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Moraga Revenue Enhancement Committee Hits the Ground Running

By Sophie Braccini

The purpose of Moraga's Revenue Enhancement Committee (REC) meeting held on June 1st was to bring its members up to speed on the Town's financial needs and start organizing their work.

Moraga Town Manager Mike Segrest presented an updated budget that's still in the black. But the figures show that the current budget does not sufficiently account for infrastructure maintenance and replacement.

The new REC is charged with identifying ways to increase the Town's income, so the infrastructure does not deteriorate and more services can be offered to residents. Ideas were put forward including studying the possibility of Moraga becoming a "Charter City."

REC Chair Dick Olsen kept order and focus during the two-hour meeting. Jill Mercurio, Town Engineer and Public Works Director, presented the current state of Moraga's roads. "Our roads are rated at a Pavement Condition Index (PCI) of 57, which is considered fair," said Mercurio, "to maintain this rating we need to spend about \$1.2 million a year, but at this time we have \$800,000 budgeted for that item."

Mercurio provided REC members with a detailed simulation that showed how much should be budgeted in order to obtain different levels of pavement conditions.

"Council needs to come to grip with what we want," said Council Member Mike Metcalf, who also sits on the REC, "we've not had this discussion yet. We need to answer this for the community and then this committee will find the money."

The issue of the drainage system is of great magnitude as well. "The system was built before the town was incorporated, it is good for 65 years, and 40% of the town's drains are more than 45 years old," explained Mercurio. Three years ago a sinkhole formed when a storm drain collapsed under Rheem Boulevard. After this incident Mercurio ordered a video inspection of the main drains to assess their state. The film has not been analyzed yet. Segrest added that a capital expenditure funding schedule could be made available for REC, but that the roads/storm drain issue was likely to take closer to 50 years than 10 to be fixed.

REC will meet 12 times before sun-setting at the end of November with a presentation of its report to the Town. Members will work in sub-committees during those meetings and the public is strongly encouraged to participate in the deliberations.

The four sub-committees are General Fund revenue enhancement opportunities, public works infrastructure and long-term maintenance, boosting commercial economic activity and sales tax revenues, town facility and real estate

management.

At the next meeting on June 15, REC will review the proposals made by its counterparts in Orinda and Lafayette. Of particular interest to REC is the idea of becoming a Charter City, an idea that both Lafayette and Orinda are considering. "At the last Mayors' Conference our neighbors approached me and proposed having a Lamorinda strategy on this issue," said Mayor Dave Trotter. "If we are to consider such a change, then the public will need a lot more information," said Moraga Chamber of Commerce President Edy Schwartz during public comment period.

What Is a Charter City?

In California, cities and towns are ruled by State law or can adopt or modify their organizing charter by a majority vote of their residents. Moraga is governed by State law and is managed by a five-member City Council. A charter gives a city's residents the flexibility to choose any kind of government structure allowed by the Constitution. It is a growing trend in California and at this time last year, 112 of California's 478 cities were charter cities. According to the League of California Cities' legal staff, "the charter city provision of the State Constitution, commonly referred to as the 'home-rule' provision, is based on the principle that a city, rather than the state, is in the best position to know what it needs and how to satisfy those needs. The home-rule provision allows charter cities to conduct their own business and control their own affairs. A charter maximizes local control."

Lafayette and Orinda are looking into this possibility as well. Areas that municipalities can decide to rule include: municipal election matters, land use and zoning decisions (with some exceptions), how a city spends its tax dollars, and municipal contracts.

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