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Five Candidates, Two Seats

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Candidates' Night Forum - Tuesday, October 5th 2010
presented by Moraga Citizens' Network - www.moragacitizensnetwork.org

The Lamorinda Weekly video taped the Forum and is offering to watch the video's from here:
Depending on your Internet performance it might take 15 or more seconds before the video will start.

Welcome and Introduction by John Haffner,
Board Member Moraga Citizens' Network

[watch video](#)
(4min 20sec)

All five Town Council candidates had 5 minutes to talk about themselves and their campaign.

 Ken Chew watch video (6min 33sec)	 Dave Trotter watch video (5min 27sec)	 Eleni Wanken watch video (4min 20sec)
 Dennis Wanken watch video (4min 35sec)	 Seth Freeman watch video (4min 26sec)	

Questions from the audience answered by all candidates

Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
Do you believe that it's achievable to preserve Moraga's semi-rural character and at the same time be a champion of growth in new residential housing and new business development? What specific things would you do to accomplish this?	What are your priorities for the Town's revenues?	Do you believe the Dollar Tree store would be a beneficial addition to the Moraga community? How would you approach reviving the Rheem Shopping Center with local businesses?
watch video (8min 23sec)	watch video (9min 41sec)	watch video (10min 28sec)

The Moraga Town Council Candidates Forum can be viewed on our website: www.lamorindaweekly.com and click the link.

be their first order of business.

"Why are we so focused on increasing revenue when we should have focused on decreasing costs?" asked D. Wanken. "The incumbents had a fantastic chance to initiate pension reform in the town by putting the new Town Manager on a defined benefit plan or a 401K-style plan...", said Seth Freeman, "these kind of pension reforms could save hundreds of thousands of dollars to the town."

According to Chew and Trotter, all possible reductions have been made and new taxes will be necessary to find the money to address the maintenance deficit. Chew emphasized the need to inform and educate the residents, and Trotter indicated that a benefit assessment district could be established, but that voters would ultimately have to decide what quality of infrastructure they want.

Freeman explained that he's not fond of taxation but does not see any way to avoid it. "A sales transfer tax can be a source of revenue to make the capital improvements we require," he said, "there is no better time than when you have a homeowner selling and a home buyer who wants to move in... the actual pain of the transfer tax is not fully felt by the buyer." He added that raising bonds could be a good solution too.

Not unexpectedly, the Dollar Tree question reared its ugly head, as did the issue of revitalizing the Rheem Center. Freeman, who claims a background in commercial real estate and community development, stated that the strategy of Kimco (which owns the Rheem Center) is clear: "their plan is to get rid of the small undercapitalized tenants and fill it (the Rheem Center) up as soon as they can with national retailers, so they can get a good appraisal, refinance it and get rid of it. But we don't control it and that's just the fact."

Trotter noted that he believes that some of Kimco's problems in that center are "self inflicted wounds," probably referring to raised rents that led tenants to leave. He would not comment about the Dollar Tree prior to the Town Council's discussion on October 13. Chew noted that government has no authority to tell an owner what store should open in their property.

Dennis Wanken said that he was "a firm believer in private property rights" and that he was in support of a store that would replace the current vacancies; his wife added that the store would be welcomed by some of the Moraga citizens. She said she talked to

There were no snappy exchanges or heated disputes when the five civic-minded residents vying for two open seats on the Moraga Town Council convened at a forum sponsored by the Moraga Citizens Network and the Moraga Movers. The candidates spoke in sequence, answered questions from the audience and made timed statements. Although there were few direct arguments, it was clear that the contenders and the incumbents have very different views on how to manage the town, find resources to fund road repairs, and promote development.

The challengers, Dennis Wanken, Eleni Wanken and Seth Freeman, expressed dissatisfaction with the way public affairs are being run; while the two incumbents, Dave Trotter and Ken Chew, took credit for a balanced budget and the approval of the new Downtown Specific Plan.

At the top of everyone's agenda are the Town's finances and where to find the \$30-\$50 million dollars necessary to maintain the town's infrastructure (roads and storm drains).

The challengers found it easy to criticize the incumbents for not tackling the road problem during their tenure. "We need to find a way to pay for these things that have been deferred not only prior to the last four-year terms, but during these last four years," said Freeman.

Responding to these criticisms, Trotter and Chew presented the work done in 2009 by the Revenue Enhancement Committee as the necessary first step in addressing the problem.

In its preamble the Committee's report notes, "Moraga does not have a spending problem, it has a revenue problem." This was not the opinion of the Wankens or Freeman, who all said that savings would

residents who cannot afford to buy shampoo at CVS and would be happy to have a Dollar Tree store in town.

Moraga's Specific Plan was another issue on which incumbents and challengers took dramatically different positions. The Plan allows the creation of a downtown area around School Street, the renovation of the Moraga Center, the addition of retail and office space, and the construction of single and multi-family housing.

When Trotter and Chew promised that the next four years will see the start of the plan's implementation, the three challengers begged to differ.

D. Wanken drew a laugh from the crowd when he began, "Using the yardstick of Palos Colorados, I think I stand a better chance of ending up at Moraga Royale before the Moraga Specific Plan is implemented. I don't see (the plan) happening in a four-year term."

"This plan needs a fresh look," stated Freeman, who doubts that the plan would be good in the long term, and believes that planning for workforce housing in the current real estate market is not realistic. He was not more optimistic for the development of new office space; "I see plenty of 'for rent' signs in Moraga... it's difficult to bring professional employees into Moraga."

As the evening came to an end, the candidates presented their qualifications to formulate public policy. E.Wanken highlighted the skills she has developed as a small business owner; communicating with parents, students and employees, as well as her experience on the Board of the Acalanes Union High School District. D. Wanken has a similar profile, as well as 9 years experience as an auditor with the city of Oakland, and served for 5 years on the Board of the Moraga School District. Freeman stressed how his background differs from those of the incumbents; he runs a global company based in Moraga and explained that he has a business approach to issues. He added that his company is a global leader in 'ESG' factors: environmental, social and governance. The incumbents spoke of their extensive public affairs experience in Moraga. Trotter has over 20 years of combined community service on the Planning Commission, Town Council and Historical Society; an attorney by trade, he works on land use and environmental issues. Chew has also served on the both the Planning Commission and Council. He is a civil engineer with extensive engineering and project management experience.

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