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\$50K for Your Thoughts, Moraga?

By Sophie Braccini

The Moraga Town Council will pay consultants at least \$50,000 to find out if Moragans are willing to pay new taxes in order to address the Town's unfunded infrastructure needs.

The consultants, The Lew Edwards Group and Godbe Research, explained that \$50,000 would pay for the first phase of their work; when Council Member Ken Chew wondered aloud what the total cost of their services would be, up to the balloting, no estimate was provided.

The first phase of the consultants' work will include a survey of 300 scientifically-selected Moraga residents intended to establish the knowledge level of the population regarding the decay of the town's infrastructure and its willingness to pony up the funds needed to remedy the situation. The survey results will be presented to the Town Council in April and a game plan for the next phases of the project will be recommended.

In the meantime the civil engineering firm Leptien, Cronin, Cooper, Morris & Poore, Inc., also hired by the Town, will be developing tax formulas for pavement and storm drain maintenance, and generating totals by property designation.

"We met with Catherine Lew (President and CEO of Lew Edwards) a week ago," said Dick Olsen of the Revenue Enhancement Community Outreach to Neighborhoods (RECON) team. "Based on the RECON work done last year, with the online survey and the focus groups, we believe that residents might have the willingness to pay for the needed maintenance. The Lew Edwards Group poll will precisely assess what residents do or don't know about the situation, and their willingness to do something about it. That's the information the Council needs to make the decision regarding the next phases."

"We will have the results and will decide in May," said Town Manager Jill Keimach, who indicated that if residents were generally opposed to new taxes the project could be dropped. As Council Member Mike Metcalf put it, "Maybe people will prefer to drive on gravel rather than fix the roads."

If it appears that residents are favorable to financing infrastructure maintenance, the second phase of the project would be a public information campaign that would run from this June to February of 2012, under the consultants' schedule. The third phase, preparation for balloting, would result in an infrastructure revenue measure on a ballot in August or November of 2012.

Read the related article, RECON Issues Road Warning, above.

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