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Bumps Revisited: Moraga Town Council Strikes a Balance

By Sophie Braccini

It was a long and emotional Moraga Town Council meeting on January 16th. Two groups of Moraga citizens argued over the issue of traffic calming devices on Camino Pablo, a major collector street bordered by two schools and leading to a populated area of the town. In its decision, the Council took a first step toward a resolution that strives to satisfy the majority of the concerns, but did not completely satisfy either side.

Council Member Chew supported leaving the raised crosswalks as is, while Mike Metcalf supported their removal and replacement with stop signs or other device that would maintain the present gains in safety for the children. Vice-Mayor Dave Trotter proposed the compromise that won the day: Maintain the

raised crosswalk at Oxford so “little people” be better seen by cars, remove the one at Hodges and have a traffic engineer study the possibility of a stop sign there, and set staff to studying alternatives for the raised crosswalk in front of Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School. Mayor Linda Deschambault commented, “This decision provides a good balance between the two needs of our community: protection of the children and response times for emergency vehicles.”

“The raised crosswalks are serving their purpose,” stated Jill Mercurio, the town Director of Public Works and Engineer. “Smoothing the raised crosswalk improved the response time tested by the Moraga Orinda Fire Department (MOFD) over the previous configuration of the

tables,” said Mercurio, as she presented the data given by MOFD. The report shows that it takes now the biggest fire truck an additional 35 seconds to travel Camino Pablo and an ambulance an additional 20 seconds. These improved results didn’t impress MOFD Chief Pete Nowicki who persisted in his opposition to the impediment.

Response time is MOFD’s main concern and so is the focus of MoragaSafety.org, a group founded by Jack Balousek and Stan Roth. On the opposing side, parents of Camino Pablo Elementary students are concerned with excessive speeding in Moraga and consider the raised crosswalks a real improvement.

The public comments part of the meeting started with

Moraga Safety. Their long PowerPoint presentation was informative, with presentation of maps showing how an added 30 seconds in the response time puts more residents outside of the 6-minute response time zone.

Christina DaRodda, President of the Camino Pablo PTA, presented the results of a CP parent poll. 250 parents signed a petition in favor of the raised crosswalks and in a survey a majority declared they could support stop signs instead. DaRodda later commented that she was glad the raised crosswalk at Oxford was maintained but added, “Removing the raised crosswalk (at Hodges) without providing an alternative traffic calming device puts us in a situation that is worse than what we have now.”