

# Joint Fire Committee Aims for June Report

By SALLY WILSON

Monday nights have been heating up for the 10 members of the joint Moraga/Orinda fire committee as they near a self-imposed deadline to have a plan for the merger of the two fire districts ready for their respective town and city councils. Scheduled for sometime in June, the status report would outline the steps necessary to form a fire district independent from the county's consolidated district.

According to Orinda resident and committee member Carl Weber, the committee has been brainstorming and working out the details of the planned merger for several months. "This is a very complicated project with lots of specific details - such as what size of budget and staff do you need and who handles the governance of the district - to decide upon," remarks Weber.

Following the council meetings, the application for merging the two districts will be submitted to the Board of Supervisors and the county's Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) for approval. "LAFCO will probably require us to submit the issue to the voters, where it would need a simple majority to pass," says Weber.

Orindan Pete Wilson has responsibility for putting together a tentative operations budget for the proposed joint district. Wilson also foresees the need for a capital budget that would include needed fire equipment for both districts and retrofitting of the three fire stations in Orinda.

The fire committee feels a fire-flow tax will be necessary to bring Orinda to parity with Moraga, particularly in the area of paramedic services. The exact amount of the proposed tax is still under consideration. Moraga passed a similar tax in 1980.

Wilson believes the question of water pressure for firefighting and condition of water pipes should not be considered by this committee. "It is really the responsibility of EBMUD to supply adequate water to the hydrants. What happens after that is the fire district's responsibility," remarks Wilson. "I personally want the water delivery system to stay out of the fire-flow tax. There are a number of options to be explored before hanging the expense on the tax.... We don't want to go before the public with what looks like the national debt." A fire-flow tax would require a two-thirds vote in order to pass.



Photo by Sally Wilson

*Many of Orinda's streets are narrow and run through heavily wooded terrain, making them hazardous routes for vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians. Dense vegetation also increases the risk of fire.*

## Spring's Growing Foliage Tomorrow's Road Hazards

By JOHN HERRELL

With the arrival of spring, particularly after a wet winter, Orinda's blossoms and rapidly growing foliage can, if not cut back, make driving our narrow, winding streets an even more challenging experience than it already is.

Trees and brush growing onto the roadway constrict the usable portion of the street for motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians alike. There may be too little room for two cars to pass or for a pedestrian to seek refuge off the pavement. At intersections, foliage may prevent drivers from seeing vehicles approaching on cross streets. Low-hanging branches can cause damage to trucks and buses, and all these problems become more critical on streets used by school buses.

By city ordinance, each property owner is responsible for keeping vegetation at least two feet back from the pavement. By trimming frontage vegetation regularly, residents can prevent problems from developing.

If city officials learn of a safety problem caused by overgrown vegetation, a courtesy notice will be sent to the property owner. The back side of the notice shows, in diagrams, the types of trimming required.

The new garbage company, BFI, provides three major trash pickups per year, and this year Orindans can schedule these dates at their convenience. This is a good way to get rid of garden cuttings that don't all fit into the provided green waste bins. Additional information may be obtained by calling BFI at 603-1144.

The proposed merged district would be run by an elected board of commissioners. Wilson envisions having both items on the same ballot as well as an advisory vote on whether the citizens of both Moraga and Orinda want a merged district. The committee hopes to have the issue on the March ballot.

According to Councilmember Joyce Hawkins, the Board of Supervisors diversion of \$3 million of city revenue to other communities is one reason why Orinda fire stations and equipment are

in disrepair. Until its dissolution in 1992, the Special District Augmentation Fund allowed the county to take a portion of the property tax revenue from special districts, including the Orinda Fire District, and reallocate the money to other parts of the county. "Unfortunately, when we incorporated, we didn't take control of the fire department. ... That's one reason why we're sitting down with Moraga and talking merger: so we can keep the money here in Orinda," says Hawkins.