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## Moraga School District and Town Council Meet Sports Fields are the Hot Topic

By Andrea A. Firth

Members of the Moraga School District Governing Board and Town Council recently held a joint meeting to discuss issues that impact both the schools and the town. "The meeting will serve as a better means of communication to the public on common issues," stated Dennis Kelleher, President of the MSD Governing Board. However, he noted that the meeting would serve as a forum for discussion and was not intended to produce specific action. "This meeting and future joint meetings will serve as important steps toward moving forward on these issues," added Mayor Lynda Deschambault.

The first item on the agenda-community use of the MSD facilities-led to a long discussion and focused primarily on the use of the School District's many athletic fields. MSD Superintendent Rick Schafer provided some history on the issue explaining that the Town of Moraga has contributed \$45,000 a year for the maintenance of the schools' facilities based on a verbal agreement that was established in the early 1990's.

"Community use of our facilities far exceeds student use," stated Schafer. "There is a quantifiable difference in the revenues that we can bring in as compared to the expenses associated with maintaining these facilities," he added. Schafer estimates that the District is down about \$91,000 annually secondary to facility maintenance. The Town suggested some adjustments to the District calculations and estimated the excess maintenance cost need at closer to \$52,000. However, Town Manager Jay Tashiro noted, "The problem is that there is no written agreement between the Town and the School District."

Councilmember Mike Metcalf recalled that four years ago the Town Council was prepared to reassess their contribution to the District for facility use and that a draft agreement had circulated between the two governing bodies. "What happened to the agreement that we worked on four years ago," asked Metcalf. Some speculated that the document had died in the hands of the lawyers, others felt the stumbling block to moving forward was the dollar amount to be inserted, in any case, the two groups agreed to revive the draft agreement and renew negotiations.

A third party to these renewed discussions will be the facility users including the Moraga Sports Alliance, which represents several sports groups across town, and club programs such as the Lamorinda Rugby Club. "We would be happy to participate," stated Joe Rosenbaum, the current leader of the Sports Alliance. Although these user groups may be faced with increased facility usage fees to help close the Districts revenue deficiency, they were committed to the process.

The condition of the sports fields was also reviewed at length. "I'm concerned about throwing money down the hole by maintaining bad fields," stated Councilmember Rochelle Bird. Schafer explained that a study of the fields had been recently completed that identified several problems and maintenance issues. "We over-subscribe our fields. The fields need to be rotated and rested," stated Schafer. A discussion of the potential for installing one or more turf fields at school sites to curb maintenance costs followed and generated questions about safety, security, and funding. The two groups agreed to further study of the topic.

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