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Is Moraga Unsustainable?

How One Bay Area may affect one small town

By Sophie Braccini

There is much controversy in the Bay Area revolving around the housing and transportation master plan, known as One Bay Area, that the Association of Bay Area Governments and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission recently released for public comment.

The philosophy of the plan is to aggregate housing and jobs close to existing and new public transit to accommodate population growth while reducing transportation pollution. On April 23, the Moraga Town Council debated how One Bay Area might affect Moraga and whether or not it should submit comments on the plan.

Although the town does not have anything to complain about regarding its housing obligation, it could find itself excluded from transportation funds and grant money; the council agreed that Moraga should request certain modifications in an attempt to protect its interests.

At stake is the lion's share of investment in maintaining the existing road system, coming from the One Bay Area grant program and other federal infrastructure funding. One of the plan's goals is to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions from cars and light trucks, so it looks to foster development where housing is close to jobs and/or mass transit and not encourage development in suburbs that rely almost exclusively on cars. Moraga's growth is not considered sustainable under this plan, mostly due to its lack of public transportation.

"Cities that are located next to BART stations, like Orinda and Lafayette, have high numbers of housing to plan for," said Shawna Brekke-Read, Moraga's planning director, "but for Moraga, the number dropped." Under One Bay Area, Moraga is expected to build 790 housing units between now and the year 2040; but the town has already planned for 1,000 units in the Moraga Center alone.

But while fulfilling the housing requirement is a condition for infrastructure grants, there are other elements in the plan that could hurt the town. Funding will be directed mostly toward Priority Development Areas, or PDAs; Moraga has only one, the Moraga Center. Brekke-Read tried to have the Rheem Center area declared a PDA as well, but that was denied because of insufficient public transportation services; she said that she is not giving up her pursuit of this goal.

"For me it's all about funneling federal funding toward established urban areas, and we get the short end of the stick," said Council Member Mike Metcalf who represents Moraga at the Contra Costa Transportation Authority. He added that the Metropolitan Transportation Commission understands the need for smaller communities such as Moraga, Danville, and Clayton to maintain their infrastructure even if they are not seeking to grow. Furthermore, Brekke-Read said that not only would transportation funding go first to PDAs, but the county's Measure J money could go that way as well—a decision that would heavily penalize Moraga, especially if Rheem is not recognized as a PDA.

Another dangerous change for Moraga would be that agencies would only look at the number of new homes actually built in PDAs, not at the number of homes that have been planned for. The Moraga Center PDA is mostly located on private land belonging to the Bruzzone family. According to planning staff there is no plan at this time to actually develop the area. "We shouldn't [just] have funding linked to the actual provision of new housing," said Mayor Dave Trotter. "Instead there should be grants eligible for funding if they might spur the developer to act. Having the possibility to access that money for infrastructure in the PDA would provide that one property owner an incentive to develop."

Moraga will submit its comments to MTC, with copies to CCTA and ABAG, asking that grants not be tied to the number of housing units actually built when the decision to develop is not in the town's hands but rather be granted to infrastructure projects as a means to support potential developers. The town will ask that allocation of Measure J money not be linked to PDAs.

One Bay Area is a long-range transportation and land-use/housing joint initiative of the San Francisco Bay Area's main regional government agencies. The Association of Bay Area Governments and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission have joint responsibility for the project and they work in coordination with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, Bay Conservation and Development Commission and other local agencies.

Priority Development Areas (PDAs) are locally-identified, infill development opportunity areas. To be eligible to become a PDA, an area has to be within an existing community, near existing or planned fixed transit or served by comparable bus service, and planned for more housing.

Association of Bay Area Governments plans for regional housing needs and it approves the designation of PDAs.

Metropolitan Transportation Commission is the transportation planning, coordinating and financing agency for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area; its board includes local elected officials—the current chair is Orinda mayor Amy Worth. MTC decides which types of projects will be funded.

Contra Costa Transportation Authority manages the county's transportation sales tax program and does county-wide transportation planning. It will be responsible for programming \$45.2 million in federal funds available for Contra

Costa County. The One Bay Area plan requires that 70 percent of the funds in Contra Costa must be spent in or near designated PDAs.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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