

Joan Streit – Taking a Firm Grip on Moraga Finance

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Moraga is certainly a place where financial savvy is needed. When she arrived, Streit realized that the Town was lacking guidelines. "A city should have strong internal policies and procedures to control its operations," believes

Streit. For example, she discovered that no written policies are in place to determine who should have a Town credit card nor are there any written policies on accepted use of the card. Although there have not been any problems or misuse of

the credit cards, and those who have them have been very responsible, a written policy helps to guard against misuse. So part of Streit's responsibility consists of protecting the Town's assets, defining standard procedures and

establishing policies.

As far as the future is concerned, Streit believes that Moraga's sources of income are not controlled enough by the town. The sales tax fluctuates depending on the economy and most of it goes to the State; the property tax is fairly stable but the Town has no control on how much it can raise. A good example of the Town's dependency on State decisions is the gas tax money that municipalities should be receiving. The State has withheld allocations since March.

The Town should be getting its share in September but the State could decide to hold it for a longer period of time.

A solution could be for Moraga to raise some local taxes, such as a business license tax, or process building permits "in house" rather than at the County as it is currently done. "The Town Council has a good understanding of the situation," says Streit, "but in an election year, no one wants to be the one who raises taxes." The Director does not see any of the rev-

enue enhancement proposals being implemented earlier than the 2009-10 budget year.

Amidst all the challenges, Streit still has time for a rich cultural life. "We are blessed in the Bay Area with a wide variety of cultural offerings," she acknowledges. The mother of two grown children enjoys going to the symphony and repertory theater with her husband, and to fulfill her passion for others she has a membership at the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

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Moraga Specific Plan Continues To Raise Questions

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In Moraga, a suburban area, the density is 20 units per acre. Council Member Rochelle Bird reminded the audience that the number of houses included in the Specific Plan has not been determined yet.

In October Salamack will present the responses to the comments that have been received. After this presentation the Council will discuss, amend and vote on a final version of the Specific Plan. Differences of opinion have already

emerged on the Council.

Council Member Ken Chew believes that this plan would so change the character of the town that a referendum would be needed. Council Member Mike Metcalf would like to better understand the risk associated with not having a housing plan. Bird believes that the town shouldn't be dictating what the developer must do with the property. Vice-Mayor Dave Trotter asks which vision is the right one for the community, stressing the

need to revitalize the existing center and is concerned that the plan presented does not include a financial feasibility analysis. Mayor Deschambault is concerned by the absence of an evacuation plan, the viability of retail, the mitigation of the CO2 impact of the plan and the preservation of the riparian corridor by the creek.

Residents may still appear before the Council and voice their comments and recommendations until the final vote.

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Moraga Discusses MOSO 2008 Impact Report

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Renata Sos, a Moraga resident who supports the initiative, asked that the 9212 report clarify the issue by indicating that MOSO 2008 would apply only to the areas designated in the text of the initiative.

That position was challenged by David Bruzzone, a member of the family which owns much of the land in question, whose interpretation is that, "All the slopes of more than 20% and all the ridge lines above 800 feet would be submitted to the development restrictions, and that would include parts of Ascot Dr. and Birchwood among other areas."

Council Member Mike Metcalf asked the Town's attorney, Michelle Kenyon, for her opinion on the matter. She replied that she would interpret the initiative as only applying to the areas defined in the text.

A major concern raised during the meeting was the possibility of litigation and the extra costs that would result for the Town. Moraga

resident Bob Reynolds asked, "What would happen if both initiatives pass?" Kenyon responded that if both initiatives have a majority of votes, and if they do not conflict, they would both stand.

The determination of whether or not the initiatives conflict would be made by the Town Council, based on legal advice. In that case, Kenyon would not exclude the possibility of a legal challenge.

Residents voiced their concern that the cost of litigation was not budgeted. "Vote both initiatives down," said Moraga resident Barbara Simpson, "we should know ahead of time if the initiatives conflict."

A larger element of discussion involved the financial impact of the initiative for the town. The fiscal analysis that was conducted by staff estimates that the town will undergo a reduction of net revenues in the range of \$410,700 a year due to the limitation of the number of houses that could be built. It concludes that the initiative would still

have a positive impact on the town, smaller than in a no initiative scenario, and would amount to a net municipal revenue of \$60,200.

Dick Loeke, urban planner for the Bruzzone family, said, "What's missing (in the 9212 report) is the long term effect on budget and housing." Loeke believes that the restriction on housing will generate a loss in sales tax revenue and will jeopardize the viability of the retailers in town.

In response to a question from Loeke on the impact of the initiative on Moraga schools and the Fire District, Moraga Planning Director Lori Salamack responded that both entities had declined to assess the financial impact of the initiative.

Salamack indicated that Town staff is preparing a comparison of the two initiatives. This report could be presented to the Council at its next meeting on August 27, and would be available online with the meeting agenda.

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Paws to Read in Lamorinda

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Melyssa reads to Trevin under the supervision of Carol, the dog's handler
Photo Sophie Braccini

"Children are sometimes unsure," says handler Ginger Wadsworth, "and within a few minutes of petting the dog they come closer and start reading." This is why Look removed some of the restrictions other libraries have put on

the program, she will allow kids with minor allergies to come to the program, as well as kids who are not used to interacting with pets and might be a bit nervous at first.

Wadsworth is on the Friends Orinda Library board, and has two

trained therapy dogs. She comes to "Paws" with her golden retriever – Willa – who is so excited about going to see kids. She's a big supporter of the program, and the Friends of the library have donated books, pillows, doggy treats, water for the handler and little certificates. "It is still a lot of work for the librarian," recognizes Wadsworth, "and Lin has done a fantastic job."


Waldroup confirmed that all the dogs in her program are certified therapy dogs as well. Most of the people who bring their dogs do other things with them, like going to hospitals and convalescent homes. There are therapy cats, too, and both Look and Waldroup would like to find some of these for their programs. They both want to connect with the local schools and reading specialists. The program is over for the summer in Orinda and will start again in the fall. After the August trial in Moraga, the program will be evaluated and is also expected to return in the fall.

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