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Published August 1st, 2012

## Town Okays Sales Tax Measure for November Ballot

By Cathy Tyson

The Moraga Town Council enthusiastically agreed to put a one-cent sales tax measure, that would sunset in 20 years, on the November ballot to fund road and storm drain repair. It's no secret to residents that according to The Pothole Report, Moraga's roads rank in the lowest 15 percent of Bay Area roads.

Calling it a "team effort" Town Manager Jill Keimach noted that the endeavor started four years ago with RECON - Revenue Enhancement Community Outreach to Neighborhoods - which was organized to address Moraga's crumbling streets. RECON looked at cost cutting measures and a variety of possible revenue-raising scenarios including an ad valorem tax, a bond measure, a Community Facilities District and a sales tax.

RECON's recommendation came after surveys, extensive community outreach and focus groups showed support of the Town's effort to find a way to fix the roads. In a Town-sponsored survey by Godbe Research in May of 2012, a majority of those that responded supported a \$0.01 sales tax.

There's no extra money available to keep up with the \$25 million cost of road maintenance when the entire budget to keep the Town running is \$6 million annually. To deal with its own state-wide budget issues, government officials in Sacramento have taken nearly \$5 million from the Town of Moraga since 1992. Due to recent declines in property values the Town has seen a slight dip in annual revenue, while the cost of providing public safety, parks and recreation and road repair has gone up.

"In order to begin addressing the \$25 million backlog in street and road repair needs out of the general fund would require the entire elimination of all other services the Town provides - for over four years," said Keimach in her staff report for the July 25 Town Council meeting. "The Town of Moraga continues to live within its means - never spending more than the current revenue would allow, but as a consequence the streets have fallen further into disrepair.

Delaying maintenance and repairs to Moraga's local streets and roads only increase costs in the long run - without additional funds, our street and road condition will decline and the cost of repairs will triple in ten years." ...

continued on page A4 She points out benefits of a \$0.01 sales tax - giving Moraga local control of local revenue raised to fund road and storm drain repair and maintain other town services; money raised cannot be taken away by the State. The additional sales tax doesn't apply to groceries, prescription drugs, professional services or rent, so it shouldn't be a burden for those on a fixed income. The statewide sales tax is currently 8.25 percent; if passed, the new rate in Moraga will be 9.25 percent.

In addition, there are a number of stores in town that draw people from outside of the community, shoppers that drive on Moraga's roads - providing a way to share the cost. The ballot measure includes independent audits by a Citizen's Oversight Committee and the Audit and Finance Committee.

Neighborhood streets in this bedroom community would be the lucky recipients of repair. Moraga Way and Moraga Road are classified as arterials - so they can receive State or Federal funds for repair. For example when 3.2 miles of Moraga Way was resurfaced in 2008, it was mostly paid for by a Surface Transportation grant of over \$1 million along with a grant from the California Integrated Waste Management Board - which incorporated bits of tires that would have gone to landfill in the rubberized asphalt.

Throughout the auditorium at Joaquin Moraga Middle School, audience members were entirely in favor of placing the measure on the ballot. "Our roads are falling apart now - we need to do something or we will end up like Orinda," said Richard Olsen. "Streets and storm drains desperately need an on-going source of revenue," said Dale Walwark. Bill Snider, a Moraga resident and owner of two local stores, supports the measure whole-heartedly, he spoke of the importance, not only of maintaining the roads, but shopping Moraga first.

All the Town Council members in attendance eagerly chimed in with their support. "It's up to us - we're not going to get help from the County or Sacramento," said Mayor Mike Metcalf. "I think we should go for it with everything we've got."

(Editor's note: Reporter Sophie Braccini, who was unable to attend this meeting of the Town Council, was lauded by council members for her outstanding coverage of Moraga's infrastructure issues.)

Tentative language for the measure reads:

To keep local streets from falling into disrepair and maintain Town services, including: fixing potholes and cracks; maintaining neighborhood police patrols and response times; repairing neighborhood streets; maintaining recreation programs for youth and seniors; other general Town services, shall the Town of Moraga enact a one-cent sales tax for 20 years with authority to incur debt to accelerate infrastructure projects, with annual audits, citizens' oversight, no funds for Sacramento and all funds spent only for Moraga?

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