

LAMORINDA Community

Moraga Town Staff Moving Back to the Hacienda

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Town-owned building at 329 Rheem Blvd.

Photo Wendy Scheck

Some residents questioned the financial aspect of the move. Why move staff from 329 Rheem when office rentals in Moraga are at an all-time low? And why spend money on adapting the Hacienda for the return of staff if this is just for the short term?

Segrest explained that the repairs and improvements done at the Hacienda needed to happen whatever the final use of the building.

All the work involved in the move led the Hacienda Foundation, a volunteer body of residents dedicated to raising money for the Ha-

cienda, to question its temporary nature.

"We were informed by the town of the coming move," says the Foundation's President, Judy Dinkle, "but we wish staff would have involved us more. We are trying to fund raise and the uncertainty

makes it more difficult." Dinkle adds that the impression is that there was no thought given to how the move would impact the Foundation.

Other town groups were concerned that the town would take over space that is now dedicated to recreation activities. "That is a misunderstanding," states Segrest, "staff will only occupy the second floor of the Hacienda." He added that the town would use additional storage space in part of the Casita, but that it will not affect the activities that are held there.

"The strategy of the town has changed over the past months," says Dinkle, "it is hard to have an opinion at this time because it is not finalized. We want to try to accommodate the plans and go along with them." The Hacienda Foundation will continue to work with the Parks and Recreation Department on their next big event, the first Oktoberfest, at the Hacienda.

Meet Moraga's New Town Clerk, Marty McInturf

McInturf would like to have more time for reforms and people, she wants to see herself as a hub for the town residents: "I love to interact with people," she says, "and they call or come to see me all the time with all sorts of requests."

Residents call her to com-

plain about a neighbor, to inquire about events, resolutions, or about planning issues. "I need to be totally connected with everything that's going on in town and I'm getting there," says the Clerk who started her job four months ago and hasn't had a lot of time to catch her breath. "The fact

that the Council will not meet in August is a good thing for staff, it will give me time to catch up," she adds. McInturf has ideas on how to improve organization and processes; the issue is to find the time and resources to implement them.

"I have started to scan and

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file online, with a volunteer, all the resolutions that were passed by the Council over the past years," explains McInturf, "my objective would be to have more information available on a more user friendly web site to improve the public's access to town facts."

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

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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

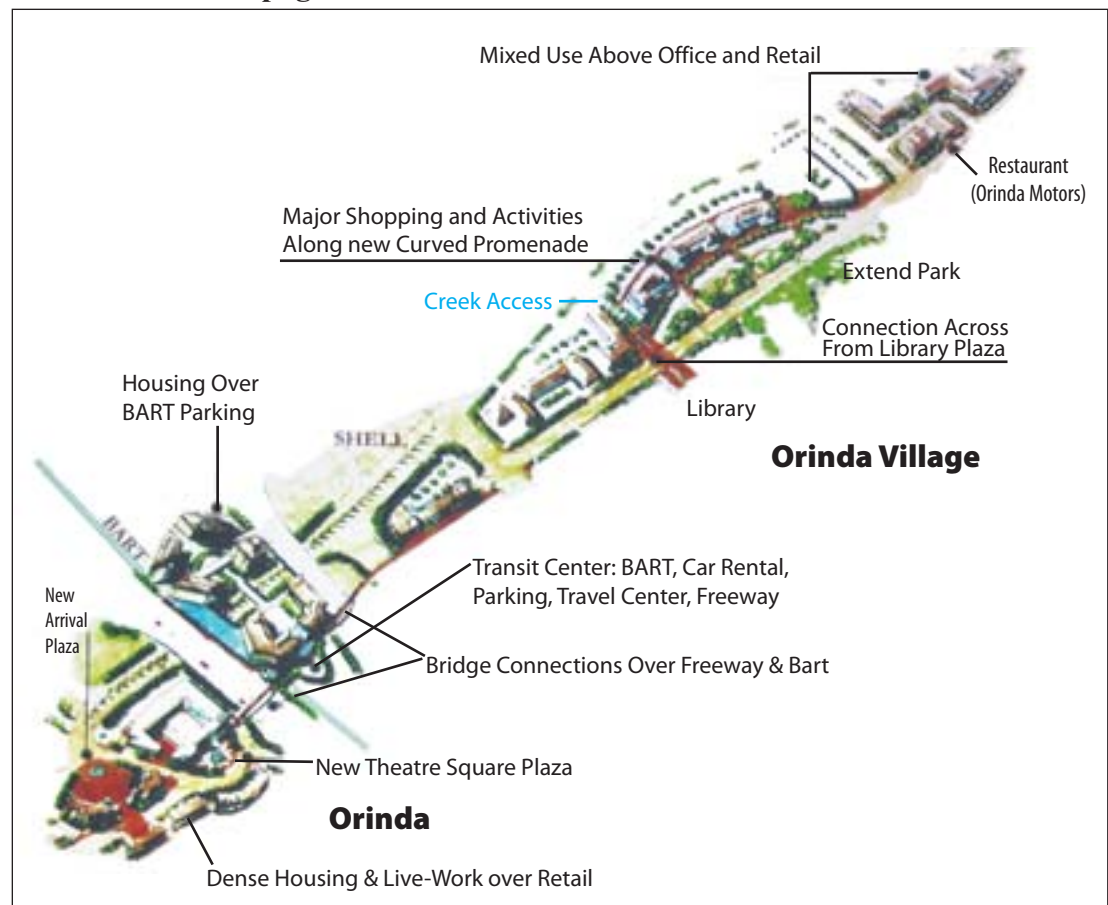
residents for financing of public improvements and services, such as streets, sewer systems and other basic infrastructure. A two-thirds majority vote of residents is needed to form such a District. Once approved, property owners pay a special tax each year.

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).

A Vision for Downtown Orinda

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Both men support the work of the City's Planning Process Review Task Force in revising guidelines related to downtown revitalization, but Simpson acknowledges that change will not come about through new ordinances. They have found that most people are visual learners—they need a picture to go with the words. "If there is a vision of what the city could be, something people could see, this might attract a different kind of developer to Orinda," explains Hasselman.

Hasselman and Simpson have begun to share their vision for the future of Orinda more widely. At a recent meeting of the Orinda Rotary Club, Hasselman narrated a slide presentation of his sketches for revitalizing Orinda's business district, identifying the opportunities and solutions available to address the City's current problems. According to Hasselman, one of Orinda's key drawbacks is the limited amount of public space which results in a linear, boring central business district. "My rough calculation shows that

80% of the downtown space is devoted to streets and parking and that leaves just 20% of the land area for nice buildings, parks, arcades, and courtyards," states Hasselman who proposes creating several sunlit public spaces and a better parking system.

What to do about the transmission towers that are dotted through the downtown landscape or how high is too high for buildings, questions that have plagued recent discussions of downtown revitalization, do not faze the two visionaries who take a long-term outlook on the process. "I think technology will evolve over the next generation that will provide solution to the transmission tower problem," says Hasselman. Simpson understands the concerns over building height and respects the impact on residential properties near downtown. However, both men see opportunities, not darkness, in allowing increased building height in some areas that could enable space for urban attributes such as additional parking, trel-

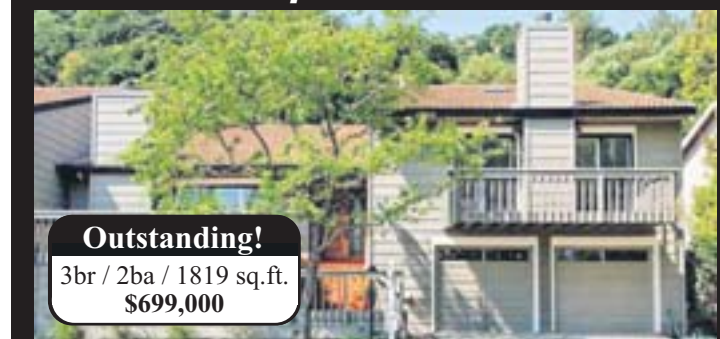
lises, and roof gardens.

"The next generation will be interested in green architecture, the economy of energy, pedestrian access, environmental quality, and recreation [in the downtown spaces]," adds Hasselman. Creating a downtown that meets the needs and expectations of the next generation seems to be the primary goal of both men who are working to share their vision for Orinda with the community through public meetings throughout the year.

Peter Hasselman will present An architect's personal vision of Downtown Orinda for the next generation; Opportunities for sustainable growth at the Fall luncheon of the Orinda Chamber of Commerce on Friday, October 23rd from Noon to 1:30 p.m. at the Orinda Country Club. The cost is \$30. RSVP 925-254-3909 or http://orindachamber.org/events.php#luncheon.

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