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Letters to the Editor

Editor:

A Moragan's Salute to David Trotter & Michael Metcalf: Kudos to Councilman Dave Trotter and Mayor Mike Metcalf for listening to the people of Moraga and voting to preserve the sanctity of Rancho Laguna Park as a community gathering point. We salute you for willing to explore compromise with other members of the council and for ultimately sticking to your guns rather than succumb to political pressure.

For over three years the city council has sought to split this open, rustic park in two and turn it into a commercial enterprise to rent out for different uses. In doing so, they have split the tranquil hamlet of Moraga into two distinctly separate camps - "dog people" versus "non-dog people".

Throughout this arduous process Councilman Trotter and Mayor Metcalf were the only members to both listen to the desires of the community and to seek compromise with the remaining members of the council based upon this community input. Regrettably, the majority of the council refused to embrace this opportunity and instead held steadfastly to a decision to split the park in two. Ultimately Councilman Trotter paid dearly for his brave support of Rancho Laguna Park as he was passed over for the position of Vice Mayor, a position he was in line for under longstanding council tradition.

In closing I want to personally thank Dave Trotter and Mike Metcalf for all of their considerable efforts at preserving the sanctity of our town park as a rustic, informal gathering place and I encourage all Moragan's to remember these brave public servants when we go to the polls on election day. Here's to preserving Rancho Laguna Park as the special place it is today rustic and open for all in existence to enjoy, including those with four legs.

Barry Behr
Moraga

Editor:

I couldn't believe what I saw today in the parking lot between 24 Hour Fitness and Chef Chao.

One of the guys working for the gym covering up a simple request that gym members not use the 10 to 12 parking spaces near the restaurant between the hours of 4 and 7 pm. Granted, it is a public parking lot, but the gym has selfishly taken over all parking in the front of the gym and now the side lot as well. In fact, St. Mary's College offices had the same issue with their parking when the gym moved from in front of CVS Pharmacy to their current location. Instead of putting another tenant out of business, why can't the town insist that 24 Hour Fitness share parking. It's only for the three hours of dinnertime that the restaurant requested.

As a member of the gym, I am embarrassed for them, as I also enjoy a Chinese meal on occasion.

I sure hope that the signs that the restaurant installed were not thrown out and will reappear for the three hours it so deserves. Shame on you 24 Hour Fitness!

Suzanne Wells Parsons
Lafayette

Editor:

On December 27th 2011 I had a very unprofessional encounter with an Orinda Police officer. I had parked in the BevMo parking lot in Orinda in order to meet a friend, not wanting to waste time waiting I decided to brush my teeth in my car. Unbeknownst to me this seemingly efficient use of downtime to practice oral hygiene would lead to a bizarre thirty minute confrontation with the Orinda Police Department. I spotted the officer in my rear view mirror, but I kept brushing my teeth because I was not sure what the police officer was doing. The officer approached and inquired to why I was brushing my teeth. She asked what I was doing and for my ID. I gave her my ID and told her I was waiting for my friend. She asked where my friend lived and I told her on the other side of Orinda. Officer Richardson then told me that my story did not "add up" to why I was meeting him in a public space and why I did not know his exact address. Officer Richardson asked if I was on drugs and I told her I had about four cups of coffee but nothing else. She then asked if she could search my car to which I replied that she could not search my car. Immediately she asked my why she couldn't and I informed her that I have rights and I do not think that someone brushing their teeth in a public space is reason to search ones person. She then said that it was perfectly reasonable because if I "robbed BevMo and she saw me brushing my teeth, it would make her look bad." To me her tone seemed like she was accusing me of being a criminal which I am not, and furthermore I still do not think that "acting weird" by doing something as benign as brushing my teeth is probable cause to violate my personal space. After about 30 minutes she gave me a "fix it" ticket for a crack in my windshield. I told her what I thought of the event and she placed the ticket under my windshield so I was forced to leave my car, a blatant sign of disrespect.

The entire event was very surreal to me. I felt violated by the police; furthermore they treated me as a criminal and did not show me the respect that I had tried to show her. Especially in a community as small as Lamorinda it seems to me that the police should treat citizens with respect rather than as criminals. She did not go in to the situation with a neutral mindset. The entire situation disturbed me, and being falsely by authority is an incredibly scary feeling. Naturally I am filling a formal complaint against Officer Richardson, and I hope to see the Orinda Police

Department take some action to stop this type of treatment of citizens in the future.

Joe Noonan
Moraga

Editor:

I just saw the Box office numbers went down for the second year in a row at North American movie theatres in 2011 and I would like to see International films to be a part of Americana just like movies that come from Hollywood to a theatre near you. I would like to see a conscious effort from the Bookers that work with Hollywood to get International movies into the Theatres and not have theatres owners to do this on their own. I know for a fact that Bookers don't want Foreign movies into theatres and that has to stop.

Jonathan I Winchell
Lafayette

Editor:

Lafayette - unfriendly to walkers who dare to cross in the crosswalk!

I moved to Lafayette over a year ago and thought I was moving to a great place to retire. I didn't know then how dangerous it could be if you have the nerve to cross Mt. Diablo Blvd. in the crosswalk. I am a 64 year old who walks with a cane and enjoys walking my dog on a leash three times a day. I cross Mt. Diablo Blvd. at Stuart St. and Hampton Rd. crosswalks as the lights on Brown St. and Carol Lane are too far. Tires have screeched, cars have swerved and I have been yelled at for crossing. I give oncoming cars time to stop and watch carefully - but people still believe they need to get where they are going regardless of the danger to myself or my dog. Don't blame the young people or college students, it was only once that a young person swerved so they didn't have to stop. It's the adults between 30 - 70, yes the good citizens in their nice cars. It's not random, it happens 2 - 5 times a day. Today was the last straw when I was in the middle of Mt. Diablo Blvd and a mother in her minivan speeded up then swerved in another lane so she didn't have to stop. Well, I smacked her car with my cane so if she has a little dent too bad - it could have been much worse - because she could be in jail tonight held for manslaughter and her children given to social services. Yes, good residents of Lafayette and surrounding area - if you see me in the crosswalk PLEASE STOP under California law in the crosswalk I have the right-of-way. My neighbor and I have called police and they come periodically. Maybe putting in reflectors will help remind people - I don't want to be your cities casualty - and if that happens Lafayette and good people you will have a casualty too in your pocketbook.

Nancy Collins
Lafayette

MOFD

Editor:

These comments were originally intended to be delivered in person, but I am unable to make the meeting, and I am highly annoyed and insulted at the timing of this meeting as it was clearly designed to bypass the majority of public opinion and get lost in the Holiday season. I will make every attempt to get my views out to the community as well using the local media.

1. I believe Board VP Mr Weil made the following comment as a justification for this transaction: "Markets will only go up". Clearly they don't, because if they did this "historic" opportunity would not exist. Besides, this is a fire department, not a real estate speculator, using one man's opinion of the market is just ignorant. Market analysis strongly suggests the target project is over-valued by \$300,000 or more dollars, but price is really a secondary consideration compared to the next point.
2. Far more troubling, no entity, public or private, or government, should EVER invest their liquid reserves in an illiquid asset. NEVER. If funds have been raised and set aside for this purpose perhaps, but that is another discussion. This action is a violation of the fiduciary trust entrusted to the board. Personally, if one of my company management teams presented me with a project like this they would quickly be looking for new employment.
3. Add-on to an existing station if you must, use modular trailers until the funds have been raised to complete the construction project. Does admin space really trump the unfunded pension issues, existing station and equipment needs? Can you really make this argument? No, you can't.
4. Finally, I want to know who on the board, or the fire department, or both, is going to personally benefit from this transaction. A project such as this only lives and gets finagled through in the holidays because some person or group has a under-the-table benefit to make it happen. This project clearly violates every fiduciary and commonsense evaluation of capital allocation and risk management. I live on Crestview, the neighborhood that had to raise its own money to pave our street precisely because of long-forgotten decisions like this. As a community, as long as we are still digging a hole we can't begin to get out.

Glenn Millar
Orinda

Editor:

Emergency Service Not Top Priority for Morinda FD Directors . . . but speculating on commercial property IS !
MORAGA-ORINDA FIRE DISTRICT (MOFD) Directors are using taxpayer dollars to speculate on commercial property.
Yeah, ok, Orinda city already has a \$700 million unfunded liability that the city council seems to have no interest in

paying down. So worrying about a two million dollar pittance may be a waste of time . . . But the number one priority for citizens should be emergency services - in which re-building the St. Stephens Fire Station is vitally important.

The MOFD Directors have decided, though, that the first priority should be for administrative offices - NOT rebuilding the St. Stephens fire station.

The MOFD Board will spend over TWO MILLION DOLLARS to buy a less than 10K ft², burned-out, building in Moraga - in order to house twelve admin staffers.

Orinda pays 65% of the MOFD revenue, so Orinda taxpayers may soon be on the hook for nearly one-and-a-half million dollars for this Moraga building, but Moraga pays only \$770,000. Equitable?

And, Orinda will still not have its sub-standard (St. Stephens) fire station rebuilt.

The Directors, however, ARE proposing borrowing the money to fix the St. Stephens Station. Of course, Orinda taxpayers will ONLY pay 65% of the cost of the borrowed money. Moraga will pay 35%. Are we at equitable, yet? The Orinda City Council COULD form an Orinda Fire District. Then its admin staff could be housed in unused space in the recently-built City Hall. That would save Orinda taxpayers nearly a MILLION FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND - since we would not have to buy the 9000 ft² building in Moraga.

Orinda has already allowed \$16 million tax dollars, that might have been used for our roads, as a subsidy for emergency services in Moraga. Is this equitable?

The \$16 million pot-hole grows, and Orinda has less and less money for roads - AND still has substandard fire-response times into some parts of the town.

Wayne Phillips
Orinda

Editor:

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors has, by a 3 to 2 vote, decided to waste \$2.2 million of our taxpayer dollars in buying a burnt-out Moraga building and refurbishing it solely for the convenience of its 12-person administrative staff. This 12-person administrative staff is currently housed in two offices, one in Orinda and one in Moraga. The two-office locations have never had any problem communicating by telephone and e-mail or by a short 4-mile drive when necessary. The majority of the MOFD directors are spendaholics.

This \$2.2 million could have been used to build a new St. Stephens fire station to replace the existing run-down station. Instead, the MOFD directors will take out a mortgage on an existing fire station to supply the money for St. Stephens. Thus we add \$2.2 million to the \$24 million debt the MOFD already has to pay for its exorbitant employee benefits. In our current economy the last thing we need is waste of our taxpayer money.

If you object to this waste of our money, send an e-mail to the Fire Chief expressing your disapproval and asking that he pass it on to all of the Board of Directors of the MOFD. Send it to rbradley@mofd.org.

Clyde Vaughn
Orinda

Editor:

Moraga/Orinda Fire District Board Scams Taxpayers Again

The focus for MOFD should be (a) emergency services and (b) paying off the huge underfunded liability problem Directors have created for taxpayers.

Instead, the Directors plan to use money dedicated to rebuild St. Stephens Station in Orinda, as a Christmas present for the owner of a burned out Moraga building. The Directors approved the purchase of this 9,000 sq. ft. building which has been vacant for 2 years to house 12 Administrative MOFD staffers. The cost to taxpayers is \$2.2 million. If Directors did not want to spend the \$2.2 million on their emergency services priority, they should have spent the money to pay down the huge underfunded liability problem.

The Directors give their reasons for going into the speculative commercial real estate business.

1. Directors believe it is a good time to buy because prices are low, and the building will appreciate \$60,000 per year.

Fact: Prices are now where they would have been without artificial Federal interference and manipulation. There is no justification to speculate on \$60,000 annual appreciation.

2. Directors believe they can rent the unused space for \$70,000 annually.

Fact: Directors need to look at empty store fronts in Moraga and Rheem.

It is easy for Directors to spend other peoples' money. If they were financially responsible for their decisions they would not throw taxpayer money away on pension spiking, illegal lawsuits, and other financially irresponsible decisions too numerous to mention here.

Orinda taxpayers are on the hook for 65% of MOFD Directors financially irresponsible decisions. It is up to the Orinda City Council to look out for Orinda citizens. Before the Orinda City Council asks voters to approve a road bond, they should detach from MOFD. An Orinda Fire District would save tax payers money that could be spent on Orinda roads.

Bruce Nicolai
Orinda

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