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Letters to the Editor

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Editor:
The Lafayette schools are a gem within our community, providing Lafayette's children with the strong enriched education they deserve. What's more, that education is provided very economically – we spend half of what comparable communities in other states spend to achieve similar results. State budget woes, now affecting education funding for the 4th year in a row, threaten the quality of that education and we must band together to preserve this critical community asset.
Fortunately school leaders have provided us the opportunity to support the school children of Lafayette by placing a temporary "bride the gap" parcel tax on the ballot, Measure B. From my 8 years on the school board I can attest that our schools are already run as efficiently as possible – 4 years of budget cuts have assured that. There is nowhere left to economize without directly impacting quality of education – in fact some programs have already been pared back and now face possible elimination. While scaling up is relatively easy once funding returns to normal levels, programs eliminated are very difficult to reinstate. Moreover, the children in the seats of our schools right now will only pass this way but once. A program eliminated for even a few years means a lesser education for those kids.
I no longer have children in the Lafayette schools but am supporting Measure B because I believe it is the community's obligation to provide a strong education. We cannot allow for the quality of our school's to decline - we owe our community's children better than that. Please vote yes on Measure B.
Sincerely,
Ann Appert
Lafayette

newspaper regarding the decision by the town council to approve the Rancho Laguna project.
The fact that the council made the decision even when they knew that they had the legal justification to say NO to the plan is baffling. They, more than the average citizen of Moraga, knew of the consequences: 180,000 cubic yards getting excavated off the top of the ridgeline, to mention one.
That 2/3 of the council did not consider the compromise on the table that would protect the ridgelines and the creek, while still allowing development, causes bewilderment.
Another puzzle: how can the council come up with the anal definition that says 'protect' does not mean 'prohibit', when referring to bulldozing open spaces? This new definition certainly makes me think twice about relying on the town council to protect me, one of Moraga's citizens. Under their 'protection', they wouldn't find it necessary to prohibit someone from lopping off my right arm. In fact, from lopping even try to convince me that such a loss, with a bit of creative effort, could become invisible.
The approval granted to the Rancho Laguna project has set a dangerous precedent. If an area deemed 'Priority Conservation Area', and 'scenic corridor' can be so badly damaged, then what of the other open spaces around Moraga? They've suddenly become quite vulnerable. The Open Spaces and Hill of Moraga were cited as reasons, along with the school system, as main reasons for people to choose living in this town; one wonders what the town council and 'planning' commission were thinking. Are we going to see the removal of a top reason for choosing Moraga as a preferred habitat one hill, one creek, one protected open space at a time?
Leslie Swartz
Moraga

Laguna project provides a sobering lesson on the need to revise the Moraga General Plan. Despite the presence of clear language in the current General Plan to protect ridgelines, two council members, Karen Mendonca and Howard Harpham, chose to ignore this language and voted to approve a project with ridgeline development. Only Councilmember Dave Trotter spoke directly about the General Plan language to protect ridgelines and the clear intent of the Town Council in 2002 which adopted this language, citing this as the basis for his opposition to the Rancho Laguna project.
The dictionary defines the word "protect" to mean: "to shield from injury, danger or loss; guard, defend". It is baffling to hear that grading off the top of the ridge is protecting it because the homes which will be built would not be seen from a small number of arbitrarily selected viewpoints. It is even harder to understand when this argument is put forth by a councilmember who ran on a platform of protecting open space as Karen Mendonca did. Ridgelines not protected by MOSO 1986 will only be protected when their preservation is not subject to interpretation. The current General Plan will be 10 years old in 2012, the time interval recommended by the state when an update should occur. Moraga residents need to insist this process gets underway and ensure that specific language is put in place that permanently protects our ridgelines from those who covet to build on them, and from the politicians who allow them to.
Malcolm Sproul
Moraga

Editor:
Dick Immel and Dan Smith wrote excellent letters to the Lamorinda Weekly last week. Letters are an excellent and important means of communicating opinions, but what struck me while I was reading them is that this is not enough. It is time for all of the open space supporters to think about either running for the Town Council or Planning Commission themselves or finding people willing to run. As both these men so eloquently pointed out, we were blind-

sided by Karen Mendonca with her first vote on Rancho Laguna. Karen campaigned vigorously for Measure K to preserve and support Moraga's Open Spaces but what did she do in the voting booth? When I have mentioned to open space supporters who have packed the council and planning commission meetings about running, everyone says no. OK, so then what happens? It is time for all the people who attend council meetings in support of Moraga Open Space to think about this. We cannot have Karen re-elected. Everyone together needs to change the face of Moraga politics or at least the part of politics that concerns Open Space. As Dan Smith said in his letter, "... the residents are not going to like what they see when the grading begins." There is no such thing as an invisible house. Carving up hill-sides to create this "illusion" of invisibility is a travesty.
Caroline Wood
Moraga

Editor:
While we applaud Governor Jerry Brown and the Legislature for taking action on the budget, the proposal to abolish redevelopment agencies would eliminate affordable housing funding for Habitat for Humanity in the East Bay and across California. We use this key source of support to revitalize blighted communities, help drive the East Bay economy and change lives for hard working families. These funds, along with local donations and the hands-on work of thousands of volunteers each year, have built nearly 300 affordable homes. In turn, our Habitat homeowners help sustain the economy by paying property taxes and reducing reliance on state and local social services.
Habitat East Bay uses this funding to create jobs, employing plumbers, electricians, engineers and architects. Redevelopment funds also allow us to leverage additional non-government funding to support our housing program.
Habitat for Humanity offers a hand-up, not a hand-out. Habitat homebuyers purchase their homes at cost and invest 500 hours of sweat equity as their down payment. They receive training on budgeting, money management and home maintenance. Habitat's model of true affordability and homeowner education has kept our foreclosure rate below 2%, far below the national average.
We support redevelopment reform that lays the foundation for an efficient system of affordable housing production. There must remain a mechanism for funding that enables the development of affordable housing and helps eliminate the sub-standard housing conditions and high rents that plague many areas of the East Bay.
Janice Jensen
Lafayette

held, it is projected that the Lafayette School District could face a staggering 3.2 million dollar structural deficit for the 2011-2012 school year.
This loss of money means cuts to established and valuable programs such as music and science. It equates to decreases in instructional days, reducing the number of teachers and counselors, and the list goes on. That is not the education I want for my children. That is not why my husband and I moved here.
Unfortunately, at this time, we can not count on the state of California to provide our schools with the funding it needs to continue to provide quality education.
The Lafayette community must act quickly to find funding sources NOW. Saving our valuable programs, teachers, counselors, and other support staff is a necessity to ensure we maintain our excellent schools. Our children deserve to be adequately prepared for the future.
How will we do this?

First, we must pass Measure B on May 3. This is one step towards generating local stable funding for our school. This parcel tax of \$176 for the next four years is money that STAYS LOCAL - it cannot be taken away by the state. If you are reading this and balking at the idea of another tax, I understand. But for less than 50 cents a day, we can make a statement that the Lafayette community cares about our schools. Whether you have children in the school system or not, our schools not only educate the children that shape our future, they are a major factor in making Lafayette a very desirable neighborhood.
Second, we must think outside the box. We need to tap into any available resources such as grants, donations from local businesses, support from generous alumni and contributions from our real estate agents who understand that the quality of our schools is tied to the value of our homes. Parents who have children in the school district were each asked to pay \$1000 per student for the 20010-2011 school year. This form of donation from the parents has been going on for years and will continue but it is still not enough. Until California can stand on its own (and I look forward to that day) and sufficiently provide for an acceptable education for all students, the entire Lafayette community needs to be part of the solution.
Third, we must work together as a community. Our city officials, our school board, our teachers, our business owners, our residents - with and without children - everyone. Be an active participant in where you live by staying informed. This can be done in numerous ways such as: attending city meetings, school board meetings, reading the paper, or listening to the news. The good news: it is not late to find out what is going on in Lafayette. And the time is right to improve communication between the schools, the city, and the people they serve.

We also need to look towards the future. The only way we can truly move past this crisis is to create stability in our educational funding source. We must all take the time to write and call our state officials and tell them that our current structure for funding education is broken and we have no choice but to fix it.
On the City of Lafayette's homepage, it states that "Lafayette is noted for its high quality of life with top rated schools." That is true now, but may not be if we do not work on the current crisis in front of us and do so swiftly. Let us lead by example in Lafayette. I look forward to our community working together and solving this urgent situation that is troubling our wonderful community.
Sincerely,
Jennifer Paul
Lafayette

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