

Town Council Hard at Work

By Sophie Braccini

Once again, they worked late into the night. On May 28th, just one week after the previous Moraga Town Council meeting, the five Council members reconvened for a packed agenda meeting that kept them busy until 1:00am. They tackled seven different subjects and had to postpone one for an additional meeting on Monday night. Obviously on best behavior, the members interacted with the level of courtesy that could be expected from five dedicated individuals.

The **Unruly Party Ordinance** was first on the agenda for a second "first reading." Residents once again voiced their frustration and resentment. A Thune Ave resident in particular expressed concerns that the new ordinance would not impose a maximum house occupancy. Most of the parties agreed that the ordinance's main target were property owners who do not act responsibly, letting their properties become "mini-dorms" in residential neighborhoods.

The College, in the person of Jim Farley, presented the series of measures it is taking to address the problem: suspension and warning to students on the punitive side, support for the new ordinance and an interesting proposal to create neighborhood groups that would meet periodically to discuss issues. Farley believes these groups will be a vehicle for dialogue with neighborhoods; he is working on a format and will contact residents before the fall.

Farley's request that the College itself be put off limit of the Ordinance didn't receive any support from the Town. "We haven't had any issue with the campus' noise level in the past years," said Moraga Chief of Police Ruppenthal, "they do not need to be off limit and have done a good job warning their neighbors when they have celebrations." The second reading should be scheduled for June 11th and the ordinance will be in effect one month after its approval by Council.

The report regarding the "**Bruzzone Initiative**," one of two competing open space initiatives that are expected to be on the November ballot, was also on the agenda. A first reading had already occurred, but the public and the property owner raised many questions. The purpose of the agenda item was to receive and file the response given by Town staff.

"According to the initiative's proponents, the Attachment A analysis (the response from Staff) is partial and biased," said MaryJo Rossi, spoke person for the Bruzzone family, "They are asking the Town Council to throw it out and decline from placing it into the public record."

The Council decided not to grant this request after the Town's lawyer affirmed that the document was simply a response to questions and not prejudiced. "There's an elephant in the room," said Council member Metcalf, "and that's the MOSO 2008 initiative. We want to apply the same hypothesis when we ask staff to evaluate the impact of that second initiative."

Leveling the playing field will be a key objective for the Council, whose responsibility is to fairly inform the public about the potential impact of the two competing measures. "You are not limited to a 9212 report," added the Town's attorney. "You could order a side-by-side analysis of the texts." The idea sounded appealing to the Council but the Town Manager warned that time and money would not be available for such a report.

As the **raised crosswalks** were again brought in front of the Council, the audience felt confident it would be for the last time. Unfortunately, the crosswalks are turning into quicksand. The raised crosswalk under examination that night was the one situated at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School.

An engineer from Fehr & Peers recommended leaving the apparatus as is, "this is the only solution to force drivers to slow down," he said, "if there is no discomfort and compliance alone is required, some people will not respect the speed limit."

Mike Mentink, Fire Marshall with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, reiterated his agency's opposition to any obstacle that impairs emergency vehicles response time.

Dave Trotter and Mike Metcalf were ready to do away with the raised crosswalk at JM, while Mayor Deschambault and Ken Chew didn't see any possible alternative to that device that wouldn't compromise the safety of children. Council member Bird insisted that a new hypothesis be studied: a stop sign at Rimer. "I am not ready to remove that raised crosswalk until we have a safe solution for the students at JM," she said.

The motion adopted required that the device be left in place until the study of that stop sign be made. After the meeting, Stan Roth, from the "Citizens Moraga Safety" group, expressed his frustration: "After spending thousands of dollars of taxpayer money on staff time and two traffic engineering reports, and after receiving two separate letters from the Moraga-Orinda Fire Department outlining their educated objections to delayed emergency response times, the Town Council elected to reject both the traffic engineers suggestions and the concerns of our fire professionals."

The earliest date on which the issue could be back on the agenda is August 24th.

Late in the night, the Council approved the **Development Impact Fees Ordinance** that was presented at the previous meeting (see our article in the May 28th issue, available on-line at www.lamorindaweekly.com).