



Independent, locally owned and operated!

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published May 26th, 2010

Moraga Supports California First

By Sophie Braccini

On May 12th the Moraga Town Council decided to be the first Lamorinda community to support the energy-retrofit financing mechanism called "California First." The program, which will be funded by the issuance of municipal bonds, will allow property owners to finance the installation of energy improvements on their homes or businesses and pay the amount back as a line item on their property tax bill. The program is managed by Renewable Funding for the California Statewide Communities Development Authority (CSCDA), and should not impact local governments' personnel or finances. Because cities can only join if their county joins, that same evening the Council passed an ordinance urging Contra Costa County to join the program. Other jurisdictions such as Richmond have already passed similar ordinances.

The four members present that night, Mayor Ken Chew, Vice-mayor Karen Mendonca, and Council Members Howard Harpham and Dave Trotter were favorable to supporting the passage of an ordinance, after they made sure that declaring their support would not create an obligation for the town to join, and that the impact on staff would be minimal.

In his report, Staff Engineer John Sherbert was careful to highlight the fact that the program is managed entirely by Renewable Funding, and that Town staff could spend time on marketing the program if adopted, but such effort is not a program requirement. The staff and Council liked the fact that the repayment period would be up to 20 years, depending on the life cycle of the investment, and that the energy savings resulting from the improvements would immediate - during the repayment period, the savings on energy bills should offset for the property tax increase. Another important aspect of the program is that property owners are asked to first go for the "low hanging fruit," investing first in energy efficiency items such as better insulation or new windows, before going for "renewable energy" investments such as solar panels. "The purpose is not to install solar panels on a home that would waste a lot of energy," said Renewable Funding Regional Program Manager Mike Marcus, "but to find the best technologically available solutions to save energy and reduce cost."

Although the program is financed by municipal bonds that do not impact municipalities, there is a cost to join. For Moraga, it would be about \$10,000.

Bill Durkin, speaking on behalf of Sustainable Moraga, told the Council that both Captain Vineyards and Canyon Construction have agreed to hold fundraisers to finance the Town's buy-in. "We think it is the right thing to do," agreed Moraga Wine producer Susan Captain, "our vineyard is the first 'green winery' in Contra Costa County, we got our award in March, and we believe that things should be done right from the start." "We would be happy to hold a fundraiser at the Moraga Barn," said Chris Avant, owner of Canyon Construction, "California First is a great financing program that would allow for many energy saving retrofits in the town."

Contra Costa Supervisor Gayle Iilkema said that she was interested in hearing about municipalities' support of the program, but that the new program was still undergoing staff review and had not yet reached the Board of Supervisors.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA