

Fire district won't help Atherton with fiscal review

Board and board members send letters to town's city council



Menlo Park Fire Protection District Chief Harold Schapelhouman at a meeting of the fire district board of directors on Tuesday, Oct. 18, 2016. (John Orr / Daily News)

By **JOHN ORR** | jorr@bayareanewsgroup.com

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HIGHLIGHTS ▾

- "With that said, despite the fact that the District has no legal duty to participate in the Town's fire services review, MPFPD is dedicated to public transparency and intends to continue meeting any and all of its legal obligations."
- "As a resident of Atherton, I am offended that this richer community want to steal from the less fortunate."

The Menlo Park Fire Protection Board of Directors on Tuesday evening instructed

board President Rob Silano to sign a letter to Atherton City Manager George Rodericks stating that it would not participate in the town's possible fiscal review of the district's services.

The Atherton City Council is scheduled to meet tonight to discuss a request for proposals to hire a consultant to study the amount of money the fire district receives from Atherton property taxpayers, and the monetary value of fire district services to Atherton residents.

The topic has become a sore issue between the town and the fire district. The discussion began when Rodericks undertook to post information about all services to residents on the town's website.

While the fire district posts its financial information on its website, it does not provide a breakdown of income and outgo for specific service areas, which include Atherton, East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and unincorporated North Fair Oaks.

Fire Chief Harold Schapelhouman has told the town that the district doesn't keep the sort of financial breakdowns the town wanted.

The letter signed by Silano states, "The district has no legal responsibility to perform fiscal analysis nor participate in the town's fire services review. As per the Californian Government Code, the district has no obligation to collect, analyze or provide information or documents that do not already exist.

"With that said, despite the fact that the district has no legal duty to participate in the town's fire services review, MPFPD is dedicated to public transparency and intends to continue meeting any and all of its legal obligations."

At the meeting Tuesday, Director Peter Carpenter, who had been the board's liaison to Atherton, asked to be relieved of that duty. Director Chuck Bernstein, who had been liaison to East Palo Alto, will trade that job with Carpenter.

Carpenter sent his own letter to the Atherton City Council following the Tuesday meeting.

"The town of Atherton and the town council have no authority over the fire district and do not represent the residents of Atherton in any manner with regard to the fire District," the letter read. "In my opinion it would be a misuse of the town's funds to expend any additional staff time or money on a study the results of which would be of no use to the town given that the town has no authority in such matters. In addition, the efforts by the town to date have, in my opinion, already badly damaged the town's relationship with the fire District and pursuing this study will only exacerbate that situation.

"I urge you to drop this issue and to devote your attention to those matters which

you were elected to oversee.”

Also at Tuesday’s meeting, Schapelhouman told the board that Rodericks has asked Menlo Park to join in the fiscal review and that Menlo Park’s city council will discuss the matter at its next meeting.

Carpenter and other board directors reacted angrily, pointing out that Menlo Park hasn’t been willing to put a fire district request for fire code changes on the agenda for months to come, yet is willing to consider the Atherton approach immediately.

“Helping them on their fool’s errand is not your job,” Carpenter said, directed at the Menlo Park City Council.

Director Virginia Chang Kiraly said that she has gotten phone calls from Atherton residents who told her they think the proposed study would be a waste of money.

“I don’t know if people understand how the two entities (the fire district and Atherton) work,” she said. “Do we need to provide education?”

Tags: [Menlo Fire Protection District](#)



John Orr John Orr edits and writes for Daily News feature pages, including arts and entertainment. He also reports on the Town of Atherton and some other cities, Previously, he was mysteries and thrillers books columnist for the Mercury News, and also wrote about movies and blues music.

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