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Edric Kwan is Passionate about Roads

By Sophie Braccini



Edric Kwan Photo Ohlen Alexander

Edric Kwan started his new job as Moraga's Public Works Director and Town Engineer July 23. He is vividly aware that the Town's first priority is its roads. Fortunately, Kwan has a lot of experience in this area - as a consultant he conceived pavement reports and designs for many Bay Area cities before going to work for the City of Richmond. "The residents of Moraga deserve good pavement," said Kwan, who is pleased that the Town will have a sales tax on the November ballot to support infrastructure that will open up the possibility of doing some serious rehabilitation work.

"I come from a bigger agency where the work was more compartmentalized," said Kwan. "Here, people seem to work more cooperatively and I am very excited about the challenges ahead."

Kwan takes the helm at Public Works at a time when Moraga's pavement is rated in poor condition and the current capital investment budget is way below what's needed to stop the deterioration. But he has seen many cities, many situations, and studied many different ways to preserve infrastructure.

"It is a balancing act," Kwan explained. "It costs so much more to repair a damaged road than to maintain a good road, that when you have a limited amount of money it might be a better idea to keep up the good ones and let some of the bad ones get worse."

As part of Harris & Associates, Kwan provided pavement management plans for some 13 Bay Area communities, including nearby Piedmont and Pleasanton. "You get the data on the roads and depending on how much money you have available you construct decision trees that lead to different repair scenarios, and decision-making by city councils," explained Kwan. The studies are done using software such as StreetSaver, the one used in Moraga.

"As a consultant, I was also involved in designing and bidding pavement plans," added Kwan. "That's the next level, when testing is done in the field, and plans are prepared and estimated." Kwan did pavement design for Pleasant Hill, among other cities.

"Deciding on a pavement is a technical and political decision that can evolve over time, because people's priorities change," said Kwan. "Plans need to be periodically re-evaluated and scenarios modified." What does not change is the need for a revenue stream. Kwan is hopeful that residents will support the one percent sales tax when they go to the polls in November.

"If the sales tax passes, the Council could consider a number of options to begin road repair and other work in 2013, including leveraging our revenues to get an influx of funds to do larger road repair projects in the first several years in order to stem our current rate of infrastructure deterioration," said Town Manager Jill Keimach. "All of those types of options and the detailed road repair plan and construction bids will be considered by the Council after the election."

"The sales tax is only one part of the overall solution," added Mayor Mike Metcalf. "It will staunch the bleeding and keep things from getting worse. But we need about \$2 million per year; the sales tax will bring in about half. That's the challenge for Edric (Kwan)."

In the meantime, Kwan will have to work with what is in the budget and possibly grants. "Grants for pavement are limited to arterials and collectors," said Kwan. "Projects have to be shovel-ready in order to take advantage of an opportunity when it arises." In Richmond, Kwan got a grant for the total reconstruction of Carlson Boulevard, a \$4.5 million project.

"I am very proud of the pavement programs in Alameda and Richmond where I was able to work with the community and get good results," concluded Kwan, who has great hopes for Moraga.

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