

Brentwood to mull change in how it chooses representatives on fire district board

By Rowena Coetsee rcoetsee@bayareanewsgroup.com

Posted: 12/11/2015 05:14:44 PM PST Updated: 101 min. ago

"We're both surprised and a little shocked," said Director Stephen Smith, who learned about the turn of events from Brentwood's city manager Thursday evening along with fellow director Greg Cooper.

The two men's terms expire Dec. 31, and both had applied to serve a second term on the nine-member board.

Brentwood City Council is scheduled to vote on the matter at its Tuesday meeting, deciding first whether it wants to change the nature of its representation on the fire board and if so, who would step into the job.

In recent years, Brentwood and Oakley city councils together with the county have drawn from the general public to fill the seats that represent each jurisdiction on East Contra Costa Fire's nine-member board.

That tradition came into question, however, when each of those three stakeholders recently committed funds to reopen a fourth fire station temporarily -- one the financially strapped fire district had been forced to close -- while it continues looking for long-term sources of revenue.

Given the size of Brentwood's \$666,000 pledge, a council subcommittee earlier this week decided to recommend reverting to the old way of choosing fire district leadership, which originally limited those directorships to city council members.

The thinking is that this way, appointees are more likely to reflect Brentwood City Council's opinions on how the fire district should proceed, said Councilman Erick Stonebarger, who sits on the two-man subcommittee.

The council wants to follow the advice of a task force that's been established to find a solution to East Contra Costa Fire's long-standing financial woes, one that City Manager Gus Vina is heading up, Stonebarger said.

Disregarding that group's recommendations means that all the hours Vina has spent on the matter would be for naught, he said.

Stonebarger emphasized that the possible change in the selection method is no reflection on Smith or Cooper.

"It has nothing to do with what they've done," he said. "We appreciate their hard work. We're not talking about a performance issue."

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Steve Tate: Morgan Hill annexation can help preserve agriculture

By Steve Tate

Special to the Mercury News

Posted: 12/11/2015 12:57:20 PM PST [5 Comments](#) | Updated: 3 days ago

Like all of Santa Clara County, Morgan Hill has a rich agricultural history. Most of today's remaining actively-grown agriculture (ag) is in South County. To preserve our region's proud history, residents throughout the county want to see active ag preserved to the maximum extent possible.

Our community has invested significant time and resources in evaluating alternatives to preserve viable ag. Morgan Hill's forward thinking, city-wide Agricultural Preservation Program was developed with guidance from respected ag preservation and economic consultants. It includes a "stay ahead" provision requiring preservation to occur before development.

Morgan Hill has pledged to invest millions of dollars in ag preservation from a fund that continues to grow as the city develops. We have a plan that effectively saves the most ag while providing other benefits to our community and region.

It is unrealistic to think that if we don't change anything, South County ag land will remain ag. We have ample evidence to the contrary. Every parcel in unincorporated South County has development rights, including active ag parcels.

San Martin is a very visual example of ag land turned into housing on large acreage parcels. If you go to the south end of Trail Drive, you'll see five homes under construction. It is literally happening now! House-by-house, our ag lands will disappear unless we do something different.

Morgan Hill is doing something different and innovative.

One way to guarantee that these lands remain ag is to remove their development rights by recording a permanent ag easement on the deeds. Land owners will do this -- for a price.

The city will assure that any ag land developed in or around Morgan Hill preserves an equal amount of designated ag land in the area southeast of the city. It can do this by supplementing developer payments from an open space account funded by developers who compete for housing allocations in the city. So housing development in the city assists in preserving ag lands in the surrounding county.

We are also working with landowners on other innovative approaches to compensating them for ag easements.

Morgan Hill has a great reputation for providing high quality recreation facilities. Another creative way to fund ag preservation is to annex a small portion of the area (less than 180 acres) near the

Tenant-101 interchange to enhance its family and youth-oriented recreation, sports and leisure offerings. Morgan Hill can leverage its reputation by expanding its active recreation facilities.

This envisioned development will pay ag preservation fees, so it will assist in preserving ag in the surrounding county.

Another planned use for the southeast area is a new Catholic high school on land owned by the church near the Tenant-101 interchange. It will be a tremendous South County asset, and its development will also help fund ag preservation.

Morgan Hill's plans do not add any housing to these areas. None.

Consistent with the widely accepted Santa Clara Food and Farmlands Resolution, Morgan Hill is working diligently to insure that small-scale ag remains viable in our sphere of influence. We are seeking the services of a third-party administrator to oversee easements and exploring creative ways to provide ag infrastructure to small-scale farmers.

To make ag preservation a reality, Morgan Hill is working closely with our Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) to gain approval to annex the land for recreation and the Catholic high school. A hearing is scheduled Feb. 3. It is imperative for LAFCo to approve our application, as it proactively and responsibly preserves viable ag while also providing quality community-serving facilities.

Steve Tate is mayor of Morgan Hill. He wrote this for this newspaper.

- 5 comments
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[Chip Johnson](#) • [5 hours ago](#)

Well said, as I would expect, from a Mayor. The issues I did not see addressed, maybe I missed them, was, how do you keep AG land, agricultural. By this I mean keep it from being rezoned. You can't by law put a housing complex on AG land. And, the issue of what are you doing to support the local farms and farmers? How many AG classes are offered in the schools? does the FFA have a "Blue Jacket group" at the HS? Does your HS have AG Shop? Mine did. You can not keep AG in the area if you do not support AG, and AG people. Farm work is not suggested by teachers, unless you do it with a MS. Until Owing and working your farm, regardless of your education, becomes valued, you will have issues.

[LF](#) • [2 days ago](#)

This is very specious, arguing that we must develop our critical open space buffers in order to save our critical open space buffers. I hope the LAFCO denies the annexation request and protects Morgan Hill from this incessant suburban sprawl, if Mayor Tate will not. These popular projects, i.e., a school and sports fields, can and should be placed elsewhere, and are chosen because they more easily deceive people into thinking a bad project (developing over the last few ag. lands we have) is a good one. We need smart, dense projects that don't add to the already egregious traffic and destroy the last vestiges of country charm that we have,

although Mayor Tate writes as if it's already a done deal, inevitable that annexations and conversions will take place. We need a mayor who sides with residents and not the next developer who comes along, who believes he can get saving these open spaces done, that it's not inevitable or unaffordable, someone who won't turn us into a mini-San Jose! Please sign this petition: <https://www.change.org/p/morga...>

[RexDev](#) • [2 days ago](#)

A policy to keep Bay Area housing unaffordable.

Cut the supply, and the price goes up.

Current owner benefit, newcomers suffer.

Agricultural heritage is a smokescreen for those who understand this, and a myth that makes some people happy.

[Sequoia Hall](#) • [3 days ago](#)

Well laid out thoughts Mayor Tate.

Just a few observations. Many organizations, some governmental and some non-profit, already have purchased agricultural easements preventing development. They know how much it costs to purchase these binding development rights, so the statement that South County Ag Land is not protected needs reevaluating.

Regarding your assessment of development potential of many parcels in the county, I agree with your concern that we are losing our Agricultural Heritage.

I hope to see good numbers, based on current real world examples, in the LAFCO staff analysis regarding Morgan Hills financial projection to purchase easements. Thank you for laying out your ideas to the public.

I am very interested to see what others say on this.

[Notobranchiata](#) • [3 days ago](#)

Mr. Tate is trying to seem like a good mayor after Gilroy's mayor approved building over 700+ acres of ag land for 4,000+ homes then resigned the same night. He's not fooling anyone.

Triple-dipper: East Bay politician making \$370,000 a year balks at paying for health insurance

By [Thomas Peele tpeelee@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:tpeelee@bayareanewsgroup.com)

Posted: **12/18/2015** 06:59:59 AM PST Updated: about 2 hours ago

It's tough to find someone as familiar with a public employee pay and benefits package as Kevin Hart. The Kensington interim police chief and Dublin city councilman is raking in more than \$370,000 in government salaries and pension this year.

But it's Hart's free taxpayer-funded health care -- and how he got it -- that is causing the latest flap in the scandal-plagued upscale East Bay enclave that swore him in as chief with a ceremony replete with Boy Scout honor guard.

Even though Hart, 56, was already what's known among government watchdogs as a "triple-dipper," he wasn't familiar enough with his multiple options for health coverage when he touted to Kensington officials this June that one of his selling points for their police job was that he didn't need them to pay for his health insurance.



Kensington Police Chief Kevin Hart is pictured during an election forum when he ran for mayor in Dublin in 2014. (Aric Crabb/Bay Area News Group)

Kensington officials' eyes lit up at what penciled out to about \$18,000 in savings.

"It was one of the reasons" he was hired, said Vanessa Cordova, of the local Police Protection and Community Services District board.

But just days after beating out five others for the job that carries other benefits of permanent employment -- such as vacation, administrative leave and pension contributions -- Hart reversed course and said he had to renegotiate.

He would need medical coverage after all because his plans to jump from state insurance to coverage from Dublin fell apart.

"Stupid me," said Hart, who started the year on the payroll of the Department of State Hospitals and is also drawing a \$223,000 a year pension after retiring as Alameda County Sheriff's deputy. He didn't know

that state retirement system rules wouldn't let him take full health coverage from his part-time Dublin post while also working for Kensington, he said

His other option to stick to his promise -- medical coverage from the Alameda County retirement system that posed no conflict -- wasn't an option because he would have to pay for it, he said. "That costs money. That isn't free."

But Kensington's coverage is free. Its employees pay no share of health insurance costs.

Hart made one concession, agreeing to cut his \$150,000 a year pay by \$5,000 to help make up for the cost. But his reversal means that to supply him health insurance, the district will be paying roughly \$6,600 more than it originally negotiated to employ him until his contract expires in March. The board can renew his contract for three months, or make him the permanent chief.

Meanwhile, insurance in hand, Hart said he had knee surgery in November, missing seven days of work.

New flaps are raising old questions about lack of oversight in this small town still reeling from a scandal over a detective whose gun and badge were stolen by a prostitute in his Reno hotel room and the firing of Hart's predecessor, Greg Harman.

Kensington's "been plagued with personnel issues for so long, many wonder if this entity is impervious to reform," Cordova said, adding she's "concerned about the community's confidence in our ability to manage even the most basic" governance.

Board members acknowledge, there's plenty of blame to share this time.

"We didn't catch it, our lawyers didn't catch it," district President Len Welsh said. "It was an honest mistake."

"It's partially (Hart's) fault, and I sort of messed up," the district's labor lawyer, John Holtzman, said Wednesday. "The rules are pretty obscure." The district "could have just made him pay for it, but he balked."

Now, residents like Celia Concis are asking hard questions: "Can we rely on Hart to manage the intricacies of the district budget and understand retirement obligations if he couldn't even get his own health benefits straight?" she said Wednesday.

Follow Thomas Peele on [Twitter.com/thomas_peele](https://twitter.com/thomas_peele). Email him at Tpeele@bayareanewsgroup.com

Kevin Hart's approximate 2105 cash pay Alameda County Pension: \$223,000

Kensington Police: \$84,600*

Dublin City Council \$10,000

Department of State Hospitals: \$57,000**

*- Over seven months

** - Over five months

Martinez's interim city manager goal?

Finding a new city manager

By [Sam Richards srichards@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:srichards@bayareanewsgroup.com)

Posted: 12/16/2015 07:25:27 PM PST Updated: about 18 hours ago

MARTINEZ -- If you're Jim Jakel, it turns out you can go home again ... and again, and again.

The City Council on Wednesday appointed Jakel to step in for 3½ months as Martinez's interim city manager, effective Jan. 1.

This will be Jakel's fourth stint as Martinez city manager. He was the city manager there from December 1989 through June 1996, and served a short stint as interim manager in early 2014. Also, while working with the Contra Costa Council -- now the East Bay Leadership Council -- he was "loaned" to Martinez for five months in 2000 to be interim city manager, he said.

"Martinez gets under your skin; I really like the place a lot," said Jakel, 60, who added there won't be any contract renewals in April, with travel plans with his wife, Kathy, firmly in place.

Jakel sees his top job as helping find Martinez's next full-time city manager. The recruiting process has already started, said Mayor Rob Schroder, who hopes a successor is found sooner rather than later.

"It's my goal to get the new the spot filled prior to Jim's contract expiring," Schroder said Thursday.

Jakel will take the reins from Rob Braulik, whose last day on the job as Martinez's city manager will be Dec. 31. Braulik started work in April and announced in November plans to join the private sector.

Jakel was Antioch's city manager from 2003 until 2013. "I think Martinez and Antioch are the only two places I'd come out of retirement for."

Jakel's 3½-month contract, which runs Jan. 1 through April 16, calls for \$98.45 an hour for a 25-hour workweek. Such temporary returns, often part time and often at an hourly rate, aren't unusual for retired city managers.

Something those two cities have in common, Jakel said, is financial challenges.

Schroder said Jakel is a great fit for Martinez.

"He's a fantastic city manager, well-respected, knows the community and the employees," he said. "Those who've been here long term all know him and have worked with him."

Before Braulik's arrival, the city had gone a year and a half without a permanent city manager. Phil Vince resigned in October 2013, and he was followed by a succession of interim city managers, including Anna Gwyn Simpson, deputy director of strategic planning and community development; Jakel; and current assistant city manager Alan Shear.

Councilwoman Lara DeLaney said getting the right person in that spot as soon as possible is important.

"I think we're due for some stability, but I also want to make sure we have the right fit," she said.

In his short upcoming tenure in Martinez, Jakel also hopes to comb the city's specific plan for a few goals around which to unify city staff. "Doing those things will be a little more nuanced than simply doing what's written down on paper," he said.

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Pinole fills vacancy on City Council

By Tuseda A. Graggs Correspondent

Posted: 12/16/2015 04:57:38 PM PST Updated: a day ago

PINOLE -- It took only about 15 minutes Tuesday night for the city to choose and seat a new councilwoman.

Longtime Pinole resident Maureen Toms was selected, sworn in and took her seat alongside the other council members. Immediately following her ascension to the post, she joined the council in a closed session and participated in the remainder of Tuesday's meeting.

"We're all happy to have her," said Mayor Roy Swearingen.

The vacant seat had been held by the Phil Green, who died Oct. 23 after serving on the City Council since 2010. Green also served one term on the council from 1986 to 1990. Toms will complete the unexpired term, which runs until certification of the Nov. 8, 2016, general election.

A Pinole planning commissioner, Toms also serves on the West Contra Costa Unified School District citizens bond oversight committee and on the Pinole Redevelopment Successor Agency's oversight board. She will relinquish her position on the Planning Commission.

Toms and Warren Clayton, who represents Pinole on the Contra Costa Mosquito and Vector Control District, were both interviewed for the vacant seat last week and were questioned on a variety of issues to determine their readiness for city leadership. A third candidate bowed out of the process last week shortly before the City Council held its candidate interviews.

"Council needs someone with good, experienced background," said Swearingen. "Maureen has that."

Toms is a lifelong Pinole resident who has been active in the community, he said.

"She was the logical choice. We think she's going to be a very good fit on the council," Swearingen said.

The council previously asked both candidates about their availability to prepare for meetings, attend them and participate in a variety of committees. Councilman Peter Murray wasn't able to attend the interview session last week, so the council postponed a vote until Murray could review the video and attend this week.

Solar farm to be built on former Richmond landfill

By Karina Ioffe kioffee@bayareanewsgroup.com

Posted: 12/17/2015 06:01:33 AM PST Updated: a day ago



Richmond Mayor Tom Butt talks about a 49-acre solar farm, located on land owned by the Chevron refinery, during a groundbreaking for the facility in Richmond, Calif., on Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2015. (Kristopher Skinner/Bay Area News Group) (Kristopher Skinner)

RICHMOND -- A new solar farm will soon generate enough energy to power more than 3,000 homes in Richmond, part of the city's commitment to reducing carbon dioxide emissions, the mayor and other leaders said Wednesday.

The 49-acre solar array is being spearheaded by Marin Clean Energy, a nonprofit electricity provider, and will be the largest publicly owned solar project in the Bay Area when it is completed by the end of next year. It will be located on a former landfill owned by Chevron, which operates a refinery in Richmond. Construction will begin in February.

"Richmond is converting former brownfields to community assets, and this is just one example of that," said City Manager Bill Lindsay. "It will not only produce power but also jobs."

Some of the solar panel installation will be done by participants in RichmondBUILD, a public-private partnership that prepares low-income people for jobs in construction and the renewable energy sector. The solar farm is expected to generate about 100 jobs and eliminate nearly 10,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide per year, roughly the amount produced by 2,100 cars, according to MCE. Carbon dioxide emissions are the leading cause of global warming.

Richmond Mayor Tom Butt, who sits on the board of Marin Clean Energy and attended the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris earlier this month, called the project a win for the city and for the environment.

"One of the themes that permeated that conference was the role that states, cities and counties -- the so-called 'subnationals' -- will have to play in the future if this whole effort to limit greenhouse gases and mitigate climate change is going to work," Butt told a small crowd at a groundbreaking ceremony Wednesday. "To come back from that huge inspiration and be a part of groundbreaking for this project is an amazing thing."

The solar farm's construction is being partially funded by MCE's "Deep Green" customers, who receive 100 percent of their energy from renewables. The land is being leased from Chevron for \$1 a year, part of the \$90 million community-benefits agreement with the refinery. The agreement was signed last year in exchange for permission to carry out its modernization project, set to start next summer.

Planned improvements at the refinery include safety upgrades to piping systems and a new hydrogen plant that can process 20 percent more crude without increasing greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, three Chevron Suezmax tankers that bring in crude to the port will be replaced with two cleaner-running vessels, although the vessels will still idle in the Port of Richmond while they offload crude.

Critics had said the improvements don't do nearly enough to reduce the region's and country's dependence on oil.

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Barnidge: Grass-roots group's modest goal? To save the East Contra Costa Fire District

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

Posted: 12/18/2015 04:20:26 PM PST Updated: a day ago

Discovery Bay residents David Piepho and Bob Mankin are taking on a project that should keep them a little busy in the months ahead. They plan to save the East Contra Costa Fire District.

This is the district, you'll remember, that's been underfunded for years, its allocation of property taxes a fraction of the percentage of neighboring districts. It's a district that was so ravaged by the real estate crash during the Great Recession that it closed five of its eight fire stations.

A parcel tax went down to defeat in 2012. A benefit assessment failed in 2014. So nine firefighters now are on duty to respond to emergency calls from 110,000 residents spread across 249 square miles -- and the situation could grow worse.

"Based on current revenues," Mankin said, "the three-station model we have is going to degrade into something less. We either come up with a solution that avoids catastrophe, or that's where we're going."

Only by the grace of one-time funding from Brentwood (\$666,000), Oakley (\$382,202) and the county (\$311,617) is there a window of time to find an answer, which almost certainly will involve a ballot measure.

Piepho -- whose wife, Mary, is a county supervisor -- and Mankin are heading up a grass-roots group whose daunting goal is to win voter support for a parcel tax. Their game plan will focus on public outreach and a large helping of straight talk.

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They've heard what opponents have said. Firefighters are overpaid. They're soaking up cushy pensions. Their medical calls could be handled by ambulances. Why not a volunteer operation?

"We have to get out into the community and start explaining the reality of East County Fire," Piepho said.

Piepho, who served as an Alameda County firefighter for 28 years, says East County's starting pay is \$17 an hour. The average firefighter earns \$50,000 to \$60,000 per year, and 24 percent of that is withheld toward retirement. That's one reason unfunded liabilities were reduced from \$28 million to \$25 million last year.

Piepho knows something about volunteer firefighting, too -- he volunteered in the 1980s, when Brentwood's population was about 5,000, and Oakley's was even smaller.

"We got about one call per day," he said. "Now they get about 26. That's way beyond a volunteer's capability."

Those medical emergencies? They can involve extractions at vehicle crash sites, victims ejected into ditches, workers trapped at construction sites and many other circumstances that ambulance services are not equipped to handle.

Mankin and Piepho think past ballot measures failed because there was no give-and-take with the public. ("A small group of government officials came up with a solution and tried to cram it down your throat," Mankin said.) This time, they plan to seek out opponents and open the issue to discussion.

"Let's surround ourselves with people who voted 'no,'" Piepho said. "Let's talk to them about why they voted 'no' and what misconceptions they might have."

The two plan to take their "road show" to city councils, service clubs, homeowners associations - anywhere voters will listen. When they recently addressed a small focus group that included parcel tax opponents, they were heartened to find that by the end of the session, they'd turned all the "no" votes to "yes."

That's a start.

Contact Tom Barnidge at tbarnidge@bayareanewsgroup.com.

Pittsburg declares fiscal 'emergency,' OK's measure to preserve sales tax

By [Sam Richards srichards@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:srichards@bayareanewsgroup.com)

Posted: 12/23/2015 05:42:22 AM PST Updated: about 3 hours ago

PITTSBURG -- Having declared a funding "emergency" with the scheduled June 2017 decrease of the city's sales tax, and the likely negative effects that it could have on police, senior services and street maintenance, city leaders want to put a tax extension on the June 2016 ballot.

The Measure P sales tax would decrease, from a half-cent to a quarter-cent per dollar spent, slashing about \$1.4 million a year from the city budgets from 2017 through 2021. This, several city officials say, would devastate a city whose staff has already fallen from 315 employees in 2008 to 240 today, and would likely fall further should the full half-cent tax not be extended.

"If we don't do this, our quality of life will suffer," City Councilman Sal Evola said before the council's 5-0 vote affirming the emergency declaration. Getting the city's situation stabilized, he added, should come ahead of Pittsburg's participation in regional efforts, including transportation initiatives.

Added Councilman Pete Longmire, "I do believe we're in a state of emergency if we don't get this (extension) passed."

In addition to the emergency declaration, the council also voted last week to authorize the bond measure for the June 2016 ballot that would extend the terms of Measure P's half-cent sales tax through June 2035.

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Measure P was approved by Pittsburg voters in 2012, in response to hard economic times brought on largely by the Great Recession. Between 2008 and 2012, the city's annual revenues from sales taxes and property taxes decreased by \$4.6 million annually, and the city's redevelopment program -- responsible for massive improvements in the city's infrastructure, especially in the downtown area -- went away in January 2012, when all state redevelopment agencies were dissolved.

In response, the city cut staff from 315 to 225 (having since rebounded slightly), reduced some employee medical and retirement benefits, eliminated nonessential services and enlisted private companies to operate the Delta View Golf Course and youth recreation programs, both previously operated by the city. The city still used \$2 million in reserves to help prop up the budget.

This all happened during a seven-year period when Pittsburg's population rose from 63,652 to 68,000.

"Although the city has seen significant recovery since 2008, challenges still remain," City Manager Joe Sbranti said. "It's very clear to us the (tax) extension would be extremely helpful."

While the city itself can't actively campaign for passage of such a ballot measure, Sbranti said it will be up to the city to put the budget numbers out there, and for others to make the case for continuing the half-cent tax, and that the city has been a good steward of the public's money.

"Hopefully, voters will agree we've been doing that," Sbranti said.

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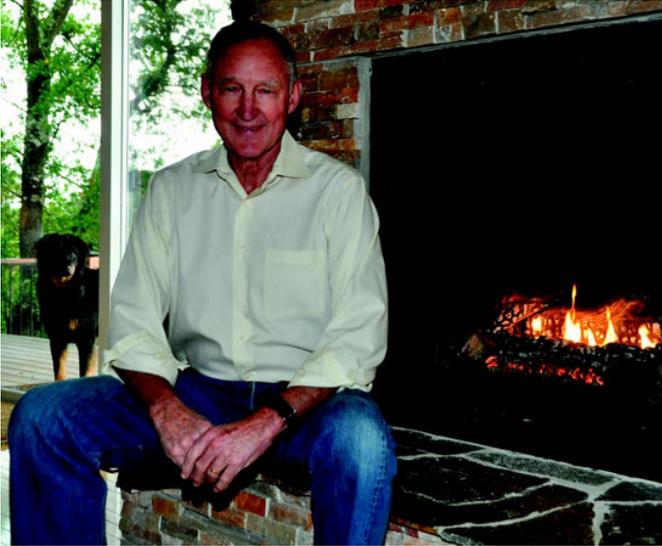
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A Conversation with MOFD Director Steve Anderson

By Nick Marnell



Steve Anderson at his Orinda home. Photo Andy Scheck

Steve Anderson takes over as president of the board of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District in January. He shared his observations of his three years as a director, and his outlook for the upcoming year, with the Lamorinda Weekly.

LW: Are you happy that you took this job?

I am. I've learned a lot, especially about how local government functions. Or doesn't function.

LW: What's been your biggest surprise?

How ineffectual local government can be, especially at the county level.

LW: An example?

When Contra Costa County closed fire station 16, the fire chief presented a plan to his board and was excoriated by his directors. I was embarrassed for him. Nothing of value was accomplished that day. The board's efforts were counterproductive. If it were me as the chief, I would have walked out of that meeting.

LW: What accomplishment are you proud of?

When I got here, MOFD had little ability to do financial forecasts. It was the district's weak suit, and the board recognized this. Over three years, we've done a remarkable job of forecasting our finances.

LW: So you're satisfied with the district financial condition?

I didn't say I was satisfied with our financial condition. We're working to get fiscal viability. At least now, we have the ability to measure our finances.

People will pick apart portions of our financials. Whether our unfunded pension liability is \$27 million or \$44 million or some other number people say it is, we're addressing it. We're putting out what our accountants and our actuaries tell us. Is it right? Probably not. Is it close? Probably.

LW: Why do you think the station 46 project fell apart?

It had a high probability of happening until revenue improved. It would have been a good deal for everyone. Why did it go off the rails? Frankly, I'm not sure.

But it was not because of MOFD. MOFD did not stall. We responded every time the ConFire attorney kept throwing changes back. It was never that we rejected outright any changes ConFire sent to us.

LW: Could 46 still happen?

From my perspective, I will try to keep 46 alive as long as possible. I'll be outvoted, but I think it's

best for the community, and fiscally it's an excellent deal. And despite what the residents of Honey Hill say, 46 had more advantageous response times than not.

LW: Even though you have gone on record as calling the county an "unreliable partner," you would re-enter into a joint venture with them?

Yes, I still consider the county an unreliable partner. But the contract contained provisions to protect us against them, such as specific remedies if either party pulled out of the deal.

LW: You have a very frustrated union membership.

Our employees are our best asset, period. But we can't just give them everything they want.

We are in a tenuous economy; 2008 could happen in a flash. One Islamic State attack in San Francisco, and the rate of return on our assets would plummet. We would be back where we were in 2008-09.

Maybe compared to adjacent districts, our firefighters are slightly underpaid. But it's what we can afford. We have an agreement into 2018, and I will continue to adhere to it.

LW: What do you foresee in 2016?

In my role as director, to ensure that MOFD provides the service it is established to do. And to be fiscally responsible, by continuing our rigid financial analysis. Also, to maintain our relationship with the union.

LW: Anything in particular you'd like to change?

I'd like to push the county retirement board to do even more, such as the changes it made to no longer count certain items toward pension payouts.

LW: A long-range goal?

Orinda roads are still a priority. Poor roads affect our response time, and replacing ambulances because they take a beating on the roads affects our bottom line.

Remember, it's not MOFD's job to sit on the taxpayers' money. So, once the district creates fiscal viability and achieves a surplus, shouldn't that money go back to the community? Maybe, to fix the roads?

LW: The district has taken a lot of grief - from the union, from residents, from the media, even from other public officials. How do you respond to the criticism?

To the people who want to complain, I would ask them to answer these questions:

When a resident calls, do we respond? Do we respond in a timely manner? And have we saved lives?

If they answer "no" to any one of those, then they should recall me.

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

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Recycled water in demand, and not just for parks, golf courses

By Sam Richards srichards@bayareanewsgroup.com

Posted: 01/02/2016 10:00:00 AM PST Updated: about 5 hours ago



Delta Diablo recycled water program coordinator Steve Rodriguez holds a bottle of influent wastewater, left, and a bottle of recycled water, right, that was processed at Delta Diablo in Antioch, Calif., on Monday, Dec. 28, 2015. (Jose Carlos Fajardo/Bay Area News Group) (JOSE CARLOS FAJARDO)

ANTIOCH -- The ongoing drought has driven interest in using recycled water instead of drinking-quality water wherever possible, but making that happen depends largely on where the "purple pipes" run.

Wastewater treatment agencies in the East Bay have been selling (or giving away) the water that runs through those purple pipes -- essentially wastewater that has been treated to a lesser degree than water purified for drinking and other domestic purposes -- for uses ranging from watering home gardens to helping cool down a power plant.

Even if the drought comes to a wet, El Niño-fueled end, cities, industries, and school and park districts will increasingly rely on recycled water. And that will require spending to expand the network of all-important purple pipes that, by state law, carry only "disinfected tertiary" water. Although it isn't safe for humans and animals to drink, it can be used on virtually any food crop and for irrigation of parks and playgrounds, school fields and golf courses.

"Moving recycled water requires separate infrastructure running to the various facilities, and that is very expensive," said Jennifer Allen, director of public affairs for the Contra Costa Water District. Bringing that water to more Contra Costa County industries, she said, will require wastewater agencies and the industries to pay for those purple pipelines and associated equipment.

Antioch-based Delta Diablo recently started supplying recycled water to Contra Costa Waste Services' Loveridge Road transfer station in Pittsburg for ongoing dust control needs, related mainly to recycling construction waste.

"Instead of the (transfer) station using drinking water for dust control, they're using recycled water," said Angela Lowrey, Delta Diablo's public information manager. "It's a matter of addressing the drought and preserving drinking water."

The cost of a gallon of recycled water is approximately one-quarter that of a gallon of drinking water, which is good news for the transfer station, operated by Concord-based Garaventa Enterprises. Sal Evola, a Pittsburg city councilman and a Garaventa governmental affairs officer, said it also plays into the transfer station's main mission.

"Our philosophy is to not waste things; for us, it's all about recovery," he said.

It also helps that the Loveridge Road facility is near an existing Delta Diablo "purple pipe," one the agency hopes will soon serve more industries, Lowrey said.

Even pre-drought, wastewater agencies supplied cities, school districts, park districts and other entities with recycled water. Delta Diablo, which has sold recycled water since 2000, can also serve industrial customers, thanks largely to its location on the East Contra Costa waterfront. Its first industrial client was the Calpine power plant a stone's throw away.

The Central Contra Costa Sanitary District, based near Concord, has had preliminary talks with CCWD and others about making more recycled water available for the area's industrial businesses and refineries.

"Are we looking at doing this? Definitely," said Emily Barnett, the sanitary district's intergovernmental affairs manager. "But other entities have to be involved for there to be a solution."

Part of that solution, she said, is creating projects large enough to be financially practical for both the wastewater agencies and the industries.

Many newer neighborhoods in San Ramon and Brentwood, among other places, have purple pipes as part of the original infrastructure. Concord's remade former Naval Weapons Station land will be built with such pipes, too.

Whether the expense of retrofit work in older, established neighborhoods is justified is a case-by-case matter, said Paul Eldredge, general manager of the Union Sanitary District, which serves Fremont, Union City and Newark.

"We'd have to determine whether the expense, and subsequent ratepayer hikes, would be worth it," he said. A partnership between his agency and the Alameda County Water District to pursue expanding recycled-water service has been discussed but would be at least two to three years away, he said.

The Tri-Valley has little industry, but the Dublin San Ramon Services District provides recycled water to construction companies for dust control. Far more of the district's recycled water goes to the cities of San Ramon and Dublin, the latter of which uses recycled water for 82 percent of its needs, said spokeswoman Sue Stephenson.

"Dublin has been a poster child for recycled water use," said Stephenson, noting that her agency is on the lookout for other bulk users.

Contact Sam Richards at 925-943-8241. Follow him at [Twitter.com/samrichardsWC](https://twitter.com/samrichardsWC).

East Contra Costa fire district mulls \$337 fee for medical aid

By Rowena Coetsee rcoetsee@bayareanewsgroup.com

Posted: 01/05/2016 02:48:45 PM PST | [Comment](#) | Updated: 40 min. ago

BRENTWOOD -- Residents in far East Contra Costa County will pay hundreds more for in-home and roadside emergency medical care if the region's fire district board adopts a fee for that service next month.

East Contra Costa Fire District directors on Monday agreed to hold a public hearing Feb. 1 on a proposed ordinance that would establish a \$337 fee for responding to urgent health complaints such as chest pains or dangerously low blood sugar levels.

"It's going to pique people's interest," said fire Chief Hugh Henderson, predicting a large meeting turnout the possibility of a fee will generate. "Some people feel that they're already paying for the service they're receiving, and others (in support of the fee) will say that we are looking at any other sources for revenue."

Once residents have spoken their minds, the board will vote on whether to adopt the so-called "first responder fee," an attempt by the financially embattled fire agency to recover its costs.

The \$337 fee, which would apply to every person firefighters treat during a call, would generate an estimated \$600,000 annually.

The fee would go toward not only the hourly expense of dispatching a three-person crew -- captain, engineer and rank-and-file firefighter -- but also the other costs associated with putting that team in the field, including fuel, insurance and vehicle maintenance, Henderson said.

He also noted that other fire districts around the county, including Contra Costa County Fire, Moraga-Orinda Fire and San Ramon Valley Fire districts, already charge such first responder fees.

The district would bill patients' health insurance companies and adopt policies to deal with those who couldn't afford the cost.

Henderson said that after deciding whether to adopt the fee, the board will revisit the idea of imposing fees for showing up at vehicle accidents and clearing crash sites, mopping up after structure fires and taking care of situations in which residents burn refuse in their backyards without the proper permits.

The directors' decision to pursue the fee comes on the heels of their Dec. 28 vote to renew their firefighters' contract, which expired Sept. 30, 2014. The new one covers the period Oct. 1, 2014, through June 30, 2017.

Effective Jan. 1, members of the International Association of Firefighters Local 1230 all received a 5 percent raise, and emergency medical technicians who undergo advanced training now will get an additional 5 percent pay hike.

As such, the annual pay for union members currently ranges from \$52,800 for an entry-level firefighter to \$74,016 for the most seasoned fire captain; the latter figure will increase to \$75,936 on July 1.

The raises do not apply to Henderson or the district secretary. The \$94,447 annual salary of the district's three battalion chiefs also will remain the same.

In addition, the 33-month contract establishes a 10 percent pay differential between ranks.

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

IF YOU GO WHAT: East Contra Costa Fire District board will vote on proposed \$337 fee for providing emergency medical care following a public hearing.

WHEN: 6:30 p.m. Feb. 1

WHERE: Oakley City Hall, 3231 Main St., Oakley

-
- 1 comment

[SJ RES](#) • [31 minutes ago](#)

Aren't these services already paid for by our (local and property) tax dollars ?

Investigators say probe of East Bay cop whose gun was stolen by prostitute flawed

By [Thomas Peele Tpeelee@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:Thomas.Peele@bayareanewsgroup.com)

Posted: **01/06/2016** 06:51:26 AM PST Updated: about 2 hours ago

Related Stories

KENSINGTON -- An internal investigation of a police sergeant's infamous encounter with a prostitute who stole his gun and badge in a Reno hotel room was flawed and didn't follow proper police procedures, a review by the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office has found.

But despite those findings, Sgt. Keith Barrow cannot face re-examination or further discipline under state police personnel laws, interim police Chief Kevin Hart said in a statement.

The review showed former Kensington Chief Greg Harman's investigation of Barrow "was not conducted in a manner consistent with the best practices of an objective internal affairs investigation. Nor was it conducted in a manner consistent with the policies of the Kensington Police Department," he said in a statement.



Kensington Police Chief Greg Harman answers a question during a board meeting at Kensington Community Center in this 2015 file photo. (Ray Chavez/Bay Area News Group archive) (RAY CHAVEZ)

Hart requested the review, but he did not return messages Tuesday to discuss the findings. As a result, the department will review future internal affairs complaints to determine if another agency should be asked to investigate them, Hart wrote. The department has just 10 officers, making it difficult to objectively investigate their colleagues.

The sheriff's department review brings to a close an embarrassing scandal that divided this East Bay hillside enclave of about 5,000 that is home to dozens of current and retired UC Berkeley professors.

Harman, 55, couldn't be reached. He lost his job when negotiations for a contract extension were abruptly cut off last year during a public outcry after this newspaper reported Barrow took a prostitute to his hotel room during a trip to Reno in 2014. Nevada police and court records showed she admitted stealing Barrow's pistol, badge, handcuffs and ammunition after he fell asleep.

She described him in court as "a john." The gun was found the next day when her pimp shot himself in the leg with it. Barrow remained on active duty while Harman investigated for more than six months. He was suspended without pay, but the length of the suspension has not been made public.

Harman's investigation "wasn't done properly, but we're stuck with what happened," said Len Welsh, president of the Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District board. He cited "stupid laws" that make police personnel records secret in California from keeping him from revealing details of the investigation's flaws.

"There is a widespread feeling that the discipline was not sufficient," he said Tuesday. "I don't think anyone is happy about it except maybe Barrow."



Kensington Police Department Officer Keith Barrow is seen in a 2009 photo. (Kristopher Skinner/Bay Area News Group archive) (KRISTOPHER SKINNER)

Barrow had no involvement in the investigation other than being its subject "and is unaware as to (Harman's) methodology," the officer's lawyer, Justin Buffington, wrote in an email Tuesday afternoon.

Buffington also said Tuesday that Barrow has "successfully completed a 30-day, intensive treatment program for alcoholism" after recognizing he is a victim of the disease and remains "alcohol-free" and committed to his job.

However, Barrow is now caught up in another town scandal. He and another officer are being investigated after they pulled over district Director Vanessa Cordova as she was driving in Berkeley last year. She alleges they harassed and threatened her. The Richmond Police Department is investigating the incident at Hart's request.

Cordova, who pushed for Harman's ouster, said the review's findings were not a revelation to her.

"This police department," she said, "has long enjoyed a systemic absence of oversight and the unflattering legacy that goes along with it."

Follow Thomas Peele at [Twitter.com/thomas_peele](https://twitter.com/thomas_peele).