station 422 could stay open

By Rebecca Unger The Desert Trail | Posted: Wednesday, November 14, 2012 2:17 pm

TWENTYNINE PALMS — The Twentynine Palms fire department's transition from a local agency function to a county function is moving ahead, according to San Bernardino County Fire District Chief Mark Hartwig.

The county chief gave a presentation that laid out a two-station scenario at the city council public meeting on Tuesday night, Nov. 13.

In the scenario fire station 421 on Adobe Road will be staffed by one full-time professional fire captain, one limited term firefighter/paramedic and one limited term firefighter. Station 422 on Lear Avenue in the unincorporated Desert Heights area will remain open as a paid on-call station.

"With the divestiture, the Lear station would be a county responsibility, it would not be a city responsibility," Hartwig explained. "It does not provide the revenue for a fully-staffed station."

Hartwig stated that the application to transfer fire service from the Twentynine Palms Water District to the county fire district would not be acceptable to the Local Agency Formation Commission if there is any red ink, such as proposing the use of fund balance to pay for fire services.

"This scenario balances the books," Hartwig told the council and assembled citizens. "Once the service is annexed to the county district there will be more freedom to move funds around from the South Desert Region and administration."

Limited-term personnel are assigned to a station for one-year stints for up to three years, up to four years if they take paramedic training. They are paid \$10/hour and receive little or no benefits.

The county's paid on-call program "is essentially volunteer," Hartwig said, for active people with "strong backs" who will get a pager, gear and a small hourly rate.

Using the current special tax funding of \$1.2 million annually, Hartwig said the staffing costs would come in around \$800,000.

He also noted that Twentynine Palms' per-parcel fee with no built-in consumer price index increase as the sole funding for fire protection is the only such mechanism in the county. Most areas also enact assessment districts.

"For every district in the county, the cost to provide fire services far exceeds revenues," Hartwig added.

After Hartwig's presentation, there were still recriminations being dished out by the public, Twentynine Palms fire chief Jim Thompson and members of the council.

Resident Steve Urban criticized the council's "pathological desires" to put a \$300,000 splash park on a project wish list over funding the fire department.

City business owner C.J. Horne said a life-saving fire department was more important than paving bike paths.

Thompson lambasted Twentynine Palms for being the only incorporated city not allotting any of its 26 percent general levy taxes to fire service.

When it was the city's turn, Councilman Jay Corbin cross-examined Thompson over his 20 years in the department, nine years as chief, and his presiding over successive tax measures to fund the department.

"When did you come to the realization that the funding mechanism for the fire department was not sustainable?"

Corbin posed. "You realized in 2005 that there would be a problem in 2009, and when you met with councilmembers three or four years ago, you identified a ladder truck as a highest priority."

The city took delivery of a \$250,000 fire truck with a 75-foot ladder in March of 2011. The fire department said it was needed with the advent of several multi-storied hotels in 2009. Corbin noted that the hotels are sprinklered.

Councilman Jim Harris added that Thompson "signed off" on the hotel plans.

The ladder truck purchase was recommended by Councilman Jim Harris and then-Councilman Steve Spear as part of their work on a joint task force with the water district.

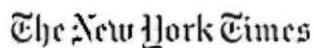
Mayor Pro Tem Joel Klink asked if the department's "sky high" wages and benefits caused the funding problem.

Thompson admitted to a failure to foresee the need for an increase in the special tax, but strongly defended his personnel as lower paid than county firefighters and working 72-hour shifts compared to 56-hour county shifts.

"Don't try to put it on firefighters," he shot back at Klink.

"The water district took action to hand fire off to someone else," Corbin concluded. "I think we're very lucky to have the county step forward with a way to do it."

In 2007, the city and the district formed a Joint Agency Fire Department Committee to evaluate the transfer of fire services to the city. In a staff report from then-city manager Michael Tree to the city council of June 9, 2009, it was noted that the water district favored either a full transfer to the city, or the retention of the fire function at the district. Legal counsel found the transfer of the special tax contractually "problematic" and the fire function remained with the water district.



November 13, 2012

The Problem Is Clear: The Water Is Filthy

By PATRICIA LEIGH BROWN

SEVILLE, Calif. — Like most children, the students at Stone Corral Elementary School here rejoice when the bell rings for recess and delight in christening a classroom pet.

But while growing up in this impoverished agricultural community of numbered roads and lush citrus orchards, young people have learned a harsh life lesson: “No tomes el agua!” — “Don’t drink the water!”

Seville, with a population of about 300, is one of dozens of predominantly Latino unincorporated communities in the Central Valley plagued for decades by contaminated drinking water. It is the grim result of more than half a century in which chemical fertilizers, animal wastes, pesticides and other substances have infiltrated aquifers, seeping into the groundwater and eventually into the tap. An estimated 20 percent of small public water systems in Tulare County are unable to meet safe nitrate levels, according to a United Nations representative.

In farmworker communities like Seville, a place of rusty rural mailboxes and backyard roosters where the average yearly income is \$14,000, residents like Rebecca Quintana pay double for water: for the tap water they use to shower and wash clothes, and for the five-gallon bottles they must buy weekly for drinking, cooking and brushing their teeth.

It is a life teeming with worry: about children accidentally sipping contaminated water while cooling off with a garden hose, about not having enough clean water for an elderly parent’s medications, about finding a rock while cleaning the feeding tube of a severely disabled daughter, as Lorie Nieto did. She vowed never to use tap water again.

Chris Kemper, the school’s principal, budgets \$100 to \$500 a month for bottled water. He recalled his astonishment, upon his arrival four years ago, at encountering the “ghost” drinking fountains, shut off to protect students from “weird foggyish water,” as one sixth grader, Jacob Cabrera, put it. Mr. Kemper said he associated such conditions with third world countries. “I always picture it as a laptop a month for the school,” he said of the added cost of water.

Here in Tulare County, one of the country's leading dairy producers, where animal waste lagoons penetrate the air and soil, most residents rely on groundwater as the source for drinking water. A study by the University of California, Davis, this year estimated that 254,000 people in the Tulare Basin and Salinas Valley, prime agricultural regions with about 2.6 million residents, were at risk for nitrate contamination of their drinking water. Nitrates have been linked to thyroid disease and make infants susceptible to "blue baby syndrome," a potentially fatal condition that interferes with the blood's capacity to carry oxygen.

Communities like Seville, where corroded piping runs through a murky irrigation ditch and into a solitary well, are particularly vulnerable to nitrate contamination, lacking financial resources for backup systems. Fertilizer and other chemicals applied to cropland decades ago will continue to affect groundwater for years, according to the Davis study.

"You can't smell it," Mrs. Quintana said of the dangers of the tap. "You can't see it. It looks like plain beautiful water."

Situated off the state's psychic map, lacking political clout and even mayors, places like Seville and Tooleville to the south have long been excluded from regional land use and investment decisions, said Phoebe S. Seaton, the director of a community initiative for California Rural Legal Assistance. Residents rely on county governments and tiny resident-run public utility districts. The result of this jurisdictional patchwork is a fragmented water delivery system and frequently deteriorating infrastructure.

Many such communities started as farm labor camps without infrastructure, said John A. Capitman, a professor at California State University, Fresno, and the executive director of the Central Valley Health Policy Institute. Today, one in five residents in the Central Valley live below the federal poverty line. Many spend up to 10 percent of their income on water. "The laborers and residents of this region have borne a lot of the social costs of food production," Professor Capitman said.

Bertha Diaz, a farmworker and single mother of four in East Orosi, rises at 4 in the morning to pick grapefruit and other crops. Her chief concern, she said, was how she would afford bottled water.

She comes home to an additional chore — filling five-gallon jugs at the Watermill Express, a self-serve drinking water station in nearby Orosi with a windmill roof. When she began receiving cautionary notices from the local water district, she formed a neighborhood committee and also joined AGUA, the Spanish-language acronym for the Association of People United for Water, a network of residents working with the nonprofit Community Water Center.

Last month, Gov. Jerry Brown signed the Human Right to Water bill, which directs state agencies to make clean water a financing priority. In the past, communities like Seville trying to make improvements got caught in a noose of bureaucratic technicalities that resulted in years of delays.

"Clean water ought to be a right," said Bill Chiat, a program manager with the California State Association of Counties who educates government officials on water issues. "The question is, how are you going to pay for it?"

The answer is sometimes a twisted tale: In Lanare, in Fresno County, the local community services district received \$1.3 million in federal money to construct a treatment plant for arsenic-tainted water. But when the system began operating, the cost of water skyrocketed — a result of lowball estimates by construction engineers, as well as the siphoning of treated water to nearby farms. "Before, it was dirty water," said Isabel Solorio, a part-time housecleaner. "But at least it wasn't expensive dirty water." The plant now sits unused.

But there is a growing recognition by state and local officials that rural communities need regional solutions. One option is consolidation, in which small systems band together to create a larger system with a bigger customer base. Another might be partnering with Alta Irrigation District, which has delivered surface water for agriculture from the Kings River for 130 years. Conserved water in upstream reservoirs could also be a source for Seville and elsewhere. "It would require a new governance structure," said Chris Kapheim, the irrigation district's general manager. "But it would give these areas a long-term fix."

The state is allocating \$4 million for interim solutions like filters under sinks that can remove arsenic and nitrates.

Even temporary solutions cannot come quickly enough for residents like Eunice Martinez, 47, who lives in Tooleville, where water has been contaminated with arsenic and bacteria.

Mobile homes rented by farmworkers sit temptingly near the Friant-Kern Canal, a 152-mile aqueduct that supplies water for one million acres of farmland.

Long before they knew there was a health problem, Ms. Martinez and her 72-year-old mother, Margaret, had stopped drinking the water. "Honestly, it was the taste," she said. "It just wasn't right."

Ms. Martinez sometimes visits family in a nearby town where the water is clean and clear, just to freshen up. "I turn on the tap and it's, 'Wow, I'm amazed,'" she said. "It's something so simple in life. And it's gone."

Moraga-Orinda Fire District unveils draft plan to reduce pension debt

By Jennifer Modenessi Contra Costa Times San Jose Mercury News

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ContraCostaTimes.com

MORAGA -- » The first draft of an ambitious plan to reduce \$60.4 million in Moraga-Orinda Fire District pension debt by slashing capital spending, diverting residents' "fire flow" tax payments and taking other austerity measures was unveiled this week.

According to the draft long-range financial plan released this week, the 15-year-old district hopes by fiscal year 2027-28 to eliminate \$24 million in employee pension debt administered by the Contra Costa County Employment Retirement Association; \$24.7 million in pension obligation bonds borrowed to pay a portion of retirement costs; and \$11.7 million in retiree health care and other benefits.

To do that, the district is relying on several significant assumptions, outlined by Fire Chief Randy Bradley this week. They include 4 percent annual growth in Moraga and Orinda property tax revenues, and positive returns on pension plan investment performance.

Last year, assessed property values in Moraga and Orinda grew by 0.85 and 1.04 percent, respectively.

The district is using the employee retirement association's assumption that the fund can earn a 7.75 percent return on investments annually, even though last year's total return was 2.7 percent

Some of the plan also hinges on the outcome of ongoing labor negotiations; Bradley said the district does not want to reduce salaries, but the plan assumes 1 to 2 percent permanent salary increases and holding medical and dental costs at current rates.

The district has been negotiating contracts for two years with firefighters who continue to receive salary and health contributions at 2010 levels.

"I do believe this plan reflects where the district is today," Bradley said. "It's really a good draft plan to begin the discussion on how we're going to address our long-term unfunded liabilities and long-term sustainability for the district while maintaining a quality workforce."

Board President Fred Weil stressed the financial blueprint is still in draft form and that assumptions should be examined. "This is a plan that we control in a sense, and don't control in a sense," he said, stressing it will take discipline and creativity to reach the goal.

Earlier, Weil formally announced the district has placed labor negotiations on hold until early 2013. The idea is to let administrators evaluate recent pension reform in the wake of new state law projected to save the state billions of dollars in retirement costs. The district says the "time out" will hold salaries and health care at their current rates until a negotiated agreement is reached -- or until a contract is imposed.

The delay also means the board will vote on the contracts with five members; trustees-elect Steve Anderson and Alex Evans are scheduled to be sworn in Dec. 13, along with Weil, whose seat went uncontested.

Anderson and Evans are replacing former directors Richard Olsen and Brook Mancinelli, who resigned in February.

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Monday, November 26, 2012

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Ex-City Manager to Lead New Library Fundraising Drive

Former El Cerrito Manager Gary Pokorny has agreed to head up fundraising efforts to build a new El Cerrito Library. Porkony was also City Manager of Walnut Creek when it succeeded in building a new \$40 million library.

By [Charles Burress](#) | [Email the author](#) | 12:27 am

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Related Topics: [El Cerrito Library](#), [El Cerrito New Library Campaign Committee](#), [Gary Pokorny](#), and [New Library Campaign](#)



El Cerrito's former City Manager, [Gary Porkony](#), will supervise fundraising for the campaign to build a new [El Cerrito Library](#), according to an email Sunday from the the grassroots committee behind the campaign.

"I have agreed to head up the fundraising efforts for our new group," Porkony said in comments quoted in the fall 2012 newsletter from the New Library Campaign. The newsletter was delivered to email subscribers Sunday.

The ad hoc campaign by a group of residents to rebuild the aging, cramped El Cerrito Library was [launched in April](#) and held two [public meetings at the library in August](#) to gather ideas on how to build support and raise funds.

Pokorny, who was El Cerrito's City Manager from 1989 to 2000 and has lived in El Cerrito for more than 23 years, said immediate fundraising would focus on the outreach effort and later shift to supporting a bond measure or other main funding source that the group and city choose to pursue. The city owns the library, while the staffing and materials are provided by the Contra Costa County Library system.

Pokorny's comments were contained in an interview quoted partially in the newsletter and posted in full [on the New Library Campaign website](#).

"We plan to partner with the [Friends of the El Cerrito Library](#) in their important work to make the library an exciting and vital lifelong learning center for the entire community," Pokorny said.

Those who would like more information or would like to donate can contact the the New Library Campaign through its [website](#)

He said the need for a new library is underscored by the contrast with what other nearby communities have accomplished.

"Today, when compared to the several new libraries in our Contra Cost County system (Hercules, Orinda, Lafayette, Clayton, Walnut Creek) and new and refurbished libraries in Albany and Berkeley, it is clear that our 60 year-old library is completely worn out and technologically obsolete as well as much too small for the many demands that our current population is putting on the building," he said.

The current library opened in 1949 and was expanded in 1960. A [2006 "needs assessment" report](#) by a San Francisco-based library consulting firm, [Page + Morris](#), found that the current 6,500-square-foot library is only a third as large as it should be.

At the library campaign's [first public meeting on Aug. 2](#), Assistant City Manager Karen Pinkos said a 2007 estimate for a 20,000-square-foot library complete with library equipment and supplies was between \$18 million and \$20 million.

Walnut Creek, Lafayette, Martinez and Clayton fire stations to close

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times

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ContraCostaTimes.com

Four fire stations in Walnut Creek, Clayton, Martinez and Lafayette will close in early January under a cost-cutting plan set to go before Contra Costa County supervisors on Tuesday.

The closure list comes a month after voters in the Contra Costa Fire District, the county's largest, rejected Measure Q, a temporary, seven-year parcel tax that would have preserved the service.

"There are no good answers when you are talking about closing fire stations," said Fire Chief Daryl Louder. "But we have run out of options. Our funding reserves have been exhausted."

The chief's list drew an immediate reaction from Lafayette City Manager Steve Falk, who urged concerned residents to make themselves heard on Tuesday. Lafayette is one of nine cities in the 600,000-resident district.

"While the city may appear to be over-stationed, Lafayette's narrow and winding public and private roads combined with few transportation corridors and large lot sizes lengthen response times, and thus necessitate more stations per capita," wrote Falk wrote in an email blast on Friday.

Louder is recommending county supervisors shutter about a third of the district's 28 fire stations, which will shave \$3 million a year from its \$102.4 million annual budget. Stations earmarked for closure are:

- No. 4 on Hawthorne Drive in Walnut Creek, which leaves the city with three stations.
- No. 11 on Center Avenue in Clayton, its only fire station.
- No. 12 on Shell Avenue in Martinez, which reduces the city's stations to two.
- No. 16 on Los Arabis Avenue in Lafayette, also cutting the number of fire stations to two.

The stations were chosen based on call volume along with proximity to other stations, risks such as refineries, and transportation corridors, Louder said.

Fewer firefighters means longer response times and greater chances that blazes will spread into neighboring homes, businesses or open spaces, the chief has repeatedly warned.

To blunt the impacts, the chief is looking at relying more heavily on neighboring fire districts, and establishing a beefier reserve and volunteer force.

Because more than 85 percent of the district's 41,500 calls a year involve medical issues, Louder said he will also consider hiring less expensive supplemental non-firefighter paramedics or emergency medical technicians.

Deploying medical-only personnel may make financial sense but the costs shouldn't come out of the fire district budget, countered Local 1230 firefighter union President Vince Wells.

Rather than form such a service within the fire district, the county should look to its ambulance service contract with American Medical Response, Wells said.

"We are an all-hazards fire district," Wells said. "Emergency medical incidents are an added value for the residents. But if we have to choose, we have to choose fire protection. EMS is the county's responsibility."

The fire district has been sinking into financial quicksand since 2008, when the recession gutted property values and its property tax receipts.

At the same time, the market downturn hurt public pension investments and drove up the district's retirement system contribution rates. The economic blows coupled with generous wages and benefits proved too much for the district to withstand.

Contact Lisa Vorderbrueggen at 925-945-4773, lvorderbrueggen@bayareanewsgroup.com, politicswithlisav.blogspot.com or Twitter.com/lvorderbrueggen.

if you go

The Contra Costa Board of Supervisors will meet as the Contra Costa Fire Protection District governing board at 1:30 p.m. in its first floor chambers Tuesday at 651 Pine St. in Martinez. The meeting is open to the public and the board will take public comments.

Deal for Discovery Bay community center hits delays

By Paul Burgarino Contra Costa Times San Jose Mercury News

Posted:

Monday, December 3, 2012
ContraCostaTimes.com

DISCOVERY BAY -- A property transaction that would provide space for a long-awaited community center may take longer than anticipated -- if it happens at all.

Discovery Bay's Community Services District is asking property owner Pilati Farms to extend escrow for the purchase of a 10.24-acre site on the northeast corner of Discovery Bay Boulevard and Willow Lake Road.

The property owner has until 5 p.m. Wednesday to decide whether it will grant a 60-day escrow extension, or the deal is dead, said Rick Howard, the district's general manager.

Discovery Bay has had some "last-minute hiccups" with its proposal to split lot lines on the property with the Delta Community Presbyterian Church, Howard said. A survey map outlining how the property would be divvied up must be accepted before completion of a deal.

The district wants about 7.4 acres of the property, which includes the Discovery Bay Athletic Club building where a community center could be located. But as it turns out, a small piece of the parcel where the district had initially proposed to remove a lot line so it could split the property elsewhere, is not identified by the county.

Now, the district is exploring other options for dividing the property.

Board directors indicated at a meeting last week they don't want to spend extra money and time to go through the process of splitting the property into more than two parcels. They also do not want to manipulate the lot line so there is no property line separation between the future community center parcel and the adjacent district water treatment facility property.

"We must maintain the integrity of that industrial parcel. We have to keep the water separate," director Mark Simon said.

Before escrow can close, the plans would need to be approved by the county and the Hofmann Co. One of the development conditions put on Hofmann in 1991 was that it set aside property for the community center and cover half of the total project cost.

The combined, all-cash price for the deal is \$1.2 million. The district's portion would be about \$850,000.

Discovery Bay has talked about building a community center for more than 20 years -- though progress has stopped each time.

Contact Paul Burgarino at 925-779-7164. Follow him at Twitter.com/paulburgarino.

TUESDAY | DECEMBER 4, 2012

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Swearing in, water focal points of upcoming meeting

AdChoices

By Martinez News-Gazette

Staff Reporter

Monday December 03, 2012

[Local News](#)

MARTINEZ, Calif. – Prior to a ceremonial swearing-in of new and re-elected City officials planned for the Council meeting Wednesday evening, outgoing member Janet Kennedy and her current colleagues will vote one last time on consent calendar items.

On the routine matter list is a motion adopting an ordinance that will outlaw aggressive panhandling, a resolution signing off on the completed renovations to the Rankin Aquatic Center and a resolution "reaffirming the City Council intent to pursue annexations within the City's Sphere of Influence (SOI) in the unincorporated Alhambra Valley area."

Included in the city resolutions for this matter is a legal agreement between the City and James Busby/Security Owners Corporation stipulating the City will provide water to Busby's Alhambra Valley property.

According to City Engineer Tim Tucker, the city cannot extend water service beyond its jurisdictional boundary unless the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) approves. LAFCO can only approve such service if there is either an existing or impending threat to health or safety to the public, or if LAFCO anticipates the City will annex the property receiving the water service.

"Should LAFCO not be able to make one of the findings above, current developments with County approvals and future development and single parcel development cannot proceed. In some cases, developers have already received County approval and constructed or paid for significant improvements for sewer and water system improvements. These investments could be lost should LAFCO not be able make the required findings," Tucker tells the Council in a report dated Nov. 29. The current developments he mentions includes 30 lots – already greenlit for development by the county – owned by the Busby family at the intersection of Alhambra Valley and Reliez Valley Roads.

"City and LAFCO staff recommends the Council reaffirm their intention to pursue annexations within the Alhambra Valley as opportunities arise," Tucker writes. "Council has take previous action such as adopting design guidelines, pre-zoning and General Plan amendments to set the stage for future annexations in the valley. The attached resolution reaffirms the Council's intent and sets a schedule to trigger staff to review opportunities on a regular basis. The resolution also directs staff to proactively communicate with residents of Alhambra Valley, both within and outside the City limits, regarding projects and programs that benefit the area."

The meeting starts at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers at City Hall.


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Current Forecast

Tue, 04 Dec 2012 2:52 pm PST



Sunrise 7:07 am

Sunset 4:47 pm

Wind: 6 mph

Humidity: 75 %

Visibility: 10 mi

Barometer: 30.19 in

RISING



60°F / 49°F

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Contra Costa fire station closure vote postponed, but shutdowns look inevitable

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times
Posted:

Wednesday, December 5, 2012
ContraCostaTimes.com

MARTINEZ -- Contra Costa supervisors put off for another week a highly unpopular decision to shutter four fire stations, a move they say they will be forced to take after voters Nov. 6 rejected the temporary parcel tax that would have rescued the services.

With no more reserves, Chief Daryl Louder proposes closing one station each in Lafayette, Martinez, Walnut Creek and Clayton and shaving \$3 million from his \$100 million budget. He said he chose these four stations based on call volume and a half-dozen other factors. The fire district has 28 facilities.

County supervisors are likely to go along with the chief's suggestions but asked for more hard data to back up their final decision.

"We told the voters that if this measure doesn't pass, we cannot keep all the stations open," said board Chairwoman Mary Nejedly Piepho, of Discovery Bay, who lost her community's fire station to budget woes last year. "The voters sent us back a message, 'Live within your means.' That means we have to close stations."

Only Supervisor Candace Andersen, of Danville, pushed back, and asked the chief to explain next week why the district cannot reduce its per-engine staffing minimum from three firefighters to two, and perhaps keep one or more of the stations open.

"From a lay person's perspective, it sounds like it makes a lot of sense," Andersen said. "I would like to know why this is either impossible or viable."

Firefighters vehemently oppose the reduction, saying it jeopardizes their safety and effectiveness. The national industry standard is four firefighters per engine.

There was no shortage of testimony during a packed 3½-hour hearing Tuesday. In the audience were more than 50 firefighters, along with numerous worried residents and elected officials from cities targeted for station closures.

"I'm not here to demand that any station stay open, but to express concern about the health, safety and property of the residents of Martinez," Mayor Rob Schroder said. "I am glad to hear the decision won't be made today but that there will be some thought put into it."

Clayton Mayor Howard Geller was more direct: "Clayton residents are very unhappy with this plan. You would be leaving Clayton with no fire station within its boundaries, the only city in the county without a fire station. It will be devastating."

Lafayette Councilmen Don Tatzin and Brandt Andersson echoed their colleagues' concerns about the long-term health of the district and urged the board to immediately embark on a thorough analysis of how to create a sustainable fire service model.

The city leaders and residents chiefly expressed angst over the most serious impact of the service cutbacks: Slower response times. Fires will have more time to spread, and people suffering a heart attack will have to wait longer for lifesaving help.

The biggest hit would come in Lafayette, where the district estimates units that used to arrive on scene within 6 minutes 58 percent of the time will show up at that rate only 8 percent of the time. Walnut Creek's 99 percent response rate will slide to 62 percent; in Clayton, 83 to 42 percent; and Martinez, 71 to 49 percent. Pittsburg's station No. 87, which is on the chopping block next year, would see its rate slide from 66 to 44 percent.

A Clayton woman tearfully described how firefighters from Clayton Station No. 11, earmarked for closure, saved her life during a medical emergency and again responded when her house caught on fire.

Measure Q, the fire parcel tax, fell substantially short of the required two-thirds voter approval on Nov. 6.

The most visible Measure Q critic and author of the opposition arguments on the ballot defended her organization's role in its defeat and urged the county to fix rather than patch the problem.

"The taxpayers association's objective was always to ensure the long-term financial viability of the district, and that's why I am here," Contra Costa Taxpayers Association Executive Director Kris Hunt told the supervisors.

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FIRE STATION SHUTDOWNS

The following Contra Costa Fire District stations are earmarked for closure in mid-January:

- No. 4, 700 Hawthorne Drive, Walnut Creek
- No. 11, 6500 Center Ave., Clayton
- No. 12, 1240 Shell Ave., Martinez
- No. 16, 4007 Los Arabis Ave., Lafayette

Source: Contra Costa Fire District