

Council Approves \$37K Study to Attract Retailers

Councilmember Brands Moraga "a Retail Sybill"

By Steve Angelides

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On April 11th the Town Council approved a \$37,000 study to help it attract retailers after discussing the town's retail woes.

The study will be performed by staff from the Ann Arbor, Michigan office of Map Info, a national research firm. It should be completed by the end of summer.

Map Info mostly does research for retailers before they decide to move into an area. Eight of the top 10 national retailers, and seven of the top 10 specialty retailers, all chain stores, are clients of Map Info. Map Info also does studies for cities to advise them on retailer recruitment and retention.

Town Manager Phil Vince told the council that Moraga receives about \$650,000 per year in retail sales tax revenue, but Moraga residents make 75% of their taxable purchases outside of Moraga.

Map Info Account manager Patricia Bell told the council she hoped that Moraga's sales tax "leakage" could be reduced from 75% to 50% or lower. Jenny Boyd, President of the Chamber of Commerce of Moraga, expressed a similar goal of reducing the leakage from 75% to 50% at the Chamber's meeting last month.

Mayor Mike Metcalf spoke in favor of the study, pointing out that the town's annual operating expenses in the last fiscal year were about \$200,000 more than the town's operating revenues. "If we don't do something we're going to go broke," Metcalf emphasized.

Councilmember Ken Chew initially expressed skepticism about the study. "Won't the free market take care of it?" he wondered. "Haven't we already been doing this (recruiting retailers)?" he asked. "Our problem is the leaking roofs in the shopping center," Chew asserted.

Councilmember Dave Trotter, who is on the council's specific plan committee, responded to Chew that the town has never before systematically recruited retailers, and that the town "can send a message to the free market" that "here's a plan that will revitalize the center."

Trotter reminded Bell that Moraga must be unique in the state of California in having a three mile radius to the south empty, and being four to five miles from the nearest freeway on the north. Bell admitted that Moraga had some unique challenges, but nevertheless believed that her firm's study would be able to help the town attract retailers.

Councilmember Linda Deschambault told Bell that "lots of people here want to stay a bedroom community." "We don't want a Baja Fresh; we don't want a Petco; we don't want a Starbucks; we don't want a Gottashalks," Deschambault said. She suggested that perhaps an Elephant Pharmacy or a Nitro Dog would be more desirable in Moraga.

"I have a hard time believing that we're terminally unique," Vince replied. "There were 52 people ahead of me in line at Starbucks yesterday. We may be unique in geography, and we have some ecotourism, but we also fit into many of the standard categories," Vince said.

"We're a retail Sybill here in Moraga," said Councilmember Rochelle Bird. "We say one thing and do another. We say we want mom and pop but we truck off to Costco to buy our toothpaste." "We need to be equipped as a town to make our case to capture the opportunity. We are not prepared for that," Bird claimed.

Bell assured Deschambault that her firm's study would not only focus on attracting chain stores, but would also provide information which could



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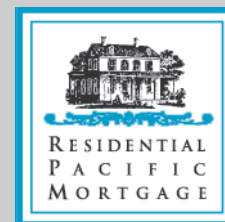


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help existing retailers be more successful, and might also help attract niche retailers. After that assurance, Deschambault made the motion to fund the study, which was seconded by Bird and unanimously adopted by the council.



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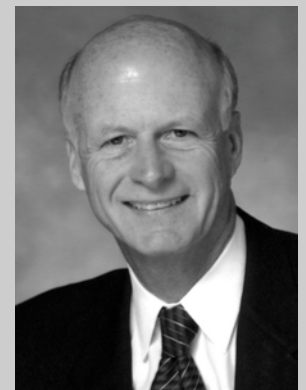
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