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Letters to the Editor

Editor:

We write about the Moraga Town Council meeting on December 14, at which the Council decided to significantly change Rancho Laguna Park.

Rancho Laguna is an open and beautiful park. Until recently, it had play structures, but the Town removed them. For about 30 years, people have walked their dogs off-leash in the morning (7a-9a) and just before the park closes.

About two years ago, the Recreation Director decided we should alter the Park and fence part of it as a dog park.

On December 14, the Council voted to adopt the Recreation Director's proposed plan by a vote of 3-2. That vote was opposed by people at the meeting and by 150 people who signed a petition presented to the Council.

The Council members who voted to change Rancho Laguna (Harpham, Chew, and Mendonca) claimed that a dog off-leash might someday bite someone and that dog "poops" are a significant problem. Anyone can avoid the possibility of being bitten by an off-leash dog by using the park during hours when dogs are not off-leash. As for dog "poops," those who use the park with their dogs mostly pick up after their dogs and police others to do the same.

The plan adopted by the Council will require the removal or relocation of trees, the ground cover bark, shrubs, the barbecues, and the picnic tables. That is too extreme. Moreover, the Council has never tried to determine the will of the people through a ballot measure or scientific survey. The Council shrugged off the petitions we presented.

For those who use the park in the early morning and evening, it is a time for people and dogs to socialize. About 30 people use the park in the morning and in the evening, 350 days a year, which totals 21,000 visits per year. The number of visits by picnickers, campers, and soccer players pales in comparison.

Changing the park will change what has worked well for 30 years - and for no good reason. If the park remains as is, others who have used the Park will be unaffected: when people reserve Rancho Laguna, the Town posts a notice and dog walkers don't allow their dogs off-leash.

We urge Lamorinda citizens to: (1) come to Rancho Laguna one morning or evening and see how well the park operates; (2) visit the park at other times - you won't see much use at all; (3) let the Council members know they made a poor decision; and (4) attend a Council meeting and keep track of what your representatives are doing - they are our representatives. Moraga does not now have enough money to pay for both new play equipment and a dog park. The money should be spent on children and not on changing the character and beauty of Rancho Laguna. The videotape of the December 14 meeting is available at www.livestream.com/moragacc.

Tina Brier and David Shapiro
Moraga

Editor:

Don't Let Orinda Crumble - A Great Community needs Good Infrastructure.

As a 22 year resident, I know Orinda is full of wonderful, committed people that value our location, our great schools and the friendly nature of the community. At the same time almost everyone is frustrated with the state of our residential roads and storm drainage. It's easy to hear complaints all over town but it doesn't seem easy to get the community to fully understand the engineering and funding realities. Many residents believe the City is somehow diverting money that should go to roads. Many harbor concerns or frustrations about other issues - past and present - that they have strong feelings about such as City Hall or the Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

As both a licensed civil engineer and a current member of the City's Infrastructure Oversight Commission I can reliably testify to key facts that I hope all Orindans will continue to educate themselves about. Orinda's overall road network is one of the worst in the Bay Area. Our roads are fifty plus years old; past their useful life and require major rehabilitation and replacement. They deteriorate further every day.

Despite any criticisms of City governance, in the last five years the City has done an amazing job of improving our main thoroughfares using the limited funding available. Priorities and policies have been set to deliver the most benefit possible for the community at large. Each year the City is able to spend about \$1 million on infrastructure out of a total annual budget of \$10-11 million. That total budget is very modest considering that it includes our police services and all other needed activities. In recent years tax revenues have dipped and, like most entities, the City has had to cut back virtually everywhere. The City is working hard to maintain the major roads but there is absolutely no budget for residential road improvements.

Getting our roads and drainage to the condition that we would like requires nearly \$60 million. Extensive details about the topic are available on the City's website at www.ci.orinda.ca.us. The entire City budget isn't enough to solve our problem without new funding sources. Federal and state money for our residential roads is non-existent. The only solution is for Orindans to decide that there are some taxes worth paying ---- that we care about our infrastructure and want to invest in our home and our future.

Darlene K. Gee
Orinda

Editor:

What's next For MOFD?

How about spending \$2.2 million taxpayer dollars for Administrative offices for 12 Administrative staff members? The Moraga/Orinda Fire District (MOFD) Board is continuing negotiations to buy a burned out building at 1150 Moraga Way in Moraga. Since this 9,147 square foot building is over 2 times the 4,300 sq. ft. the Board feels is needed, the Board reasons they can fix up this vacant shell, and rent any empty space. There seems to be no concern there are many vacant rental spaces in Moraga. The Board lacks experience in the speculative commercial real estate business.

A citizens analysis shows MOFD has obligated tax payers with hundreds of millions of dollars for unfunded liabilities. Instead of purchasing a 9,147 sq. ft. building, the Board should start reducing taxpayers' huge unfunded liability debts.

When the Orinda City Council in 1997 convinced voters to detach from county services and form MOFD, it was for emergency services only. We did not vote to use tax payer funds to invest in speculative real estate.

Orinda's fair share for MOFD costs is 58% but we are financing 65% of the revenue which amounts to a \$1.2 million annual subsidy for Moraga's emergency services. Since the formation of MOFD 14 years ago, Orinda has wasted approximately \$16 million subsidizing Moraga. That \$16 million could have fixed many Orinda roads.

Since Orinda cannot afford to continue subsidizing Moraga with \$1.2 million annually something needs to be done, and time is of the essence.

Solution: The Orinda City Council should follow the lead of the 1997 City Council . Our council should detach from MOFD and form an Orinda Fire District. If we had our own fire district, we would not subsidize Moraga, We could add that \$1.2 million annual Moraga subsidy to Orinda's road budget.

Janet Maiorana
Orinda

Editor:

I am writing to raise a red flag about the dangerous parking situation at the Whole Foods/McCaulou's parking lot in Lafayette. Today I was walking across the parking lot from the Bank of America to enter Noahs Bagels and was almost hit by a driver going well over 20mph in front of McCaulou's. I visit this area 2 -3 times a week and have seen several near misses between pedestrians crossing the traffic lane and cars going way too fast for this busy parking lot. Somebody is going to get hurt or worse. Drivers enter at Whole Foods and pick up speed as they drive the straight down to McCaulou's. Drivers are either not paying attention and/or driving way too fast. Pedestrians play russian roulette when they cross over the traffic lanes, especially in front of Whole Foods. The retailers who occupy the retail spaces and the City of Lafayette need to organize and protect the people who shop at those stores. The parking lot needs crosswalks and speed bumps to slow drivers down. Diablo Foods provides traffic monitors at peak shopping times as does the WholeFoods in Walnut Creek. Lets not wait until a terrible accident happens like the one last year in front of the post office to fix this. Please contact Whole Foods, McCaulou's and other retailers in the mall to get them to pay attention to this.

Heidi Schmidt, Lafayette

Editor:

With competing definitions for "insanity" I wondered what my dictionary might offer. Not surprisingly, it showed a picture of a bicyclist riding uphill on Moraga Road. Recently, while driving downhill on that road I saw two bicyclists puffing up the hill, their feet spinning 100 miles per hour and their bikes traveling 100 feet per hour. I mention this for those who drive up the hill from Lafayette and who prefer not to attach "10-speed hood ornaments" to their autos. Please watch out for cyclists.

Edward C. Hartman
Moraga

Editor:

My husband and I attended the Chamber of Commerce Holiday Party hosted by Moraga Royale in early December. As one of over 125 attendees, I felt I was attending a "royal" party. To start with, we were greeted by Santa and Mrs. Claus in the lobby where a group of musicians filled the air with seasonal tunes. The upbeat music inspired several to swing into dancing! Decorations were superb, complete with a Festival of Trees Room holding 6 unique trees for community bidding to benefit Moraga's Rescue One Foundation, as well as garlands of greens and colored balls tastefully decorating the walls of all the rooms.

And what a feast for our palate! The staff passed tasty and abundant appetizers, poured wine and chilled punch, and served festive desserts. Moraga Royale's activity director, hostess and MC, Loto Rickman, took off her shoes at one point to dance gracefully and professionally one of her many Samoan dances.

Hats off to Dianne Wilson, Executive Director of Moraga Royale, Al and Karen Pyne, Directors of Transportation and the Clauses, Chris and Nancy Berg, owners of Moraga Royale, and the whole staff for their gracious, generous hospitality to Moraga's Chamber of Commerce members and guests. You surely live up to your name - Moraga Royale!

Ellen Beans

Moraga

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