

## Tax failure bodes ill for San Pablo's Doctors Medical Center

Carolyn Jones

Updated 8:43 am, Thursday, May 8, 2014

June 11, 2014  
Agenda Item 13c

Fear, sadness and anxiety were among the emotions experienced by West Contra Costa residents Wednesday as they faced the imminent closure of the only public hospital between Berkeley and Vallejo.

"We have kids. We need a hospital here," said Timothy Taylor, 47, a maintenance worker who lives in Richmond. "In all honesty, I don't know how this is going to work. Yeah, it's worrying."

Doctors Medical Center, a 189-bed facility that's served West Contra Costa families since the 1950s, is almost certain to close in July after a \$20 million, last-ditch parcel tax failed Tuesday night. The tax would have helped the hospital pay off its \$18 million deficit and achieve some financial stability, as it continues to serve about 80,000 uninsured and underinsured patients annually.

The only other hospital in the region is Kaiser Permanente in Richmond, which has a 15-bed emergency room - far too small to accommodate the 250,000 residents of El Cerrito, Richmond, San Pablo, El Sobrante, Pinole, Hercules, Rodeo and Crockett.

Victims of car crashes, broken bones, gunshots, heart attacks, strokes and other emergencies - including illnesses related to the several oil refineries in the area - would face long waits at Kaiser, or a 17-mile drive to the county hospital in Martinez.

The West Contra Costa Healthcare District board, which oversees the hospital, will likely vote in a week or so to close the facility, and the hospital would close for good in July, said board chair Eric Zell.

### 'Life and death'

"I'm really sad for this community," Zell said Wednesday. "At the end of the day, the people who will suffer the most - seniors, the disabled - are the people who need health care the most. For a lot of people, this will mean life and death."

The district, created by voters in the 1950s, would stay intact for at least 15 years to collect tax money and pay off the hospital's debts, he said.

To make payroll through July, the hospital will rely on a \$4.6 million payment from the Lytton Band of Pomo Indians, who run nearby Casino San Pablo and plan to lease the hospital's back parking lot.

The hospital began running into financial trouble in the 1990s as increasing numbers of its patients relied on Medi-Cal and Medicare, or had no insurance at all. Government insurance plans typically reimburse hospitals at a significantly lower rate than the actual cost of the service, Zell said.

### Slim takeover chance

Supervisor John Gioia, who represents western Contra Costa County, said he plans to ask the county for an analysis of the hospital's finances to determine whether a takeover is possible. Meanwhile, a county health clinic in San Pablo and Kaiser's Richmond facility are also planning to expand some services to make up for the loss of Doctors, he said.

"I'm sad not just for people who live in west county, but because this is such a statement about the dysfunctional state of health care in our country generally," Gioia said.

The chances of the county taking over Doctors are slim at best, he said. The county has its own financial woes, and it has already loaned Doctors several million dollars over the past few years.

The hospital's closure would mean close to 1,000 nurses, doctors, cafeteria workers, janitors and others will lose their jobs.

Seung Choo, an intensive-care nurse at Doctors, said she's not worried about finding another job, but she does worry about her patients.

"We see a lot of people who are 'train wrecks' - they have a lot of health problems, and they need the most help," she said. "It's really a disservice not to provide them with the help they need. I think it should be a moral mandate."

Sandy Alaniz, 29, of San Pablo said the drive to the county hospital in Martinez could take an hour during the afternoon rush hour.

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## Barnidge: Expected closure of Doctors Medical Center is a catastrophe in the making

By Tom Barnidge Contra Costa Times Columnist Contra Costa Times

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ContraCostaTimes.com

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In just a few seconds, Contra Costa's emergency medical services director, Pat Frost, explained this week what the expected closure of Doctors Medical Center San Pablo will mean to West County. She said the hospital handles 62 percent of the region's EMS ambulance traffic, 120 emergency room visits per day and 550 cardiac cases per year.

"These patients are going to have to be cared for in different ways," she said, in a moment of chilling understatement.

You could sense the concern -- in some cases, the anger -- among the more than 200 people who attended the Board of Supervisors meeting Tuesday where a report on the likely fate of the facility was unhappily dissected.

The bottom line, the only line that matters, is that Doctors Medical Center is operating at an \$18 million annual deficit, even after parcel tax bailouts in 2004 and 2011, infusions of state funds, cost-cutting and considerable hand-wringing.

When a last, desperate life raft -- a mail-in parcel tax that would have generated \$20 million in yearly revenues -- failed to get two-thirds support last week, it signaled the beginning of the end. The mourners in the audience seemed to know that but they came looking for signs of life, anyway.

Couldn't the county float DMC the money it needed?

From where, Supervisor John Gioia asked: "Do you take it from our foster care system? Do you take it from law enforcement?"

Couldn't the county absorb DMC into its system? Hardly, said Health Services Director Dr. William Walker, whose operation confronts a \$20 million shortfall of its own.

The sad fact is no one's rushing to solve this problem. Nor is any one entity to blame. The cloud cast over Doctors Medical is largely a product of a deeply flawed health care system.

Eighty percent of DMC's patients -- many of them seniors or indigents -- rely on Medi-Cal or Medicare coverage, which pays far less than the true cost of treatment. Another 10 percent of patients are uninsured. "When you're losing money on 90 percent of your patients," said Gioia, "you're never going to make money on the 10 percent."

West County Healthcare Director Eric Zell lamented a sad reality: "The fact that we can't figure out as a society how to provide services to this segment of the community when there's so much money in the health care system is pretty tragic."

The Affordable Care Act, designed to address this problem, actually makes things worse, Zell said. Medicare cuts that help fund ACA have resulted in lower reimbursement rates, costing DMC about \$2.5 million a year.

The center also suffers from being a rare stand-alone hospital, lacking the bargaining power of a chain in negotiations with commercial insurers and the economies of scale that come with a larger client base.

"This hospital used to serve the entire economic strata of West County, from the richest to the poorest," Zell said. "The development of the Kaiser system pulled many employed residents away and left our hospital for those who had no other options."

No decision on closure is expected until May 28. Meanwhile, Zell and Gioia dare to dream that large, profitable operations -- John Muir Health, Sutter Health, Kaiser, corporate donors or a combination thereof -- might partner with DMC to avoid a catastrophe in the making. It hardly seems an unreasonable request.

Allowing the hospital to fail won't make the needs it served go away.

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

## Balloting ends in Rodeo-Hercules fire district as taxpayer group mulls challenge if assessment passes

By Tom Lochner Contra Costa Times San Jose Mercury News

Posted: Thu May 15 21:14:25 MDT 2014

ContraCostaTimes.com

HERCULES -- A ballot measure in the Rodeo-Hercules Fire Protection District could trigger a challenge to benefit assessments as a tool to raise revenue for fire districts.

A public hearing before the Rodeo-Hercules board Wednesday night marked the end of the voting period for the measure, which would impose an assessment of \$82 a year on single-family houses and \$46.93 for condos and apartments. Stores would pay \$60.30 per one-fifth acre while industrial properties would pay varying rates, based on fire risk and replacement cost of structures. The results won't be known until June 11.

The measure, which is supposed to raise almost \$1 million a year for enhanced fire protection and emergency response, requires majority approval by property owners, with ballots weighted according to property type and, for nonresidential properties, size and other factors.

Alex Aliferis, executive director of the Contra Costa Taxpayers Association, warns that fire districts, faced with the difficulty of passing special parcel taxes requiring two-thirds voter majorities, will increasingly look to benefit assessments as alternative funding mechanisms.

"East Contra Costa can't seem to pass a parcel tax," Aliferis said, referring to the unsuccessful June 2012, \$197-a-year Measure S in the East Contra Costa Fire district, "so they're studying a benefit assessment. What's next? ConFire?"

A report on the Contra Costa County Fire District, popularly known as ConFire, by consultant Fitch and Associates envisions another revenue measure within two or three years. In November 2012, Measure Q, a \$75-a-year ConFire parcel tax measure, went down to defeat.

The results of Rodeo-Hercules' measure will be unveiled at a public hearing June 11, said John Bliss, vice president of SCI Consulting Group of Fairfield, which ran the election. The ballots will be tabulated by Carol Keane & Associates, Certified Public Accountants, of Walnut Creek.

Aliferis referred to an April 2 letter from the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association to the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District opposing a proposed "fire suppression assessment" in that district. The organization holds that fire suppression is ineligible for benefit assessment financing because it is a general, communitywide benefit, not a special benefit accruing to individual parcels.

Another letter from the Jarvis association, this one to Aliferis, dated Wednesday, makes a similar point about Rodeo-Hercules' measure.

"We wrote and sponsored Proposition 218, which added article XIII D to the California Constitution in 1996, in part for the purpose of restricting the use of assessments," both letters note.

Rodeo-Hercules district counsel Richard Pio Roda opined that the measure is in compliance with the law, citing a report from SCI, which explains that it complies because the services to be funded are clearly defined and will be provided directly to all benefited property in the district. Moreover, the report argues, the benefit will be over and beyond general benefits conferred on real property in the district.

Aliferis, asked whether his organization would challenge Rodeo-Hercules' benefit assessment if it

passes, said, "No comment."

# JESSE DWIGHT MEADOWS

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Jesse Dwight Meadows  
Dec. 4, 1942-May 13, 2014  
Resident of Oakley

Jesse Dwight Meadows passed away on May 13, 2014 after a valiant battle with cancer. Dwight was born on Dec. 4, 1942 in Berryville, Arkansas to Jesse Meadows and Alma Swofford. He moved to California as a young child and attended Tracy schools. After college, he moved to San Jose, where he met his wife Carla, and was married in 1967.

Dwight enjoyed politics. He spent 20 years as a member of the Ironhouse Sanitary Board. He was presently serving on the Contra Costa Resource Conservation Board and was Chairman of the Board of LAFCO, having spent 5 terms on the board. He managed several vineyards in East County and was proud of the grapes he grew. His four grandchildren were the joy in Dwight's life. They will always remember time spent at Lake Tahoe with Papa.

Dwight is survived by his wife Carla, son Aaron Meadows (Amy), daughter Stacia Ruffolo (Craig), grandchildren, Isabella and Anthony Meadows, Jake and Nicole Ruffolo and father Jesse.

Family and friends are invited to a Celebration of Life on Friday May 23 at 11:00 AM at Club Los Meganos, Trilogy at the Vineyards, 1700 Trilogy Parkway, Brentwood, California. Donations may be made to the , PO Box 22718, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73123-1718



### Today in History

A look at the lives and legacies of celebrities who died on this day.

Published in Contra Costa Times on May 20, 2014

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## Jesse Dwight Meadows remembered as longtime Oakley community leader

By Rowena Coetsee *Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times*

Posted: Tue May 20 17:10:47 MDT 2014

ContraCostaTimes.com

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OAKLEY -- One of this city's civic leaders is being remembered for his love of politics and longtime commitment to public service.

Jesse Dwight Meadows, 71, died at his home May 13 after a battle with cancer.

The Arkansas native had made a name for himself in Oakley since moving with his wife to the then-unincorporated town in 1972.

Meadows worked with his father-in-law at a tire shop and feed supply store on Main Street, and soon began buying and selling undeveloped properties to developers as well.

Some of the parcels he kept had vineyards, which became as much an avocation as a business.

And then there was politics.

Over the decades, Meadows held elected positions on local and regional agencies, building a résumé that resonated among others in the world of local politics.

For 25 years, he served on the board of Ironhouse Sanitary District, where he was known as a man who had strong opinions and was adept at expressing them.

"He was good at making his cases, getting his ideas across," said General Manager Tom Williams, who credits Meadows as one of the driving forces behind the district's purchase of Jersey Island.

Meadows viewed the move as environmentally responsible, a way to recycle the district's treated wastewater by growing hay that it then could sell, Williams said.

Meadows later moved on to the board of the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District and, in 1994, to the county's Local Agency Formation Commission, where he acquired an expansive knowledge of jurisdictions' boundary changes as the longest-serving of the agency's 11 commissioners. Just last month, he had been re-elected for another four-year term.

Although soft-spoken, Meadows had control of the microphone as the board's chairman, and when he used it he didn't mince words.

"He spoke his mind -- he didn't sugarcoat anything," said Executive Officer Lou Ann Texeira.

When he died, Meadows was close to seeing the last of three unincorporated areas adjoining Antioch annexed to the city, a long and contentious process that had tested his patience.

"He wanted it done," said Texeira, recalling Meadows' pointed remarks that a power plant had been built in Antioch while stakeholders haggled over how to divvy up tax revenue.

Meadows' level of civic involvement -- he also served on Sutter Delta Medical Center's board of directors and belonged to the Contra Costa County Farm Bureau -- led to the chamber of commerce naming him Oakley Citizen of the Year in 1997.

Oakley resident Rico Cinquini says Meadows had a natural bent for business, and as his partner in

real estate ventures, he learned to trust his investment advice.

"It's gotta be born in you, and Dwight had it," Cinquini said.

Meadows also had a head for grapes, says Brentwood farmer Tom Bloomfield, who recalls the extensive research he did to develop the vines best suited to Oakley's sandy soil.

"He really put Oakley on the map as a prime Zin location," he said.

Indeed, a bottle of Zinfandel that Alameda's Rosenblum Cellars made from Meadows' grapes not only won best of show at the 2003 California State Fair but also was named among the top 100 wines in the world that year by Wine Spectator Magazine.

While much of the community knew Meadows for his work accomplishments, there was another, less well-known side to him.

He told corny jokes, good-humoredly teased his children's friends when they were young, and doted on the four grandchildren his son and daughter gave him.

He and his wife, Carla, satisfied their wanderlust on road trips that took them around most of the United States as well as on cruises to Mexico, the Caribbean and Mediterranean.

In recent years, Meadows had taken to raising pumpkins and Indian corn to use as yard decorations in the fall; simple pleasures also included enjoying his favorite Rocky Road ice cream with the grandkids, trips to Tahoe and tuning into multiple TV news shows.

"We watched them all. I guess he was kind of a news junkie," said Carla Meadows.

Friends are invited to a celebration of Meadows' life at 11 a.m. Friday. The gathering will be at Club Los Meganos, Trilogy at the Vineyards, 1700 Trilogy Parkway, Brentwood.

Donations may be made in his name to the American Cancer Society.

Contact Rowena Coetsee at 925-779-7141. Follow her on [Twitter.com/RowenaCoetsee](https://twitter.com/RowenaCoetsee).

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## The Ambulance Wheels Are Turning

*By Nick Marnell*

In his search for more revenue and to increase efficiency in the operations of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, fire chief Jeff Carman identified a unique opportunity: that the district compete for the exclusive operating contract for ambulance service in Contra Costa County. The county's current ambulance provider is American Medical Response, whose contract expires in December 2015.

Carman presented the idea to the Board of Supervisors in April, and the board approved his request to hire a consultant to analyze the feasibility of ConFire assuming that contract.

After completing the request for proposal process, the district entered into an agreement with The Ludwig Group, a fire and emergency medical services consultant in Memphis, Tenn. headed by Gary Ludwig, a national fire and EMS professional with more than 30 years experience in the industry.

"We received three proposals," said the chief. "Two were very close in price, and Ludwig was a little higher in price than the low bid but his background lends itself to a lot of credibility in this area of expertise." A consultant fee of up to \$15,000 was approved by the board; the report from Ludwig is expected no later than Aug. 1.

The Ludwig Group recently completed a study for the Loudoun County, Va. Department of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Management on the establishment of an EMS transport reimbursement program. In January, the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors approved Ludwig's recommendation and the program is expected to be implemented in July, confirmed Mary Maguire, spokeswoman for the department.

"Gary will give us a good report we can trust," said Carman. "I know we are going into a fight with AMR, but I'd be negligent on behalf of the district not to do it."

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

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## Lamorinda Fire News Briefs

*By Nick Marnell*

### MOFD Seasonal Staffing Increase

Because of a general fund deficit, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District lowered its daily on-duty minimum staffing level from 19 to 17 in November. But with the district facing drought conditions and the risk of a large vegetation fire, particularly in north Orinda, fire chief Stephen Healy requested a staffing increase from May 12 through Oct. 31 at the May 7 board of directors meeting. Healy specifically recommended that the district re-staff the ambulance at Orinda Village station 45 from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily. "It will increase the availability of engine 44 in south Orinda, which will add three additional firefighters to a vegetation fire the majority of the time," said the chief. His proposal will increase overtime charges by \$65,000 this fiscal year and \$142,000 in 2014-15. A motion to approve the staffing increase passed 4-0, with board president John Wyro absent.

### MOFD Budget Workshop

After three consecutive years of General Fund deficit spending, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District presented a fiscal year 2014-15 budget with a projected operating surplus at its May 14 Finance Committee meeting.

"We were given direction to present a balanced budget for 2014-15," said Gloriann Sasser, administrative services director. "In order to do that, significant changes had to be implemented." Many of those changes resulted from the new four-year labor agreement struck by the district with Local 1230 in April; under the new contract, salaries decreased 3.5 percent for the first year and health benefits were capped at 2010 levels for active employees and retirees. The district will also continue to operate with one less division chief. As a result, salaries and overtime are projected to decrease nearly \$600,000 for the new fiscal year.

Though 2014-15 property tax revenue is projected to increase more than \$1 million, the district's retirement contribution jumps nearly \$2 million. Combined with a \$300,000 increase in workers' compensation charges - mainly due to the major accident on Highway 24 in 2012 (see our online archive for details, [www.lamorindaweekly.com](http://www.lamorindaweekly.com)) - the district will use more than \$700,000 of its fire flow tax revenue to fund operating expenses.

Total district revenue for 2014-15 is projected at \$22.2 million, with total expenditures - including capital expenditures and debt service fund expenditures - equaling \$21.7 million.

Sasser also updated the district's Long Range Financial Plan. "We will have a balanced general fund, with revenue meeting expenditures in each year," she said, with the positive trend resulting from projected rising property tax revenue and lower retirement costs. Sasser also projected that the general fund balance will exceed 10 percent of budgeted general fund revenue by 2019.

"Last year we were looking into a chasm," said director and finance committee member Steve Anderson. "Labor and management have done remarkable work in keeping us from falling off the cliff."

### Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force

One of the issues on which many members of the Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force agree is the completion of proposed fire station 46, a joint venture between the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. A precipitating event in the formation of the task force was the closing of ConFire station 16 in Lafayette.

ConFire chief Jeff Carman and MOFD chief Stephen Healy have said that they are very close to an agreement on the construction and operation of the new station. At the March task force meeting, however, Carman said that he was reticent to present a station 46 plan to his board when, at the same time, Lafayette was considering secession from the district. "I need to decide where to put our emphasis," said Carman.

The task force approved a draft of a resolution at its May 15 meeting to present to the Lafayette City Council affirming and supporting the concept of station 46.

"This resolution does not end our discussion of governance, modeling, financing and response

times," said co-chair Traci Reilly. "But it will be an affirmation from Lafayette that we're not packing our bags." Co-chair Brandt Andersson added, "We do want this and we think that station 46 should be built."

The draft will be presented for approval at the May 27 City Council meeting; Carman's station 46 presentation is expected to be delivered to the Board of Supervisors on June 3.

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

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## Pinole set to give interim fire chief Piper permanent position

By Tom Lochner Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times

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ContraCostaTimes.com

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PINOLE -- Robert Piper, the city's interim fire chief, will become the permanent fire chief pending City Council approval of a contract.

A retired San Jose deputy fire chief, Piper became Pinole's interim fire chief in February. He replaced Carlos Rodriguez, who had to quit as Pinole's interim chief because he had served the maximum number of 960 hours in a fiscal year allowed under California Public Employees Retirement System rules.

Piper faces no such restriction in Pinole because San Jose, the agency he retired from, has a different retirement system.

Piper's annual pension from San Jose is \$170,700, said the director of that city's Department of Retirement Services, Roberto Pena. Piper also is entitled to lifetime medical benefits.

Piper worked with the San Jose Fire Department for 29 years; as deputy fire chief from 2000-2004, he directed the Bureau of Education and Training and EMS, according to his resume.

Applicants for Pinole fire chief were interviewed by an independent assessment panel of professional fire chiefs and then by a community panel, City Manager Belinda Espinosa said in her latest weekly report, adding, "Rob was selected as the number one candidate by both panels."

It was not known late Monday what Piper's remuneration would be in Pinole or when a contract will go before the council.

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

## Decision on Pittsburg road extension continued until next month

By Eve Mitchell Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times

Posted: Tue May 20 16:02:05 MDT 2014

ContraCostaTimes.com

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PITTSBURG -- A decision on certifying a final environmental impact report for a 1.7-mile-long road to relieve traffic congestion on busy Buchanan Road was continued until July 21 by City Council members Monday night.

The continuation is needed to give city staff more time to respond to last-minute concerns that have been raised by environmental groups about the adequacy of the report prepared for the long-delayed project.

The James Donlon Boulevard extension, which was first proposed more than 25 years ago, would be built south of Buchanan Road and outside the city limits.

The \$53 million project is viewed by proponents as way to take commuter traffic off Buchanan Road while providing a key route from points east of Pittsburg to Concord and other areas of Central Contra Costa.

Save Mount Diablo and Greenbelt Alliance contend the extension will lead to more housing developments and destroy pristine habitat and views as a result of cuts into the hillside and grading of 2.1 million cubic yards of dirt.

The vote to continue the matter was 3-0. Council members Nancy Parent and Ben Johnson recused themselves because they live near a project alternative that calls for widening Buchanan Road instead of building the extension.

In other matters, a proposal to extend to e-cigarettes restrictions that apply to traditional cigarettes was taken off the agenda to give staff more time to close some loopholes. The matter will come back to the council for consideration at the June 16 meeting.

Contact Eve Mitchell at 925-779-7189. Follow her on [Twitter.com/EastCounty\\_Girl](https://twitter.com/EastCounty_Girl).

## Pinole to put sales tax measure on November ballot

By Tuseda A. Graggs For the Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times

Posted: Thu May 22 11:41:57 MDT 2014

ContraCostaTimes.com

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PINOLE -- The City Council on Tuesday unanimously agreed to ask voters in November to approve a half-cent sales tax that could help pay for police, fire and safety officers.

If approved by a majority voters, the money will come in handy because the council on Tuesday also approved a long-awaited agreement with the Pinole Police Employees Association that will cost Pinole nearly \$166,000 during fiscal year 2014-15.

The agreement with police, which expired in 2011, was renewed and updated after nearly two years of discussion, negotiation and mediation. During the period of the agreement from July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2017, the city will pay increased contributions to the police employees' health and dental plans, increased uniform allowances and lump sum payments of 2.5 percent of employees' base salary to employees each year of the agreement. The changes will cost Pinole \$165,521 in fiscal year 2014-15, then annual costs will decrease to \$120,361 for 2015-16 and \$91,243 for 2016-17.

The council unanimously approved the resolution placing the sales tax on the Nov. 4 ballot, which would raise the total sales tax rate in the city to 9.5 percent.

It agreed that the \$1.6 million to \$1.8 million that the tax could generate each year could help cover the costs of the police agreement as well as fund the salaries of several police officers and firefighters that could be laid off because federal Department of Justice grants that currently pay their salaries will end soon.

Grants currently cover \$223,214 for two police officers and \$125,000 for a battalion fire chief.

The council also held a budget discussion to review revenues and expenditures in advance of its final budget public hearing and approval scheduled for June 17. Although revenues, including property and sales taxes, are steadily recovering from the 2008 recession, additional liabilities such as expiring grants more than offset the revenue gains.

During the budget discussion, the council discussed other ways of generating income, including raising city licensing fees. But City Manager Belinda Espinosa mentioned that the sales tax would be more effective to generate revenue for the city.

"That's why this new measure is so important to use for salaries for police officers and firefighters," she said. "We're pretty topped out in those other areas (like raising fees). Those are nickels and dimes compared to how this measure would help."

Espinosa also highlighted that the West Contra Costa school district will cover \$160,000 to fund all three student resource officers at Pinole schools, eliminating the need for the city to cover the costs. She credited Councilwoman Debbie Long for her diligent work with the district.

"It's always a team effort," Long said. "We have a good working relationship with the school district, and I'm proud of that."

## West Contra Costa health care crisis looms with expected closure of Doctors Medical Center in San Pablo

By Robert Rogers Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times

Posted: Thu May 22 23:12:52 MDT 2014

ContraCostaTimes.com

SAN PABLO -- While various stakeholders scramble for a "Hail Mary" to dig up the cash needed to save Doctors Medical Center, county health officials are trying to figure out how to patch the gaping hole that would be created by the closure of a hospital that receives over 40,000 visits to its emergency room every year.

But a stark reality faces West Contra Costa residents who suffer life-threatening emergencies if the hospital closes: Some may die.

More than 70 heart attack victims are rushed by ambulance to DMC each year, more than one-quarter of all victims countywide, and another 30 are brought by friends and relatives. The hospital also receives a handful of gunshot and other trauma victims who need stabilizing quickly before transfer to a designated trauma center.

"It's with those types of patients that we have the potential to lose lives every year," said Dr. Joseph Barger, medical director of Contra Costa Emergency Medical Services.

Earlier this month, DMC leaders announced plans to close the 60-year-old hospital this summer after voters rejected a parcel tax measure needed to keep it solvent. The public hospital has been bleeding red ink for years, a result of a patient mix tilted heavily toward those on government-sponsored health coverage such as Medicare and Medi-Cal that carry low reimbursement rates.

The hospital is the lone provider of advanced cardiac care for heart attack victims in West County, and its closure would leave the area with only 15 of the county's 242 emergency room beds. In situations where every minute counts, heart attack victims in West County would be taken to Alta Bates Summit in Oakland, Kaiser Permanente in Vallejo, Marin General in Greenbrae or John Muir in Concord.

It would be a far cry from the situation 15 years ago, when Doctors Medical operated two emergency rooms in West County; its Pinole campus received about 9,000 emergency visits a year before closing in April 2000.

The San Pablo hospital handled the influx of new patients relatively well after the Pinole closure, and many residents had to go only an additional few miles to get care. But a new reality confronts West County residents today, particularly those at risk of heart attacks and strokes.

DMC is the only public hospital in West County and the site of 25 of the area's 40 emergency room beds. Kaiser operates the only other ER in West County at its medical center in Richmond, but it is not equipped to treat heart attack victims.

"The major impact of the closure of DMC is less about where patients get elective surgery or primary care; it's about the lack of emergency room beds we have in West County," said Contra Costa Supervisor John Gioia, of Richmond, who also sits on DMC's governing board.

Dr. William Walker, the director of Contra Costa Health Services, said talks are ongoing with emergency responders and other county health officials to develop a plan to deal with DMC's closure.

Changes in how ambulances are deployed and routed is the most immediate issue, Walker said. DMC receives an average of 22 emergency ambulance visits per day. For those suffering strokes, Kaiser Richmond, Alta Bates Summit in Berkeley or Muir Concord will be the options, Walker said.

On the day of closure, which could come as early as late July, the county plans to declare a public health emergency to mobilize public and private hospitals to operate at full capacity to deal with the impact. Walker said the county will urge Kaiser to increase its same-day appointment capacity for non-Kaiser patients. Response times for 911 calls likely will be delayed as well, as more ambulances traveling farther distances will have to triage their responses, prioritizing calls by apparent severity and wait times at other hospitals. All the extra transport could cost millions, some of which will be borne by the county.

The secondary planning will focus on walk-in, nonemergency patients, which average about 100 per day to DMC, most of whom use the hospital as a primary care destination rather than emergency room.

Average wait times for walk-in patients at Kaiser's ER would soar as high as 12 hours, according to one study. While emergency departments are required to treat all patients who come through the door, the perception that Kaiser's hospital is only available to its members and long wait times would likely deter uninsured and Medi-Cal patients from going there.

Given the distance to other hospitals, many of the county's older and uninsured would likely defer care until their symptoms become severe, according to the 2011 study commissioned by the county.

That reality was on display at DMC last week.

Emergency Department physician Humayan Tufail, who monitored a computer screen displaying information on about 15 patients, bolted from his chair toward one of the emergency beds.

In bed lay Manuel Garcia-Cruz, 59, hooked up to crimson IV tubes and complaining of severe stomach pain.

Garcia-Cruz, a San Pablo resident who lost his job at a Richmond warehouse last month, had been brought in by his adult daughter after days of passing blood.

Without DMC, he said he had no idea where he would have gone.

"I guess I would probably have just called 911," he said.

Dr. Tufail ordered blood transfusions and a stay in ICU for additional tests to determine what caused the stomach bleeding. He said ICU care will cost at least \$5,000 per day, and the hospital would almost surely take a total loss on those costs.

"In some ways, (Garcia-Cruz) is the perfect example of the shortcomings in our health care system and how catastrophic it would be if we closed," Tufail said. "He has no insurance, and he hasn't seen a doctor in years, and now he's very sick, and it's going to be very costly to the system."

Walker said efficiently diverting this flow will require a "community wide effort" to educate people about alternatives, including urgent care centers and a county-run nurse advice line that will be opened up to all residents of West County if the hospital closes.

"We are all going to ask everyone to step up to the plate," Walker said. "But it will not be the level of service that the patients of West County received before, and there will be some bad outcomes

as result of long transports."

Walker said he also holds out hope that an urgent care wing of DMC may remain open after the hospital closes. Contra Costa supervisors also plan on June 3 to consider conducting a poll to gauge voter support for a countywide sales tax hike on the November ballot to save the hospital, or reopen it if it closes. The quarter-cent sales tax would raise \$40 million annually

Dr. Tufail mentioned a gunshot victim, age 17, who was rushed to DMC with a stomach wound last month after being shot in Richmond. The boy was stabilized with water and blood transfusions at DMC before being airlifted to the trauma center at John Muir in Walnut Creek.

"He was losing a lot of blood, and that had raised his heart rate to more than 160 beats per minute, and his blood pressure was falling rapidly," Tufail said. "And it was rush hour, so there was little doubt that he wouldn't have made it for a longer trip."

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## Barnidge: ConFire's new chief envisions big changes for the district

By Tom Barnidge Contra Costa Times Columnist Contra Costa Times  
Posted: Sun May 25 08:58:42 MDT 2014

ContraCostaTimes.com

Among the first observations that struck Jeff Carman when he took command of the Contra Costa Fire District seven months ago was the volume of calls his firefighters answered.

"They run a tremendous number of structure fires," the fire chief said. "It's not unusual on a weekend to get called out five, six or seven times. We get difficult, complex calls, too -- falls down hillsides, water rescues. There's a lot of topography here."

The observations are in sharp contrast to his experience in Roseville, a Sacramento suburb where he was assistant chief of operations. ConFire sees more structure fires in a typical month, he said, than Roseville usually does in 12. Concord Station No. 6 handles nearly half as many calls of all kinds (4,500) as Roseville's 10 stations (10,000) do in a year.

That wasn't all he noticed. He saw the district needs some changes. The dispatch center, which lost its accreditation from the National Academies of Emergency Dispatch, needed new software and hardware to meet efficiency standards. Upgrades had been postponed because of budget shortfalls.

Money issues still plague the district -- it's dipping into reserves to pay its bills -- thanks to property tax declines and hefty retirement obligations. But Carman sees help on the way; property values are rising, and a new operating model would provide greater efficiencies.

Hailed as an innovator at his hiring, the new chief has proposed a dramatic change in how the district handles emergency medical response. He wants his department to add ambulance service to its responsibilities, replacing private vendor AMR in that role.

"If 66 percent of our job is EMS," he said, "then let's embrace it and get into it. The vast majority of our job is EMS, but we don't have control over delivery of that service."

Most 911 emergency medical calls currently result in a fire company -- three firefighters and an engine -- racing to the scene, joined by two AMR paramedics in an ambulance. That's five responders and two vehicles for one emergency. In Carman's plan, each company would still have three firefighters, but a number of strategically located stations would add ambulances and two paramedics. Those EMS teams would be the sole responders for all but the most serious emergencies.

He said this approach reduces cost (paramedics' salaries are lower than firefighters'), eliminates duplication of efforts and saves firefighters for what they do best. A single structure fire can require 15 or more firefighting personnel.

"This changes the model," he said. "That's the big thing for me."

Other possible changes include "community paramedicine," in which medical responders treat ailments on site, saving the cost of an ambulance ride to the emergency room. Those same responders might offer low-cost preventive services such as vaccinations, or quick-response intervention for psychiatric emergencies.

A consulting group is studying the feasibility of Carman's plan -- the ambulance contract is up for

bid in September -- but that's not his only idea. He sees revenue potential from marketing his fleet maintenance shop services to other nearby districts. He sees similar potential for his radio and IT technicians.

Bit by bit, he hopes to redefine ConFire's role.

For now, though, he has staffing issues -- there are 20 vacancies to fill -- as the community girds for what he describes as the "worst, driest" fire season in memory.

It's a good thing he likes challenges. He has plenty of them.

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## Special District Leadership Foundation - Congratulations Are in Order

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Recognition in Special District Governance was designed to honor special district board members, trustees and staff. It is comprised of two distinct parts: 1) the CSDA Special District Leadership Academy and 2) elective courses.

The CSDA Special District Leadership Academy is comprised of four courses: Governance Foundations, Setting Direction/Community Leadership, Board's Role in Human Resources and Board's Role in Finance and Fiscal Accountability. The four courses are unique from any other courses on special district governance in that they are curriculum-driven—curriculum that was created by special districts, developed by special districts and agreed upon as what governing officials of special districts should know. SDLF has endorsed the Academy as the foremost authority on special district governance in California.

Those seeking recognition also need to submit 10 hours of continuing education.

The Recognition is designed so the Academy covers the essentials of good governance and the electives cover service-specific knowledge.

In addition to Recognitions given to individual directors, there is also a District Recognition. Districts that have a majority of their governing board holding Recognitions will receive a Silver Recognition and districts with their entire board holding Recognitions will receive a Gold Recognition. District Recognitions will be presented at an upcoming association's annual conference. An application for this program can be found at [www.sdlf.org](http://www.sdlf.org), under Recognition in Special District Governance.

If you are interested in this recognition, please contact Charlotte Lowe, program assistant, at (916) 231-2939 or email [charlottel@sdlf.org](mailto:charlottel@sdlf.org).

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## East Contra Costa fire district could close station earlier than expected

By Rowena Coetsee *Contra Costa Times* *Contra Costa Times*

Posted: Tue Jun 03 08:02:53 MDT 2014

ContraCostaTimes.com

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OAKLEY -- The East Contra Costa Fire District's board approved a \$12.3 million preliminary budget Monday that assumes the agency will close two stations at the end of November.

Although the size of the 2014-15 spending plan is virtually the same as this year's, projected expenses aren't: The biggest single increase the district must handle is a 40 percent hike in its contributions to firefighters' pensions, which amounts to an additional \$1.2 million.

The increase is due in part to a drop in the rate of return on district investments.

The district must adopt a final budget by Oct. 1.

"We are down to the bone," said Director Stephen Smith, disputing online comments he's seen that assert the district must have some expenses it could cut.

With 96 percent of its revenue currently coming from property taxes, East Contra Costa Fire suffered a blow with the collapse of the housing market seven years ago.

The district was forced to shutter stations and is still in a precarious position.

Unless more revenue is forthcoming, residents of far East County might lose one of their remaining five stations even before a federal grant that has been keeping a couple of them open expires in November.

The uncertainty of their jobs has prompted four firefighters to leave the district, and four others have received conditional offers of employment, fire Chief Hugh Henderson told the board.

Nine firefighters are needed to man each station, so if any more resign, the board will have to decide whether it can afford to continue paying firefighters overtime to compensate for the empty slots, as well as whether it should expose them to the added risk of injury that comes with working longer hours, Henderson said.

The option would be to close one of the two stations this summer instead of waiting until late fall, he said.

The board hasn't yet announced which sites it would close, although the last time it took this step, it targeted Knightsen's station and one in Brentwood.

The departures cost the district in another way as well: It forfeits part of its federal grant for each firefighter who leaves.

Director Greg Cooper urged the board to discuss the matter sooner rather than later, prompting Henderson to agree to put it on the agenda for next month's meeting.

In a related matter, directors also agreed to have consultants solicit property owners' opinions on several aspects of a benefit assessment that the district is considering presenting to voters in November.

East Contra Costa Fire already has hired a consulting firm to show how some properties stand to

benefit more from fire services than others, an analysis that must be done before this type of a levy can be placed on the ballot.

Now that company will ask those who would have to pay the assessment -- land owners -- how long they think the assessment should be in effect, whether it should be a flat dollar amount or increase each year, and whether an independent committee should oversee the expenditures of that money.

The board overruled Directors Cheryl Morgan and Joe Young, both of whom thought the district shouldn't spend the approximately \$20,000 it will cost to poll these voters when it already has a good sense of what the answers will be.

"I don't see the value of this survey," Young said.

Although the \$115,000 the district already has paid the consultants could be used to cover this extra expense, the district then would need to come up with more money for the two additional mass mailings it's planning to explain to voters what's at stake.

Reach Rowena Coetsee at 925-779-7141. Follow her at [Twitter.com/RowenaCoetsee](https://twitter.com/RowenaCoetsee).

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## Lafayette Council All In for Station 46

By Nick Marnell

Throughout its 12 months of existence, the Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force has struggled with the subtleties and the complexity of the fire protection industry. But in May, the task force took a major step forward: it agreed to endorse and support the construction and operation of fire station 46; and the Lafayette City Council concurred.

When the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors closed Lafayette's fire station 16 and refused to commit to the joint venture between ConFire and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District to build and operate station 46, the Lafayette City Council formed the task force to investigate alternate delivery of fire and emergency medical service to the city.

The task force, co-chaired by Council Members Traci Reilly and Brandt Andersson, evaluated a range of options, including funding its own service, contracting for service with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, merging with another district and even contracting back with ConFire. At a task force meeting in March, ConFire chief Jeff Carman asked that the task force stop talking secession and indicate if it was serious about station 46 as an option; he did not want to present a revised plan for station 46 to his board while at the same time the board was reading that Lafayette had one foot out the door.

In May, Alan Hartford, assistant chief of operations, unveiled to the task force the ConFire internal Strategic Planning Group, charged with evaluating the operation of the district on all levels, including standards of cover, finances and public outreach. Hartford also said that the district planned to take its risk-based deployment model to an entirely new level, based partly on pitching for the county's ambulance contract now held by American Medical Response.

Since ConFire does not know the deployment model of AMR's ambulances, it cannot tailor custom responses to medical calls. If it controlled the ambulance deployment, explained Hartford, then the district could keep its fire resources where it feels they are needed and deploy medical resources to ensure adequate coverage for medical emergencies without compromising the fire response. "We have no way of doing that right now," he said. "If we had the ambulance contract we would know where our resources are and then can move them around accordingly."

"Hartford's address calmed nerves in the room," said Reilly, who emphasized that the committee was impressed by how rapidly ConFire is working to fix its problems. The task force presented a resolution supporting the concept of station 46 to the City Council, which unanimously approved it on May 27.

Acknowledging that station 46 would be a huge step in the right direction, Reilly cautioned that there are still areas that need to be addressed. One of those problem areas was highlighted in a letter sent to the city council by task force member Jim Cunha.

"This motion does not solve all of our problems," he wrote. "Firefighter pensions and post retirement medical benefits are still to be solved before we are anywhere close to where we need to be on a sustained basis."

Carman plans to present his revised station 46 strategy - along with the formal support of Lafayette - to the Board of Supervisors this month. MOFD chief Stephen Healy is expected to make a similar presentation to his board shortly.

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

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## Proposed District Budget Riles Union

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District and the firefighters union reached a tentative agreement on a new contract in April, and at the May 20 district meeting, the 36-page memorandum of understanding was approved by the board of directors. But a pall of resentment hung over the rank and file.

"This is not a contact that we are happy with," said Vince Wells, Local 1230 president. Wells maintained that the district's financial situation was never as bleak as it was portrayed during the negotiations, and he expressed cynicism that a balanced general fund was now projected for every year of the district's revised long range financial plan. The new financial forecast only verified the union's belief that the district finances were never as dire as projected, noted Wells.

"We hope that in future negotiations similar tactics are not used," he said.

The MOFD directors did not respond to Wells' comments. The MOU was approved by a 4-1 vote, the dissenting vote cast by director Steve Anderson, who has steadfastly objected to the automatic wage increases built into future years of the new labor agreement. Starting July 1, 2015, base salaries per the MOU are set to increase 1 percent with a 4 percent increase in each of the two succeeding years. The firefighters accepted a 3.5 percent pay cut for one year beginning this July.

Gloriann Sasser, administrative services director, then led a presentation on the 2014-15 fiscal year district budget, projecting that for the first time in three years the district will operate in the black. Total district revenue for 2014-15 is projected at \$22.2 million, with total expenditures - including capital expenditures and debt service fund expenditures - equaling \$21.7 million.

Those numbers only added to Wells' chagrin.

"Next year's financial forecast shows a surplus of around the same amount the district will be saving with the 3.5 percent pay cut," he said. "A reduction in salary is not the way to balance the district's budget."

Fire chief Stephen Healy said that he appreciated the effort and cooperation of the union throughout the negotiations but he did acknowledge the uneasiness that pervaded the talks. "The process of concession bargaining was very difficult for both sides," he said.

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