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## Council and Committees on Vacation in August, but not the REC

*By Sophie Braccini*

The Town Council will not be meeting at all in August, and neither will the Traffic and Safety Advisory Committee; the Planning Commission met just once, on August 17. But some volunteers are using August to work even harder. The Revenue Enhancement Committee (REC) is being super-charged in August with three meetings instead of two.

The Committee, chaired by Dick Olsen, plans to give the Town Council a preliminary report in September and wants to be sure it has explored every possibility to find long term resources for the town. The group met on August 3 and 17 and will meet again on August 31 at 7:00 PM. at the Hacienda. "The Town Council has asked for our Final Report by the end of November, and I have personally committed to them that I will do everything within my power to deliver that report before Thanksgiving," said Olsen.

The group works with three sub-committees, Economic Development, chaired by Larry Tessler; Infrastructure, led by Mike Metcalf; and General Fund, led by Tracy Vesely.

One of the long-term transformations that the Economic Development group is examining is how to better capture the image of Saint Mary's College and incorporate it into the town's dynamic. This sub-committee is also working on what can be done with the Rheem Shopping Center, searching for all possibilities including an imaginative scenario of the town purchasing the center and partnering with developers. They are also considering a business licensing fee. The 123 members of the Chamber of Commerce will be polled to see if they would support the concept and what they would expect in return.

The Infrastructure committee faces the tremendous challenge of finding long term financing for the maintenance of roads and drains, as well as for other town's properties such as public facilities and parks.

One idea would be to re-assess the Lighting and Landscape District. This very small amount of taxation appears on Moragans' tax bills (between \$8 and \$16) and is what the town charges residents for lighting. At this time, the modest tax covers only a portion of the cost of public lighting; the total bill is paid by the town from the General Fund. The town could decide to pass along the total cost of lighting to its residents, and could add parks maintenance as well. The town would then free between \$400,000 and \$500,000 from the General Fund that could be directed to road maintenance.

Bonds are being studied for long-term infrastructure maintenance, as is the possibility of establishing a Mello-Roos District. Mello-Roos is designed to allow any city to collect funds from its residents for financing of public improvements and services, such as streets, sewer systems and other basic infrastructure. A two-thirds majority vote of residents is needed to form such a District. Once approved, property owners pay a special tax each year. The General Fund sub-committee is also studying the impact of new taxation such as a Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT). This tax brings significant resources to the neighboring city of Lafayette through the hotels and motels within its boundaries. In Moraga, preliminary data shows that there is a need for a hotel. TOTs are in place in most Contra Costa cities that have hotels and averages 9.5%. The sub-committee is also studying the positive and negative aspects of becoming a Charter town; for example, a new real estate transfer tax could be paid directly to the town when homes are sold. Members of the Committee remarked that such a tax would make sense only if neighboring communities went the same route (Lafayette is currently considering a Charter).

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