

Published October 1st, 2008

## Moraga Town Council Candidates Discuss Priorities

By Sophie Braccini

There will be many serious issues facing the Moraga Town Council in the next few years. What would the six candidates for the Moraga Town Council do first if they find themselves elected to fill one of the three open seats?

We recently asked all six candidates the question, "If you are elected to the Council, what would be your highest priority and why?" The financial situation of the town is a clear winner, but other issues such as the police force and development rank high as well on the candidates' list of issues.

"There are many important issues facing the Town Council in the coming year. Undoubtedly, the most critical is our Town's fiscal situation," says Janice Kolbe. Dennis Wanken agrees with her, "The budget concerns must be addressed as soon as possible. Revenues are declining and expenditures are rising. This trend must be reversed."

Karen Mendonca and Howard Harpham also named the state of the Town's finances as their first concern. "Fiscal solvency is the foundational underpinning necessity to ensure the Town's ongoing vibrancy," says Mendonca, while Harpham adds, "Unless our Town Council focuses immediately on reducing unnecessary expenditures and finding ways to increase our revenues, we will be faced with having to begin cutting back on local services in order to bring our expenditures in line with our revenues."

The candidates' concern is rooted in the present and future budget situation of Moraga. "Our Finance Director warned the Council just three months ago that if we fail to address this issue now we would be facing substantial deficits beginning in less than a year and growing steadily over the next five years to unmanageable proportions," recalls Howard Harpham.

Kolbe explains, "Joan Streit (the Town's Finance Director) projects that beginning as soon as the summer and fall of 2009 our expenditures will begin to exceed our revenues by as much as \$100,000 a year; and within five years we will be looking at deficits of as much as \$600,000 a year."

Dennis Wanken believes that all of the issues faced by the town are the consequence of the budget crisis, "The infrastructure of our community is rapidly evolving from needing repairs to needing replacement. Moraga faces an infrastructure bill of nearly \$40,000,000. This bill constitutes replacement of residential streets, utility distribution systems, and improvement of arterial roads some of which are currently dangerous."

Each of these four candidates has ideas on how to correct the situation, "My highest priority will be to address the need to reduce unnecessary expenditures and increase revenues without adversely affecting the local services our citizens expect and rely upon," promises Harpham.

Kolbe sees eye to eye with him, "Unless we focus on reducing expenditures and increasing revenues, we will have to begin cutting back staff and local services – police, park & recreation and others – something nobody wants to see."

Mendonca focuses on the process to get there, "I am particularly interested in working with fellow Council members and Town officials in establishing a well thought out budget reserve that could potentially provide an ongoing income stream for the Town of Moraga." She adds a positive spin to the situation, "While budget shortfalls often necessitate the implementation of both reduced expenditures and enhanced revenue streams, they also can provide the catalyst for identifying creative revenue enhancement opportunities."

Wanken stressed the need for the community to get together to solve its problems, "Stakeholders in our community need to work in unison to promote and assist current and new businesses to operate in Moraga and the growth versus no-growth advocates need to come to compromise in the best interest of all citizens in Moraga."

Harpham stresses the importance of trying to maintain the level of service Moragans have come to expect. "Maintaining our police, park & recreation and infrastructure needs must be the highest priority for all of us at this point." And that's where he meets with Mike Metcalf, who didn't list the budget as his first priority, but one of the consequences of the budgetary constraints: the difficult situation of our police force.

"Our police force struggles to provide the services our residents and businesses need and deserve," states Metcalf,

"thirteen officers are inadequate to service 16,400 citizens. I will see that our police force is increased by several officers, consistent with what we can afford. Augmenting the police force will put a dedicated traffic safety officer back on the streets, and will free up police management to work on emergency preparedness and department efficiency." Using his experience on the Council, he proposes, "I will encourage St Mary's College to contribute to funding our force, since we are obliged under law to provide police services to the college." Metcalf cited as well the maintenance and improvement of our infrastructure.

Brad Kvederis does not share his opponents' financial concerns, "Our Town's budget problems will disappear anyway as the last of the pre-Proposition 13 houses are sold or passed down over the course of the next decade." Kvederis' first priority is to preserve the character of our town, "My highest priority is to permanently ban tract housing in Moraga, and to preserve every remaining acre of our open space that I possibly can." Kvederis explains, "The housing market likely won't experience a resurgence for years, so now is not the time to build large numbers of homes. All we'll accomplish is to create an oversupply of housing and drive down local property values even further -- not to mention ruining our small-town character."

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