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Published September 11th, 2013

Livable Moraga Road Project

By Sophie Braccini



Moraga's newly launched Livable Moraga Road project aims to improve transit and connectivity for all types of users - drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians - along the Moraga Road corridor between St. Mary's Road and Campolindo High School.

Current challenges facing this major thoroughfare include heavy congestion in the morning as students arrive at school, disconnected pedestrian and bicycle paths, and dangerous crossings. The effort will focus on community-based planning and consensus building. The initial study phase will include several public meetings and a tour. Interested residents should mark their calendars for Thursday, Oct. 3 to attend the project's Welcome Meeting, and Saturday, Oct. 5 for a Community Walking/Biking Tour to explore the whole area and share ideas.

"The idea came from the 2011 public workshops (which centered on creating a vision for the Rheem Center) and the need to improve traffic flow, security, pedestrian transit and connections to the schools in the area," explained Ellen Clark, senior planner, in her presentation to the Moraga Town Council on Aug. 28.

Late last year the town received a \$335,000 award from the Contra Costa County Transportation for Livable Communities Grant program. The money will be used to fund the entirety of a contract with consultant Alta Planning and Design. The result will be a comprehensive vision for Moraga Road, a list of strategic improvements leading to developed designs for key intersections and road segments to be used to secure funding and construct needed improvements.

"A critical point is the public outreach campaign conducted by Alta to engage the community," said Clark. "We will do publicity, send mailers, do personal outreach, presentations to community groups, and conduct many public events." One of the early events is the morning-long, on the ground, walking/biking tour on Oct. 5, for Moragans of all ages, with the intent to capture public opinion and input.

The town will host a welcome meeting Oct. 3 to introduce the project's goals and the team.

A series of public workshops will be held over the next several months. In late October or early November Moragans will discuss their vision for the corridor, review existing conditions, and provide input on key issues, opportunities and concerns that can be addressed through planning and design. At the second workshop, slated for the spring of 2014, residents will discuss preliminary options and solutions developed by the consultant team based on public input at the first workshop. And later next spring, at the third workshop, participants will review the draft preferred concepts, and provide input on any adjustments or modifications that might be needed before final draft plans are developed.

During the public comment period Aug. 28, resident Scott Bowhay proposed that the creation of a formal entrance to the Hacienda de las Flores on Moraga Road be included in the plan (see the related article "Making a Local Treasure More Visible") and Graig Crossley asked for an option to widen Moraga Road near the Commons Park where it's currently only two lanes.

Recalling the public outcry a few years ago when a suggestion was made to narrow Moraga Road to two lanes, Mayor David Trotter warned staff against revisiting that idea. "(It's) a non-starter. I would not support it under any circumstance."

Staff also proposed the creation of a Town Advisory Committee to provide input on materials and topics to be reviewed at the public workshops and liaise with town decision-making bodies. Staff suggested that the committee be formed by one representative of each formal commission and committee in town, but the Town Council struggled for a while with the necessity to expand participation to other interest groups such as the Hacienda Foundation, Campolindo High School, the Chamber of Commerce, and Saint Mary's College, among others. Councilmember Michael Metcalf's suggestion that "a nucleus of motivated people can get a lot done" gained momentum, and the Town Council decided to keep the committee small, adding one member from the Youth Involvement Committee and agreeing to invite special interest groups when needed. "We could talk to the same people we always talk to," pleaded Jill Keimach, town manager, "but the purpose is to get young people and different perspectives on this committee. It's not only drivers, but kids who ride their bikes to the yogurt shop."

The project's website is still under construction, but residents will soon be able to find information and updates at www.moraga.ca.us/livablemoragaroad.

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