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## Jill Keimach: Moraga's New Town Manager

By Sophie Braccini



Jill Keimach addresses the Town Council on Sept. 22nd Photo Andy Scheck

The Moraga Town Council has approved the appointment of a new Town Manager. Jill Keimach (pronounce kaimæk), currently Fremont's Community Development Director, will take the helm on November 1st.

Mike Segrest, who announced last May that he intended to step down from the Town Manager post for personal reasons, said the Council made a great choice. Keimach will be Moraga's third Town Manager in two years.

The Council was unanimous in its choice, and the members spoke very positively about Keimach. "She was one of our two final candidates and even though she does not have experience as a town manager per se, she is very knowledgeable about economic development and has a very strong financial background," said Council Member Dave Trotter.

"She is taking a very significant pay cut to come to Moraga," said Mayor Ken Chew, "but she wants to work here, already knows the community and the college, and the Council feels that she will be very good for Moraga."

According to Chew, Keimach combines very strong training and experience in development, coupled with a tough but approachable personality.

Keimach made the short drive from Berkeley to attend the Pear Festival with her husband. "I applied for the Town Manager position in Moraga because I share many of the values of this community," she says. As Fremont's Community Development Director, Keimach managed a budget much bigger than Moraga's and had a staff of over 100 people.

The extent of Keimach's experience is impressive. For example, if we can bring bikes on BART trains, we owe it to her. After working for the Association of Bay Area Governments, she moved on to BART and was in charge of the bicycle project. According to her, there was a lot of negotiating with the different stakeholders involved in that project.

Keimach is also responsible for bring Trader Joe's to El Cerrito. As that city's Community Development Director, she conducted negotiation with Regency Centers, the owner of the aging El Cerrito Plaza Shopping Center, to be able to get the tenant that the community wanted.

Keimach worked in Fremont for six years, where one of her big projects was the installation of the Solyndra solar energy manufacturing and administrative facilities that President Obama visited last May.

Public service is definitely in Keimach's blood. Most of her career was spent in that sector, but for a three-year period she worked on the other side of the fence as a development consultant. "I learned a lot in that job," she said "and it makes me sympathetic to what developers have to go through; but what I want to do is weigh the pros and cons of projects and decide what is good for the community."

From this diversity of experience Keimach developed a business-friendly attitude that was a definite asset in Fremont. "When I arrived, the city had the reputation of not being business-friendly," remembers Keimach, "business applications could take up to a year. It was not a matter of regulations, more a culture of 'we know better than the private sector how to do things.'"

Keimach says her business-friendly reputation is why Fremont approached her. "We had focus groups and interviewed previous applicants to understand where the problems came from," says Keimach. Of course she didn't change the culture overnight, but consistently worked on it. "We created a partnership-based approach where everybody would get together within 72 hours of an application, assign a staff person to it, and meet with the developer early on to understand what their vision is," she explains, "since then we got some big projects that the city is proud of."

From her career tales emerges an image of a woman who listens to what the community wants and is able to bring the different stakeholders to the table to build win-win scenarios. For a divided Moraga that has been struggling with the conflicting agendas of semi-rural feel and economic vitality, Keimach could be the catalyst for finding solutions.

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