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Council Considers its Spirit Van Subsidy

Chew Tells Seniors to Take a Taxi

By Sophie Braccini

"I don't want to appear insensitive, but (giving an additional \$6,000) to the Spirit Van would not be a wise budgetary decision," Mayor Dave Trotter told program coordinator Mary Bruns, who came to the Moraga Town Council's May 22 meeting to ask the council to increase its contribution to the only senior transportation service in town. The town currently contributes \$9,000 per year to the program.

Every year Bruns builds a compelling case for the council to support the Spirit Van, a service that shuttles seniors who can no longer drive themselves to appointments, recreation events and shopping, allowing them to maintain a social life in a suburb that offers very little in terms of public transportation. The cost to seniors and handicapped patrons is \$10 for a round trip; Moraga contributes, according to Bruns' calculation, \$14 per ride.

Bruns enlisted help to support the project. Julie Fisher, who has lost a large part of her vision to macular degeneration, depends on her husband to go places but in his absence appreciates the Spirit Van. George Fisher cited the study completed at the beginning of the year by Lamorinda Village that indicates the number one need for residents 65 and older is transportation. "This segment of the population is growing," he said. "We have to prepare for the future." At this time, residents 65 and older represent close to 20 percent of Moraga's population.

The only council member convinced was Mike Metcalf who recalled a presentation made by Cliff Dochterman when the town appointed him to the Contra Costa Senior Council. "He said that we can't turn our back on our seniors, who have given all their lives, and that the way a community treats its seniors says a lot about who we are," said Metcalf. "I can find an additional \$6,000 in our budget, and we should do it." The \$6,000 represents 0.09 percent of the town's total expenditures.

Council member Phil Arth said the town could not spend money it does not have and that the current surplus is not comfortable enough to allow this extra expense. The estimated surplus for the 2012-13 budget year is \$98,000; but the projection for 2013-14 is only \$8,600.

Vice mayor Ken Chew went a step further, saying that if someone was not able to afford the cost of a round-trip taxi ride they should seek other solutions, noting that there are alternatives for people who are not able to continue to live independently in their homes.

Trotter proposed to help raise private funds to make up the difference the town would not contribute and to talk to the mayor of Orinda, because Orinda's contribution is much lower than those of Lafayette and Moraga. Ultimately, the council agreed to keep its contribution at \$9,000 and asked the administrative services director, Stephanie Hom, to see if she could find extra savings to potentially increase the town's contribution.

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