

# Danville: Hated development in Tassajara Valley, now downsized and revamped, approaching approval

By Sam Richards , srichards@bayareanewsgroup.com  
The Mercury News

July 13, 2016  
Agenda Item 16c

Posted: Thu Jun 09 12:50:07 MDT 2016

DANVILLE -- Having undergone major changes in both size and form since it was proposed in 2007 as New Farm, a much smaller housing project east of the city limits in the Tassajara Valley is now well into the planning and approval process.

The 2016 version of the project, now called Tassajara Parks, calls for 125 homes, downsized from 152, on a 30-acre parcel just east of the San Ramon city limit. That is part of the original New Farm's northern site; the rest of its 155 acres are to remain open land.

The agricultural aspects of the plan are long gone, as is any planned development on the 616 acres of the southern site immediately west of Camino Tassajara. Plans now are for almost the entire parcel to be deeded to the East Bay Regional Park District as open space for recreational uses. A few acres would go to the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District for potential use as a training site.

Comments are being accepted on a draft environmental impact report for the project through July 18.

John Osborne, a Contra Costa County senior planner, said those comments will be incorporated into the final environmental report. The release date for that report, he said, will depend largely on the number and nature of public comments and questions to be addressed.

Tassajara Parks could come before the county planning commission and the board of supervisors late this year, Osborne said.

New Farm originally called for 185 houses, mostly very large ones, distributed on both the northern and southern parcels. The houses were to have been surrounded by working orchards and vineyards.

But that plan was bitterly opposed by environmentalists and others, in large part because it represented sprawl. It drew the moniker Fake Farm.

David Bowlby, a spokesman for project developer FT Land LLC, said it's been a long and at times laborious process, but ultimately "inclusive and collaborative."

FT Land would contribute \$4 million in seed money to help establish an agriculture preserve on the southern parcel, he added.

At a county Zoning Administrators hearing Monday, most supported the latest version of Tassajara Parks, which would nestle up to the east side of Tassajara Hills Elementary School.

"We have significant traffic issues already, and they're extremely hard to mitigate," said Gary Black, a San Ramon Valley school district assistant superintendent. But he said the developer will provide some much-needed extra driving and parking space on the east side of the school.

The new homes would feed an estimated 65 to 70 students into Tassajara Hills, plus district middle and high schools, which the district is well able to handle, Black said.

Juan Pablo Galvan, land use manager for the preservation group Save Mount Diablo, said that group hasn't yet taken a stand on the project itself, but is satisfied with proposed measures to help wildlife, including the California red-legged frog whose habitat includes the two large parcels.

The prospect of even the downsized project means more homes in the fast-growing Tassajara Valley, and that doesn't thrill everyone.

Richard Fischer, who lives on Old School Road just northeast of where the houses would be built, doesn't appreciate the precedent of a development like this breaching the urban limit line.

The county would have to adjust the urban limit line around the proposed residential parcel.

"With this, the nose of the camel is underneath the tent," he said. "Soon we'll have 'Dublin North.' "

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

Tassajara Parks

Written comments about the draft environmental impact report for this project are being accepted through July 18. Send them to John Osborne, Contra Costa County Department of Conservation and Development, 30 Muir Road, Martinez, CA 94553.

Close Window

Send To Printer

[http://www.thepress.net/news/fire-district-may-switch-to-elected-board/article\\_d4eb5d76-33e6-11e6-aa3b-a747c2281007.html](http://www.thepress.net/news/fire-district-may-switch-to-elected-board/article_d4eb5d76-33e6-11e6-aa3b-a747c2281007.html)

## Fire district may switch to elected board

Kyle Szymanski Staff Writer Jun 16, 2016



The East Contra Costa Fire Protection District Board will ask voters in November if they approve switching to a five-member elected board.

The move comes seven months after the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors agreed to pledge \$312,000 to help open a fourth station if the district considered some changes, including switching to an elected body.

“This question has never gone to the public,” said Fire Chief Hugh Henderson. “I don’t know if there is ever a good time to do it, but this seems to be the right time to move forward, with the work of the task force (to get a fourth station reopened) and the request of the board of supervisors. As the cities and the county have appointed different directors, the discussion has always been that at some point this board needs to move forward, be on its own two feet and be an elected board.”

Since 2009, the cities of Brentwood and Oakley and the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors have appointed the nine board members. Prior to that, the board of supervisors served as the district board for the first seven years of its existence.

The district considered posing the question to voters in 2011, but scrapped the effort over concerns about its cost.

This time around, the board seems poised to move forward, with the resolution passing in an 8-1 vote. Dr. Cheryl Morgan cast the lone dissenting vote.

Morgan said that having the district represented by an elected board would backfire. She expressed concern that the elected board will get rid of the contract with CalFire, which is currently used to serve parts of unincorporated areas of the district.

"I don't think this will end up being good for the district," she said. "I think you are going to get back into a situation where Morgan Territory, Marsh Creek and now Byron are going to petition again and use whatever legal means they have to separate. There is no reason for us to be part of this district if we are eventually going to lose the Amador (CalFire) contract and have no fire service."

Bethel Island resident Mark Whitlock expressed a similar concern.

"Logistically, for us in Bethel Island, we have a very big concern about having zero representation, with Brentwood and Oakley owning the lion's share of voters," he said.

The measure on the November ballot will only ask voters if they will approve switching to an elected board. If the measure receives a majority vote, the board seats would be filled in a separate election in November 2017. The initial election is slated to cost the district around \$112,000.

Opinions varied among board members on whether future board members should be elected at large or by wards. If the district is broken into wards, a consultant would be brought in, costing an unknown amount. This would ensure the wards are broken up evenly, based on population, and confirm no member of the populous is left unrepresented.

The majority of fire agencies in Contra Costa County are governed using elected boards, with the Moraga-Orinda Fire Protection District using a ward system and the San Ramon Valley and Rodeo-Hercules fire protection districts using an at-large system. The Contra Costa Board of Supervisors governs the nearby Contra Costa Fire Protection District and Crockett-Carquinez Fire Department.

Board president Joel Bryant said regardless of how the district board is chosen, it would have a responsibility to represent every district resident.

"This district as a whole is responsible for fire protection," he said. "Ward or no ward, the responsibility will be the same."

Board members Randy Pope and Meghan Bell both expressed support for breaking the district into wards to ensure residents in unincorporated areas are adequately represented.

"I feel very strongly it should be by ward, and we (should) pay close attention to how the lines are drawn to make sure every type of area has representation, because it would be very easy for Brentwood and Oakley to steamroll the rest of the unincorporated, lower-density population areas," said Pope.

Board member Erick Stonebarger countered that board members elected district-wide would be a better representation model, because each member could represent the entire district.

"I think the best representation for the district is a district-wide line," he said. "Everyone would be able to vote for whomever was the best candidate to take that position."

The district board plans to further discuss the matter at its June 20 meeting, which will be held inside the Oakley City Council Chambers, at 3231 Main St. The time of the meeting will be announced on June 18, at [eccfpd.org](http://eccfpd.org).

# Accepting 'new normal' for water, brings more challenges (East Bay Times guest commentary)

By Alexander R. Coate and Jerry D. Brown  
East Bay Times guest commentary  
East Bay Times

Posted: Fri Jun 17 13:00:00 MDT 2016

Droughts happen. And every one teaches us new habits and shows us new challenges. Droughts remind us that water is precious.

We write this on behalf of 10 member agencies of the Bay Area Water Agencies Coalition who serve more than 6.3 million Bay Area residents and thousands of businesses in Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Sonoma and Solano counties.

We thank our customers for their exceptional response to this drought and their tremendous conservation actions.

We also know they will maintain these water-wise habits for years -- reducing demands on future supplies. Is conservation here to stay? Count on it.

These are not just water-wise habits. Our customers have taken permanent water efficiency actions: upgrades in appliances and irrigation systems, replacement of turf, repair of leaks.

In just the last two years alone, customer rebates for high-efficiency toilets, efficient clothes washers, and lawn replacements will save 831 million gallons per year of drinking water for Bay Area communities.

These permanent savings are not a new trend. Our local water agencies have active conservation programs that have been in place for decades.

Our rebate programs, home water-wise evaluations and audits, and lawn replacement programs were in place and ready for when dry years arrived.

We have been advancing water efficiency, water-wise habits, and leak detection in various forms for years. With this recent drought, we are learning new lessons that will help us advance our programs and maintain the water savings our customers have achieved.

As we look ahead and consider new state directives, improved snowpack and water-supply conditions, and the possibility of returning dry conditions, we want to thank Gov. Jerry Brown and the State Water Resources Control Board for recognizing that local water agencies know our customers, water supplies and challenges best.

Our water systems, many put in place 100 years ago or more, are incredibly reliable.

As we adapt to a "new normal," we also must recognize challenges that lie ahead.

With successful conservation and water wise habits come reduced water sales, challenging revenue shortfalls and the need for cost efficiencies.

Water service is a capital-intensive business. With substantial fixed costs, achieving financial sustainability is key. Forgoing upkeep on the maintenance of the water systems that the Bay Area depends upon is not an option.

We also must pursue local and regional water supply reliability efforts, which include new infrastructure, recycled water projects and development of other alternative water supplies.

Municipal water systems are amazing, complex operations that must be managed responsibly. Before a single drop of water is delivered to your tap, it has been collected and transported from its source, treated and tested, and traveled miles to get to your home or business.

The complex water treatment and delivery process is a responsibility entrusted to us by our customers, and we work to deliver that service to homes and businesses, with the fire protection and water quality you expect, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

We are proud of the service we provide, and we encourage you to learn how we deliver safe drinking water to your tap every day.

Thank you again to our customers, local leaders and the state. Together, we successfully made it through this dry period. Together, we will move forward with new habits learned, new efficiencies locked in, and a commitment to planning wisely for the future.

Alexander R. Coate is general manager of East Bay Municipal Utility District and Jerry D. Brown is general manager of the Contra Costa Water District. Also signing the piece were water managers Robert Shaver, Alameda County Water District; Nicole Sandkulla, Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency; Joy Eldredge, city of Napa; Krishna Kumar, Marin Municipal Water District; Harlan L. Kelly Jr., San Francisco Public Utilities Commission; Grant Davis, Sonoma County Water Agency; Roland Sanford, Solano County Water Agency; and Jill Duerig, Zone 7 Water Agency.

Close Window

Send To Printer

## East Bay Times

# Should California limit the number of small, new water systems?

By Paul Rogers, [progers@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:progers@bayareanewsgroup.com)

Posted: 06/20/2016 05:25:27 AM PDT

California's drought has revealed that when it comes to water, not every community is equal.

Large urban areas, from the Bay Area to Los Angeles, asked residents to conserve, raised rates to buy water from other places and generally have gotten by without much inconvenience, other than brown lawns and shorter showers.

But communities served by smaller systems, from farm towns to forest hamlets -- often lacking money, expertise and modern equipment -- have struggled and, in some cases, nearly run out of water entirely.

Now, a bill by a Bay Area state lawmaker aims to slow the spread of little "mom and pop" water providers by making it very difficult to create new ones.

The problem, says state Sen. Bob Wieckowski, D-Fremont, is that California has 7,642 water systems. Some serve only campgrounds, prisons or schools. Of the ones in communities with full-time residents, 63 percent have 200 or fewer connections.

Many have no permanent employees. Some own only one well and have leaky, aging pipes and tanks. State records show they have far more health violations than large city water districts, involving everything from arsenic to bacteria levels in drinking water.

"We see a proliferation of these small districts, some with 100 homes, 200 homes, even 15 homes," Wieckowski said. "Some of them are just putting in a well and saying, 'this is a water district' without the money or the technical expertise to operate it."

Under current law, in much of California anyone can create a private company or a new public agency to set up a water system with a vote from local officials, such as the county.

Wieckowski's bill, Senate Bill 1263, would require applicants instead to identify other water agencies within 3 miles, then meet with those agencies, and write a report comparing how much it would cost residents to simply connect to the existing, larger water system rather than creating a new one. Every new system would need a permit from the State Water Resources Control Board in Sacramento.

"There's no rhyme or reason now," he said. "We need to be more efficient."



The bill, which passed the Senate 21-14 last month, also requires a study of how a new system's supply would hold up over 20 years, including in droughts.

But the debate, pitting environmentalists against business interests, is raising questions about whether bigger is better, and how much local control matters.

Opponents include the California Chamber of Commerce, California Building Industry Association and Association of California Water Agencies. They note that it's often developers who need to create new water systems, particularly if they can't work out agreements with existing ones.

"In its current form, the bill would set up an open-ended bureaucratic process that could make it more expensive to build new homes and developments," said Valerie Nera, a lobbyist with the California Chamber of Commerce.

Supporters cite a 2015 state water board report that showed systems with under 200 connections accounted for 69 percent of all arsenic violations in the state, 94 percent of nitrate violations and 92 percent of bacteria violations.

"Some of these smaller agencies are not able to provide people with clean water," said Kathryn Phillips, director of Sierra Club California. "We've seen a lot of that happening in the San Joaquin Valley, and we want to make sure that doesn't happen again. This provides more oversight."

But others say having larger agencies provide water gives locals less say over rates and rules.

"We've seen what happens with consolidation of smaller business into larger corporations. Sometimes you don't have the same level of service, and you can fall through the cracks," said Tyler Boswell, who works as an operator for seven small water systems in the mountains between Los Gatos and the Santa Cruz County line.

In 2014, as the drought worsened, Boswell watched as Aldercroft Heights, a small community near Lexington Reservoir whose water system serves 350 people, was told by San Jose Water Co., which serves 1 million people, that it might run out of water. The reason: San Jose Water was going to stop releases of water from Lake Elsman, which empties into Los Gatos Creek, the main source of water for Aldercroft Heights.

The tiny community dug a well, put in strict conservation rates and got by when natural springs continued to feed the creek. Other small areas had an even rougher time.

Lompico, a community of 480 people east of Boulder Creek in the Santa Cruz Mountains, saw its wells drying up in 2014.

"It was pretty bad. We were running out of water," said Merrie Schaller, a former member of the Lompico Water District board. "We have old redwood tanks. Everything leaks. We had to tell people, 'Don't use water unless you have to.' Nobody could grow a garden."

The district, founded generations ago when the area was a collection of summer vacation cabins, raised rates and got a grant from the state to build an emergency pipeline connecting it with the larger San Lorenzo Valley Water District. A vote to merge with that district failed by one vote, but then passed on a later vote, and took effect this month.

"A lot of it is emotional," she said. "People here said it was cool to have our own water district. They thought nobody gets to tell us what to do. But the state tells us what to do. Everybody has to meet the public health standards, and it's not cheap."

Paul Rogers covers resources and environmental issues. Contact him at 408-920-5045. Follow him at [Twitter.com/PaulRogersSJMN](https://twitter.com/PaulRogersSJMN).

## East Bay Times

# Contra Costa, Alameda: Agriculture finds room to grow

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

Posted: **06/24/2016** 02:28:31 PM PDT | Updated: a day ago

While "U-pick" berries, Livermore wine grapes and Brentwood sweet corn may be most people's mental image of East Bay agriculture, Contra Costa and Alameda counties produce a wide variety of crops and livestock -- and in a wide array of settings.

Even with the explosion of new subdivisions and strip malls in the early 2000s, and despite the drought after that, agriculture's various forms remain key economic drivers in both counties after almost 200 years. Some sectors are on a distinct upswing, including cattle, wine grapes and urban farms, and overall agricultural income is trending upward.



Mariana Malevich, of Hayward, shows off a large beet grown at City Slicker Farms in Oakland, Calif., on Friday, June 24, 2016. This urban farm grows and sells their produce on site in a totally urban setting. Contra Costa and Alameda counties produce a wide variety of crops and livestock even as both counties become more urbanized. (Dan Honda/Bay Area News Group)

"There is a lot of urban farming, sustainable urban landscaping, farmers markets, things that aren't obvious in the crop reports," said Edmund Duarte, Alameda County's deputy agricultural commissioner. "Agriculture is a pretty diverse industry."

Contra Costa County's 2015 overall agricultural production value was up more than 7 percent from the previous year, according to the county's 2015 Annual Crop and Livestock Report, approved by county supervisors Tuesday and submitted to the state.

Alameda County numbers were still being updated this past week, but Duarte said that the county's two biggest agricultural sectors, wine grapes and cattle, will likely continue to grow over the next several years.

With less land devoted to agriculture now than there was two decades ago, farmers have had to adjust.

"Contra Costa agriculture has gotten smaller in the past 20 years, but a number of farmers have shifted to a higher-value type of farming -- crops for the table," said Chad Godoy, Contra Costa County's agricultural commissioner.

That evolution has long since come to the Brentwood-Discovery Bay-Delta islands area, Contra Costa's agricultural core, where crops destined for the dinner table, not a food processor or grain elevator, have increased in importance. It's in full effect at G&S Farms, a 1,000-acre operation just east of Brentwood, where the sweet corn harvest is now in full swing. All of the estimated 20 million ears to be harvested this year will go straight to grocery stores near and far.

"There's great demand for local product and good support from retailers" like Safeway, said Glenn Stonebarger, a partner in the family-owned farming operation that also grows cherries, beans and cannery tomatoes.

### **The 'multiplier effect'**



Crews harvest sweet corn at G&S Farms in Brentwood, Calif., on Friday, June 24, 2016. Contra Costa and Alameda counties produce a wide variety of crops and livestock even as both counties become more urbanized. (Dan Honda/Bay Area News Group)

There are also the visitors to the wineries in the established Livermore region and in up-and-coming wine regions like Lamorinda, plus East Contra Costa's U-pick farms and the more than 60 certified farmers markets throughout both counties. The ever-popular "multiplier effect" of money from agricultural workers, buyers and support businesses made the total estimated agriculture-related economy worth \$225 million in Contra Costa in 2015, according to the county's annual crop report.

The gross value of Contra Costa's crops and related products in 2015 was about \$128.5 million, up 7.24 percent from 2014. Notable items in the report included a 27 percent increase in the value of vegetable and seed crops (mostly sweet corn and table and cannery tomatoes) and a 17 percent decrease in value for the tree nut crop, mostly in far eastern Contra Costa, thanks to both poor market conditions and smaller overall yield.

The cherry crop was again below average in 2015, the report said, mostly because of bad weather (including untimely late-season rains) that harmed the fruit.

Contra Costa's leading agricultural products in 2015, in descending order, were cattle, tomatoes, sweet corn, miscellaneous vegetables, grapes, field corn, alfalfa, walnuts, miscellaneous field crops, cherries, peaches, livestock pasture, apricots and wheat.

### **Variety is a key**

Jeff Langholz, a senior researcher at the consulting firm Agricultural Impact Associates, said Contra Costa has maintained a healthy variety of crops.

"By maintaining its economic diversity within agriculture, Contra Costa County is insulating itself from future economic shocks, rather than put all its eggs in a single basket," said Langholz, whose firm helped prepare this year's Contra Costa agricultural report.

In Alameda County, the gross crop value, Duarte said, rose from \$35 million in 2010 to \$46 million in 2014. It's a less diverse agricultural economy than the one in Contra Costa, with fruit and nuts -- propelled by the Livermore wine region's grape growing -- representing the greatest agricultural value, followed closely by cattle. Those, along with nursery trees, shrubs and flowers, make up most of that county's agricultural production, Duarte said.

Outside of Contra Costa's "agricultural core," small pockets of production include the up-and-coming wine regions in Lamorinda, Walnut Creek and Martinez, the nurseries of Richmond and the wide-open spaces for cattle in the hills between Martinez and Hercules, in the Tassajara Valley east of Danville and on various East Bay Regional Park District properties.

The heart of Alameda County's agricultural area is the Livermore-Pleasanton-Sunol wine region, plus the ranch operations concentrated in the same general area, but it also encompasses the open spaces north of Interstate 580 from North Livermore into the hills west of Dublin, where cattle roam.

### **Future looks good**

Godoy said Contra Costa growers have weathered the drought relatively well, thanks largely to widespread use of drip irrigation and through area irrigation districts' relatively robust senior water rights, ensuring at least a semblance of a steady supply. Livermore area wineries also have adopted drip irrigation on a large scale.

Urban farms, resembling community gardens but with a distinct commercial aspect, have long been established in Oakland and Berkeley, and are gaining popularity now with the "farm to table" movement and campaigns to bring healthier food to the inner cities. The West Oakland Farm Park, a large plot of farmland and open park space, opened earlier this month.

"I think it's going to be an important niche, providing locally grown vegetables and fruits," said Stephen Wheeler, a landscape architecture professor at UC Davis, who called such operations "community-supported agriculture."

A fifth generation of Stonebarger's family is now working at G&S Farms, even as relatively new tract homes have been built less than 200 feet from the nearest G&S fields. That interface, and the inevitable clashes with modern suburbia, present liability issues, he said.

But the county, especially the city of Brentwood, has been supportive of G&S and other farms, Stonebarger said, and the hand-picked, high-quality corn his farm supplies has never been more popular.

"I think the growers have contributed to Brentwood's good name; it's a good brand," he said.

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

### East Bay Agriculture

To see Contra Costa County's 2015 Crop Report, go to [www.cccounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/41302](http://www.cccounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/41302)

Alameda County's latest agricultural report, from 2014, can be viewed at

[www.acgov.org/cda/awm/resources/2014cropreport.pdf](http://www.acgov.org/cda/awm/resources/2014cropreport.pdf)

Information on the West Oakland Farm Park is available at [www.cityslickerfarms.org/farmpark](http://www.cityslickerfarms.org/farmpark)

# East Contra Costa Fire polls voters on proposed tax with negative results

By Rowena Coetsee, [rcoetsee@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:rcoetsee@bayareanewsgroup.com)  
East Bay Times

Posted: Thu Jun 23 12:23:08 MDT 2016

OAKLEY -- A survey of residents in the East Contra Costa Fire District shows that most would not support a utility user tax to shore up the cash-strapped agency.

A task force that has spent the past year wrestling with ways to drum up a steady source of revenue for the historically underfunded district commissioned the poll, which consisted of interviews with 894 people by phone and email over the course of a week.

The Fire and Medical Services Task Force, which comprises 10 government and fire district officials, earlier this month floated the idea of asking voters in November to approve a tax on electricity, gas, cable TV and telephone service.

But the results released Wednesday suggest that it's unlikely the proposal would garner the simple majority vote required to pass: The highest rating the tax received anywhere in the district's service area was 47 percent.

"The public appears to be happy with being underserved," said Fire Chief Hugh Henderson, noting that 69 percent of the respondents indicated they are pleased with its performance.

Before settling on the utility user tax, the task force also had considered proposing another parcel tax or benefit assessment; the fire district pursued each of those options in 2012 and 2015, respectively, but voters rejected both.

A utility user tax has two advantages: It needs a simple majority vote to pass unlike the two-thirds margin that a parcel tax requires, said Brentwood City Manager Gus Vina, who heads up the task force.

In addition, it's more equitable because everyone would pay whereas parcel taxes and benefit assessments affect only property owners, he said.

"I thought we had something that was very different and maybe would get some traction, but that doesn't appear to be the case," Vina said.

One thing he is sure of, however, is that the fire district and task force must keep trying to get the public to understand the dangers of having only three stations.

"The issue is too critical to give up," he said.

People either can approve a tax or pay more for their homeowners' insurance -- assuming they can get it, Vina said, noting that some area residents say their insurance carriers are denying coverage altogether.

Since the task force formed in June 2015, it also has recommended that East Contra Costa Fire reopen Knightsen's station and update its master plan, which specifies how many stations the district needs to accommodate a growing population while achieving response times that meet industry standards.

The consulting firm that East Contra Costa Fire hired to update that 10-year-old document presented its findings Monday: The conclusion was that the district needs nine stations if it hopes to respond to emergencies in its more rural areas within eight minutes.

The agency currently operates just three stations that serve about 115,000 residents. The estimated cost of establishing four stations in Brentwood, three in Oakley and two in unincorporated areas is \$15.6 million annually, according to the consultant's report.

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

## East Bay Times

# San Ramon: Police Chief Gorton to be interim city manager

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

Posted: **06/25/2016** 08:50:56 PM PDT | Updated: a day ago

SAN RAMON -- With the impending retirement of City Manager Greg Rogers, police Chief Joe Gorton has been appointed interim city manager effective July 1.

Gorton, 50, has been with the department since it was established in 2007, when the city opted to stop contracting with the Contra Costa Sheriff's Department for police services. Gorton has been chief since November 2013, succeeding the first chief, Scott Holder, upon his retirement.

"In the short term, my job is to keep San Ramon on a steady path," the one overseen by Rogers since April 2011, Gorton said. Gorton said his city manager duties will take precedence over his police chief work and plans on delegating more of the latter functions to the police department's command staff.

Rogers announced last month he would retire July 1 to end a 25-year career in government, including the past 13 years in San Ramon. Mayor Bill Clarkson and Vice Mayor Scott Perkins praised Rogers' strength in negotiating the city's finances since the recession in an era of increased online shopping and a smaller brick-and-mortar sales tax base.

"He really put the city back on its feet after the Great Recession, and thanks to his leadership we're in a really good position going forward," Clarkson said.

Rogers said he is proud of his work as San Ramon's finance director to help shore up the city's fiscal footing, and as city manager helping oversee the opening in 2014 of Rancho San Ramon Community Park and the May opening of the new San Ramon City Hall, long in the planning.

"I feel like the city is in better shape than when I came, and that's always been my goal," Rogers said.

That said, plenty of challenges await his long-term successor. The city will have to develop a more robust revenue stream to pay for upkeep of what will soon be a half-billion-dollar infrastructure of streets, bridges and sewers serving a growing city, Rogers said.

Part of that growth figures to be driven by the City Center commercial/residential project on Bollinger Canyon Road envisioned as the downtown San Ramon has never had. Designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, this will be a signature project for the city, set to open in 2018.

Clarkson said no timeline has been established to choose a permanent successor to Rogers; the City Council will likely start talking about it in July, he said. Perkins said it might be better to wait to begin the search until at least November, when three of San Ramon's five council members are up for re-election, or possibly after Jan. 1.

"We'll likely get a better pool of applicants if we wait," Perkins said.

Gorton said he is thus far unsure about pursuing the city manager's job beyond the interim. He said he's never held such a job before but said that as a member of San Ramon's "executive management team," he has a pretty good handle on the various issues and challenges facing the city.

"If I find it feels right for me, then I would consider throwing my hat in the ring for the permanent position," said Gorton.

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



## East Bay Times

# Contra Costa County: Fire crews spread thin as flames rage in Brentwood, Antioch

By Rick Hurd, [rhurd@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:rhurd@bayareanewsgroup.com)

Posted: **06/26/2016** 10:12:19 AM PDT | Updated: about 19 hours ago

A homeowner was hospitalized, a firefighter injured and a Brentwood home destroyed in the last of a string of fires in Contra Costa County on Saturday that spread crews thin and left them weary on a day when temperatures reached the high 90s.

Medics treated and released the firefighter for a heat-related injury, Fire Chief Hugh Henderson of the East Contra Costa Fire Protection District said. He was part of a crew of 21 that needed eight hours to put out the house fire in the 100 block of Sycamore Avenue after it started around 3:28 p.m., Henderson said.

Fire crews controlled that blaze in about 90 minutes, and many of the firefighters then were dispatched to fight a four-alarm fire in Antioch. Those remaining at the Brentwood scene needed another 6 1/2 hours to make sure the fire would not reignite, Henderson said.



An Antioch home was damaged by a fire Saturday. (Contra Costa Fire)

The Brentwood fire broke out as crews were fighting a grass fire that claimed 45 acres and destroyed a building near Willow Pass Road and Evora Road in an unincorporated part of the county between Concord and Bay Point.

At the same time, crews also were responding to the blaze in Antioch at a home in the 900 block of Burwood Way that grew to five alarms.

That fire started when a man threw a cigarette out his window, said Fire Marshal Robert Marshall of the Contra Costa Fire Protection District. It destroyed one home and damaged two others.

A multivehicle crash on Highway 4 that involved a person trapped in a vehicle further complicated the efforts, delaying the response to the Antioch fire and allowing it to spread, authorities said.

The California Highway Patrol did not have information on that incident available Sunday morning.

"In many ways, it was a perfect storm of events," Henderson said.

The fires also highlighted the challenge the district faces after closures to two East County stations last year, Henderson said. The fire in Brentwood left that area uncovered by other fire crews for an eight-hour span, Henderson said.

"If another fire had broken out, it would've been put out by agencies coming from Alameda and San Joaquin counties," Henderson said.

The blaze in Brentwood appears to have started in a back shed, and it extended into the house through an open patio after several explosions in the shed, according to a statement from East County Fire Battalion Chief Jeff Burris.

The fire also caused power lines to fall, which delayed the attack from one side of the home for 45 minutes, Burris said. That delay, along with the diversion of some firefighters to the blaze in Antioch, caused the house fire to spread to the attic, Burris said.

A Brentwood police officer also suffered a heat-related illness and was treated and released at the scene, Burris said. An update on the resident who suffered heat-related injuries and was hospitalized was not available immediately.

Investigators have not determined the cause of that fire.

In Antioch, they talked to the resident of the home who threw the cigarette out the window, Marshall said.

Authorities did not announce any arrests immediately.

"It's a careless fire, but there will be repercussions for the gentleman who started it," Marshall said.

Temperatures topped out at 98 degrees on Saturday in Concord and Antioch, according to the National Weather Service. High winds also made the conditions difficult.

Staff writer Karina Ioffe contributed to this story. Contact Rick Hurd at 925-945-4789 and follow him at [Twitter.com/3rdERH](https://twitter.com/3rdERH).

Published June 29, 2016

## ConFire Chief: Reach Out, He'll Be There

By Nick Marnell



Jeff Carman Photo provided

The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District was in dire need of strong leadership. The district had closed four fire stations after a failed 2012 parcel tax initiative, the labor group had tuned out management, property tax revenue was flat and according to the county administrator, the district was headed toward bankruptcy. Lafayette, a city that accounted for more than \$8 million a year in tax revenue, threatened to detach from the district after the closure of one of its fire stations and plans for a replacement station stalled. If that weren't doom and gloom enough, a consultant warned the county that the ConFire business model was unsustainable.

It was the exact opportunity that Jeff Carman, a 29-year veteran of the Roseville Fire Department, had been seeking.

"I was ready for the challenge," said Carman, who took over as chief of the \$100 million district in October 2013. "They wanted someone who would look at things differently. ConFire is much bigger than Roseville, so it was a little intimidating. I knew it wasn't a boutique fire department," - over 240 ConFire suppression personnel respond to 45,000 calls a year out of 25 staffed fire stations - "but I was up for it."

Carman, 52, in good enough shape that he recently took up snowboarding, started as a junior firefighter for the city of Grass Valley. As soon as he turned 18 he went to work for an ambulance company. He rose to assistant chief of operations at Roseville, leading the largest all-hazard fire district in the second-most industrialized county in California. There he faced his most difficult decision as an incident commander. ... continued on page A8

A fire in a tank car holding 270,000 gallons of propane forced the evacuation of nearly 5,000 homes in the city of Lincoln. "A two-mile blast if it exploded, seven to eight thousand fatalities," Carman said. "It would have killed more people than any incident I've been in." How to keep the rail car cool enough so it wouldn't blow up, with temperatures rising to 1,000 degrees, was the challenge. "If it hit 1,200 we knew it would explode. It was the toughest decision I ever made: should we just let this thing blow, or deal with it? The group agreed - we had no choice. We had to go in. We sent firefighters into the blast zone for 36 hours, pumping 5,500 gallons of water a minute, until the car ran out of fuel."

That was the decisive leadership ConFire desperately sought, and Carman quickly got his chance to exhibit that leadership.

Jumping Right In

A consultant told the fire board that the struggling district should take two engines out of service in select companies and replace them with three, two-person squads, since more than two-thirds of the district calls were medical related. "But what about the third that are fire responses?" said Carman, who fought the proposal and secured agreement from his directors. "The board gave me the latitude to do what I saw was right, and it has paid off."

"He was open and transparent with us serving on the fire board, and also with our employees and labor groups," ConFire board chair Candace Andersen said.

The chief took off from there.

The district hadn't hired firefighters in five years. Mandatory overtime racked the staff, which was down 40 positions. "We had an internal clash with human resources. They weren't working fast enough. We started meeting and broke down the barriers," Carman said. The district filled three fire academies in 18 months and today is nearly fully staffed.

"We didn't get along with the sheriff's department," the chief said. Again he reached out. "My first day on the job I had a meeting at the sheriff's office," said assistant chief of operations Lon Goetsch. "We talked about partnering to use their helicopter for fire rescue in addition to law enforcement." The departments struck a deal, and ConFire now has a dedicated budget for an aerial rescue program. The helicopter crew recently helped ConFire rescue a collapsed hiker in the Lafayette hills.

### Building Morale

After the parcel tax defeat, the rank and file felt betrayed by the public, and they did not trust the fire and county leadership. "Carman built morale. He visited every station, consistently, a couple a week. He asked for feedback," said Vince Wells, president of International Association of Fire Fighters Local 1230. "In our contract negotiations, during conflict with the negotiating team, instead of the usual standard of the chief staying out of it, he spoke up and advocated for us to get a deal done."

The city of Lafayette, bitter over the closure of fire station 16 at the western end of the city, threatened to detach from the district. Carman held things together by meeting with city officials and task force members and updating them on ConFire's progress. "I had to show the public that we're worth what they're paying for. The firefighters do some incredible work, and they just go back to their stations and don't talk about it. On the one hand, I admire that. But, you've got to let people know what you're doing." In May, the ConFire board approved a total rebuild of station 16.

Carman's legacy with ConFire will likely be tied to his integration of nearly the entire county emergency ambulance transport system into the fire district. A non-traditional revenue source, yes, for a district that sorely needs revenue; but by absorbing the ambulance system into ConFire, where he can control dispatch, Carman saved the duplication of an engine and a private ambulance response, easing wear and tear on the engines and keeping them available for fire emergencies. It was a first-of-its-kind amalgamation in recent California history.

"Carman always gave me a heads-up before a controversial subject, like, starting the ambulance business," Wells said. "He wanted our buy-in before he even approached the board." Added Goetsch, "He used his industry contacts and pulled all of that expertise together. He reached out to fire chiefs throughout the county, then to his boss and then the board."

The chief said his ambulance deal is his favorite. "We were able to take the money that was going to the private company and use it to enhance our local medical system."

### Working with MOFD

Even a deal that fell through did not stain Carman's image: the fire station 46 joint venture

between ConFire and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District. Carman inherited the project, an attempt to save each fire district \$1 million annually in operating costs by consolidating two stations at the Orinda-Lafayette border.

"The 46 project was a little frustrating," Carman said. "It looks so good to the public, like it's so easy to do, but it involved two drastically different agencies and putting them under the same roof. I never think anything is impossible, but that was going to be problematic."

MOFD chief Stephen Healy praised Carman's efforts through the tedious, time-consuming negotiation process. "He was always very respectful toward our organization, which I really appreciated," Healy said. "We're still friends and have since worked together on a number of other projects."

### A County Leader

Bankruptcy is no longer mentioned. Neighboring agencies have reached out to ConFire, for help with everything from additional mutual aid to station construction. Impenetrable walls barely exist between ConFire and other county departments. Tax revenue increased, and after years of zero spending on capital projects, the district unveiled a 5-year, \$36 million capital improvement plan. "I've never worked harder than I am now," Goetsch said. "We've revitalized our organization."

"I am enjoying my job every day," Carman said. "It has its challenges but we seem to be solving them and that is satisfying. I appreciate the support we get from the community."

Lafayette fire commissioner Bill Granados summarized maybe best of all the respect the chief has garnered.

"Every decision the guy has made has been the right one," he said.



The Chief off duty in Cabo Photo provided

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

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA



**Independent, locally owned and operated!**

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published June 29, 2016

## **Despite Surplus, Moraga-Orinda Fire District Still Bugged Down By Budget Sticking Points**

*By Nick Marnell*

Even as the Moraga-Orinda Fire District projected a general fund surplus of nearly \$250,000 for fiscal year 2016-17, Fire Chief Stephen Healy warned that the district still struggles with employee recruitment and retention, and the firefighters union complained about district income inequality. The district board approved a budget June 15 that included general fund revenue of \$20.4 million, a 4.6 percent increase over the prior year thanks in large part to a 6.3 percent increase in property tax revenue, with general fund expenses increasing 7 percent to \$20.2 million. Much of the expense increase was due to higher salaries and benefits, including retirement contribution costs and health insurance charges.

"Recruiting and training firefighters is very expensive," the chief told the board earlier. "We need to remain competitive in the regional job market." Healy noted that the improved economy in the Bay Area is adding pressure for public agencies to stay competitive, with agencies that offer the best pay and benefits pulling tenured employees away from other agencies.

"Our firefighters have never asked to be the highest paid in the area, but have only asked to keep pace," Healy said, pointing to an internal salary survey which found that the MOFD firefighters are paid more than 20 percent below the Bay Area average of comparable fire districts. "We must retain the high quality employees that we currently have," the chief said.

The firefighters union added its own take to the salary discussion by lashing out at the district board over the chief's 4.5 percent pay increase, which pushed his salary to \$229,000 effective July 1.

"If you go back 10 years ago to July 2006, the signed contract for the chief position included a base salary of \$173,000," Local 1230 representative Mark DeWeese told the board, noting that the 32 percent increase for the chief's salary far exceeded the 12.5 percent pay increase for the rank and file over the same period.

"Income inequality is a major national political issue and we have a similar problem here in our district," DeWeese said.

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

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA



**Independent, locally owned and operated!**

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published June 29, 2016

## Tax Disparity in MOFD is Still a Hot Issue in Orinda

By Nick Marnell

Orindans frustrated with a perceived tax funding inequity perpetrated by the Moraga-Orinda Fire District made their case to the district board June 15, and for once the directors promised to fully investigate the residents' concerns.

MOFD is funded mainly through two distinct revenue sources: the ad valorem 1 percent tax on real property and the special district-assessed parcel tax, called the fire flow tax, roughly billed at six cents per square foot of a residence. For fiscal year 2016-17, MOFD projects property tax revenue of \$18.5 million and fire flow tax revenue of slightly more than \$1 million.

Though all residents of the district pay the 1 percent tax to Contra Costa County, the amount of the tax allocated to the fire district varies by municipality. Again roughly speaking, more than 22 cents out of the Orinda property tax dollar goes to MOFD, while 19 cents per tax dollar is delivered to the district out of Moraga.

This uneven percentage distribution, which is based upon allocations determined under Proposition 13, is one aspect of the Orindans' perceived funding inequity. Another is assurance of the use of Orinda tax dollars only in Orinda, which some perceive as a promise made to Orindans before the 1997 merger of the Orinda Fire Protection District with the Moraga Fire Protection District. MOFD has operated as a consolidated district since 1999, with all services provided on an integrated basis, so somehow the script went sideways and the district veered off track, according to Orinda resident Steve Cohn.

"The framers of the merger from the Orinda side did make their intentions very clear with regards to the 22.8 percent of Orinda's ad valorem property taxes going to MOFD," Cohn said. He cited material printed in the voters' pamphlet endorsing the measures for the creation of MOFD, which stated that one of the driving forces for the creation of the new district was to "insure that fire protection dollars Orindans pay will stay in Orinda."

But statements made in voter pamphlets are not binding whatsoever, said Dick Olsen, then-vice chair of the Moraga Fire Committee. "Whatever was presented is immaterial," he said. Comments in voter pamphlets are merely a form of free speech, and they carry no official weight.

Yes, a tax disparity existed at the time, said director Brad Barber of Orinda, but it apparently was not of interest to the district founders or to the voters, or nobody knew what to do about it.

"We never discussed property tax equity then. There were too many other things going on," said Gordon Nathan, one of the early MOFD directors.

Solutions were in short supply, with Vince Maiorana of Orinda suggesting that MOFD raise the Moraga tax allocation rate to 22 percent, something the district has no authority to do. Moraga director Fred Weil, long critical of the Orinda complaints, again emphasized that what is relevant is not the revenue distribution but the service provided by the district.

Nevertheless, unlike abjectly dismissing the Orindans' concerns as they had in previous years, the directors agreed to continue the discussion of all aspects of district funding at a full board session, likely later this summer, with the intention of formalizing a policy decision on tax equity.

"Either it's equitable and here's why, or let's answer the question and do all the math, no matter how long it takes, until we resolve it," said Alex Evans, a director from Orinda.

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

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA



## East Bay Times

# Delta islands sale blocked by court order again

By Denis Cuff, [dcuff@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:dcuff@bayareanewsgroup.com)

Posted: 07/01/2016 06:03:58 PM PDT | Updated: 3 days ago

SACRAMENTO -- The sale of four Delta islands to Southern California's largest water district was put back on hold Friday by an appeals court as Northern California opponents plan to take their case to the state Supreme Court.

Contra Costa and San Joaquin counties, environmentalists, and Delta land owners have opposed the move as linked to the governor's plans to build twin water tunnels to export pumps near Tracy in the southern Delta. Two of the islands are along the route for the tunnels.

One day after lifting a temporary order that blocked the sale, the state's Third District Court of Appeal reinstated the stay, preventing the big Metropolitan Water District from completing the \$175 million purchase of the islands.

The new stay lasts through July 15.

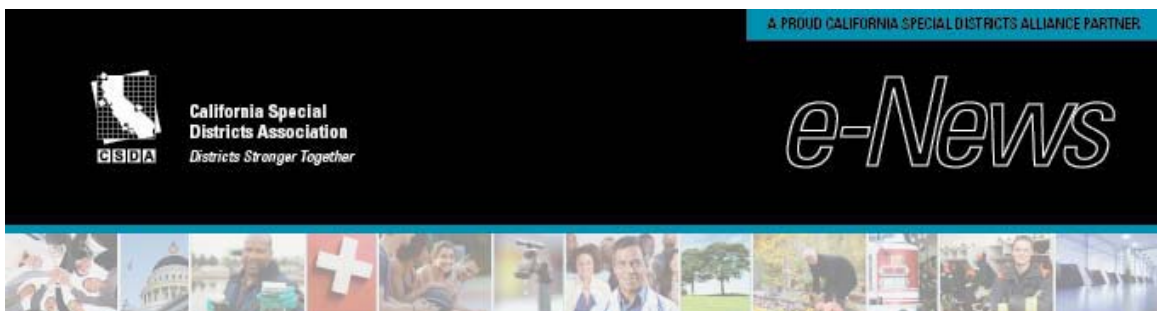
The plaintiffs plan to take advantage of the time to seek a sale injunction from the state Supreme Court, said Tony Rossmann, a Berkeley attorney for project critics.

Opponents say the tunnels will be used to export more Delta water to Southern California, and they assert that an environmental impact report should be done before the land sale is allowed.

Metropolitan Water District has argued there is no reason to stop the sale nor require an environmental report because no formal plan has been filed to use the island properties in a water project.

"We believe it's a simple purchase," said Metropolitan spokesman Bob Muir.

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



## Alamo's New Fire Station Under Construction

East Bay Times

Five years after it was approved to be built, the construction of a fire station on the corner of Miranda Avenue and Stone Valley Road is underway.

San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District Fire Chief Paige Meyer halted the construction process after he was hired in 2013, citing a shortage of funds. Construction was restarted earlier this year, he said.

"We are looking at a 12-month process, around Feb. 1 of next year," said Meyer about the time frame of completing the construction.

Meyer said the cost of constructing the building is close to \$4.3 million and that the total cost of the project is closer to \$4.7 million. The 7,968-square-foot building is on a 1.1-acre lot. It will house two fire companies -- one three-person, one two-person.

Changes have been made to the original plans for the station, which called for a 9,400-square-foot edifice in 2011. The overall area footprint of the building was reduced, six bathrooms were reduced to three, and the size of the gym was reduced. A classroom and suite/sitting areas in the firefighter bathrooms were also reduced, Meyer said.

"Particularly in the redesign of the station after the new chief came in, the design is much improved," said Mike Gibson, a member of the Alamo Improvement Association planning committee and board. "There was also very good cooperation with the district, in terms of doing lots of little things to blend the station into the neighborhood in terms of the walls and the generators. I'm pretty pleased."

Advertisement

Meyer said that one of the main reasons there was a need for a new station was the age of the current station, which he said was built in 1958. It is located less than a half-mile away on Stone Valley from the new station site. Another main reason is the location of the new station, Meyer said. It is at an intersection where the lights can be controlled to stop traffic.

"We know that Stone Valley is a fairly busy road, so to be at an intersection was a big deal for us," Meyer said.

It will also be an environmentally-friendly station with solar panels, Meyer said. Meyer praised the fire board, which he said "has done a great job of managing the district's funding and being smart and savvy on how to build the station. Let's not overextend ourselves; let's build it when we can financially handle it."

***If you like reading about special districts in the news, CSDA members can now [subscribe](#) to the [CSDA Blog](#) to receive "District Daily Press," a comprehensive, daily overview of news articles covering special districts from around the state.***

[California Special Districts Association](#) | 1112 I Street | Suite 200 | Sacramento, CA 95814 | 877.924.CSDA (2732)



A Proud California Special Districts Alliance Partner