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School District Will Charge Town for Facilities Use

By Sophie Braccini

The Moraga School District has a new rental fee structure for the use of District facilities in the coming school year. All rental fees for non-school users will be increased by 10% and, for the first time, the District will charge the Town of Moraga for the use of District facilities. For example, Moraga will pay \$53.50 per hour to use the Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School (JM) auditorium, where most of the Town Council meetings are held; given the length of those meetings this could add up to a sizeable bill, but for the financially strapped School District, every penny counts. "There are several reasons for the change," said Moraga School District Superintendent Richard Schafer, "the district is using general fund revenues to cover costs generated by non-school user groups; the Town is reducing its contribution, starting next school year, thereby creating a greater under-funding of facilities; the district scheduler had identified inconsistencies in the fee structure; and the district's fee schedule is dissimilar to neighboring districts' fee structures." The fees are based upon the type of user groups and facility to be used, and is applied to offset costs generated by the usage.

The Town had been exempt from paying rental fees, but was contributing to the maintenance of the District's fields with an annual sum of \$45,000. At the September 23, 2009, Town Council meeting Town Manager Mike Segrest proposed to decrease that contribution by \$11,000 each year until it ceases to exist in 2014. "If those were our fields we would move in the direction of having them be more self-supported," said Segrest, adding, "We would reduce the subsidies, which is consistent with the rest of our policy, and the direction that was given by the Town Council. This is, unfortunately, what the financial reality is today."

"This increase will be phased in with annual raises of approximately 10%," added Schafer, "no district funds will be used to support non-school recreational/community use by the school year 2014/2015."

Segrest could do nothing but accept the logic of the School Board's decision. "I recognize and respect the School District's needs to make their finances work," said the Town Manager, "We have no problem with equitable treatment with other users." Segrest added that in light of the current economic situation, it is understandable that every agency must look closely at their finances, and that the Council would look into potential meeting locations on Town property.

At the Town's recent goal-setting session, Segrest presented a plan to create a civic meeting space on the ground floor of the building at 329 Rheem where most of the Town's offices will eventually be located. The room would seat 70 people and could be equipped with video capabilities. Other alternatives to the JM auditorium are the Hacienda de las Flores and the meeting room at the library, which have lower seating capacities than the JM facility. The rental fees for fields and gyms to youth non-profit organizations, clubs and association groups will also increase by 10% for the 2010/2011 school year. We contacted LMYA (Lafayette-Moraga Youth Association) and MBA (Moraga Baseball Association), but the youth sports groups were not ready to comment on the School District's decision. Since rental costs represent a large percentage of the associations' expenses, these groups will likely have to pass along the increase to families signing up for recreational sports.

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