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Small Town v. Federal Government Moraga Town Council opposes closure of Country Club post office

By Sophie Braccini

The Moraga Town Council is joining the fight against the planned closure of the post office on Country Club Drive. The Council was not consulted, nor even officially informed, about the United States Postal Service's (USPS) decision to close the branch near the Moraga Center and it has little say in the matter, "It's David against Goliath," commented Chief of Police Bob Priebe; united against a rare common enemy, the Council decided to take a stand. "The (USPS) personnel that conducted the public meeting on April 19, 2011, obviously had no knowledge of the situation in this town," said Mayor Karen Mendonca, "they were not informed of the developments that are planned in that area, or of the fact that this post office is close to two retirement homes populated with residents that have limited mobility." (Read our report about that meeting at www.lamorindaweekly.com.)

The Council indicated that closing the Country Club post office did not make good economic sense because, as the USPS itself admits, it's a profitable branch. Council members noted that the closure of that office would add extra car trips for residents of Moraga and north Orinda. They wondered if such environmental consequences should be reviewed under a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) procedure.

NEPA, enacted in 1970, requires federal agencies to incorporate environmental considerations in their planning and decision-making through a systematic interdisciplinary approach. Specifically, all federal agencies must prepare detailed statements assessing the environmental impact of and alternatives to major federal actions significantly affecting the environment. The Town's attorney was asked to check if the closure of the post office could be subject to NEPA regulations.

The Council also decided to send a formal letter to the Postal Service and elected officials to push their agenda. Staff had readied a long, descriptive letter that council members deemed "too polite."

"We are outraged," said Vice Mayor Michael Metcalf. "We want to be punchy and stay civil," said Mendonca. A revised letter was mailed on May 17, and the mayor agreed to place a call to Congressman John Garamendi.

Town Manager Jill Keimach, who previously worked in Fremont, recounted how residents there saved a post office branch that was scheduled to close: "What made the difference was that people literally flooded the Postal Service with letters." Public opposition was so overwhelming that the postal administration reversed the decision. Keimach appeared perplexed at the half dozen residents who showed up at the meeting to voice their concerns.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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