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Moraga Saves Energy

By *Sophie Braccini*

There's nothing like a bit of grant money to sweeten a budget's harsh reality. Federal funding can be hard to obtain, and many long hours of effort goes into preparing a grant proposal that has no guaranteed results; time not easy to find in a small town with a bare-bones staff. Moraga Staff Engineer John Sherbert is passionate about improving the town's energy efficiency, and put in the time - as a result, Moraga will get \$93,465 in grant money, and an 11-year loan of \$198,000 at 3% interest, to fund a series of energy efficiency projects (see sidebar).

The funding is a combined ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) grant and low-interest loan that will permit the Town to save 1/3 of its energy bill over at least the next 20 years.

"John Sherbert did a yeoman effort of combining projects and the projected energy savings in order to maximize the Town's ability to receive funds," says Town Engineer and Public Works Director Jill Mercurio, "But, yes, the paperwork is unbelievable."

"At the Hacienda, two of the furnaces are on their last legs and we could not get the temperature over the low 60s last winter, even with the addition of electric heaters," says Sherbert. The Moraga Library is also in desperate need of an upgrade to its ancient heating system. Sherbert is now waiting for an okay from the California Energy Commission. The contracts have been awarded to the lowest bidders, and the contractors lined-up to start the work. "We should be ready to start in December," he believes.

It will take longer for new solar panels to appear on the roof of 329 Rheem. "We first need to complete the retrofitting and the remodeling of the second floor of the building," Sherbert explains. The work is not anticipated to start before mid 2011, meaning that panels should not be seen on the roof before the second half of 2012.

Getting here was not easy. Sherbert first had to convince the hierarchy that seeking the grant was worth his time. "I researched and proposed that program at this time last year," he recalls, acknowledging that, although Mercurio was always supportive, his request was met with skepticism.

When he received approval to proceed, he was stunned by the amount of paperwork that was required. "The amount of formalities exceeded by far what I had anticipated," said Sherbert. He believes that this level of control and minutia, exerted especially at the federal level, is probably adequate for multi-million projects, but totally absurd for small jurisdictions. "I was invited to talk at the California Energy Commission and I told them what I think," says Sherbert.

"Given the amount of benefit that the Town will receive by implementing these projects, it is well worth the time and effort to wade through the required reporting," concludes Mercurio. As always, she and her staff remain on the lookout for other grant opportunities.

Moraga's newly-funded energy efficiency projects:

- Replacement of the HVAC boiler at the library with a high-efficiency model
- Upgrade of the Hacienda de las Flores' three "forced-air" furnaces and the upstairs air conditioner to high-efficiency models
- Removal of the asbestos-covered ductwork in the Hacienda crawl-space and replacement with new insulated ducts
- Insulation of the attics at the Library, Hacienda, and Casita
- Upgrade, to LED, the streetlights on Moraga's main roads, and the lighting in the Library, Commons, and Hacienda parking lot
- Installation of occupancy sensors in restrooms and enclosed conference areas and photo-sensors on the exterior lighting at the Library, Hacienda, and 329 Rheem
- Installation of a photo-voltaic (PV) system on the roof of 329 Rheem

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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