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Letters to the Editor



Share your thoughts with our community! Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly. All published letters will include the writer's name and city/town of residence -- we will only accept letters from those who live in, or own a business in, the communities comprising Lamorinda (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only).

Letters should be 350 words or less; letters of up to 500 words will be accepted on a space-available basis.

email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com; Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570

Editor:

Waking up to a crisp Moraga Fall morning and seeing the sun rise over the beautiful hillsides. Listening to the owls hoot, the turkeys gobble and the cows moo as I go through my day. Watching the kids walk safely, and happily to school each morning. Chatting with neighbors and friends on the fields, in the stands and on the pool deck. Running on the trails behind Rancho Laguna Park with my best friend (who I met when I moved here). These are the things that I love about Moraga.

But all of that could change on November 5th, if Moraga does not support Measure B -- a six-year, parcel tax in the amount of \$192 per year to help fund the Moraga School District. It won't change everything overnight, but will begin to change the fabric of our community.

Sacramento continues to short change towns like ours and the funding never seems to make it back to Moraga (or Orinda or Lafayette for that matter). That is why I am voting Yes on Measure B. It is local, it goes directly to our school programs, and it helps ensure that Moraga's children will continue to get one of the best educations in our state for years to come. Without strong schools, Moraga will no longer attract the kinds of families that value a great education. And while the beautiful crisp Fall mornings, and owls, turkeys and cows will all still be here -- the people that make this town a great place to live will be forced to look elsewhere.

Please vote Yes on Measure B and keep Moraga a great place to both live and learn!

Denise Duff
Moraga

Editor:

When my husband got a great job offer in the Bay Area more than 40 years ago, I reluctantly moved from the East Coast with a condition that we would go home after one year. We fell in love with this amazing, little town called Moraga and eventually built our dream house. Our children grew up here, went to school here, left for college and we are lucky that our daughter came back to raise her family here.

We gave a lot of time and money to the schools when my kids were young because we wanted the best for them. And now that we are older, it would be easy to say "we have done our part". But the reality is that our Moraga Schools, and more importantly the children of Moraga, need our continued support. Whether your kids are still making their way through college, starting their careers, or raising a family of their own, it is all of our responsibility to keep our Moraga schools strong. It was done for us and we need to continue to support the schools and our community, because that is the prudent thing to do. I am voting Yes on Measure B and urge you to join me. Great schools in Moraga are good for the whole community. In addition, the excellence of our schools keep our property values high. In the long run the passage of Measure B will put more money in our pockets than it takes out.

Janet Forman
Moraga

Editor:

I am proud to admit that I was a teacher in the Moraga School District for 37 years! My career was highlighted in 2002 when I was chosen as an outstanding teacher by the Warren W. Eukel Teacher Trust. I served as president of the Moraga Teachers Association and participated on the Negotiating team for six year, chairing the team twice.

My children all attended Moraga schools and have graduated from major universities with advanced degrees. Their elementary education prepared them for competitive academic careers. Moraga has educated astronauts and Olympians! I am now privileged to have my grandchildren living in Moraga and attending school here. I want the best education for them as their parents received!

Recently literature was mailed to select Moraga residents advocating voting NO on measure B. This is a democracy and others have their opinions. However, it is disturbing that this information was distributed with incorrect information/assumptions, and had no return address or creator's name. Teachers' pensions are received from STRS (not CalStars) and are the result of contributions made by the District and teachers. The more years a teacher contributes, the higher the retirement benefit. After retirement, the Moraga School District makes no contribution to retiree's benefits. Therefore, the \$532,699 mentioned in the flier is not money from the District budget. I doubt the truthfulness of these figures since my STRS account is confidential and can only be accessed by password. For many years Alberta Svendsen was a treasured kindergarten teacher in Moraga and her husband taught in the Acalanes High School District. To my knowledge, she was never an administrator as stated on the flier.

From my years of association with the Moraga School District I have not seen any waste of school funds. As a negotiator, I have studied many a budget. The District has been fiscally responsible in its programs and expenditures. Since my first year in 1969 I have seen state funds reduced consistently, program cut-backs and staff reductions.

As property owners in Moraga for 69 years, my family has voted for parcel tax increases because we value the quality education received, the valuation of our property and the advantages our family earned from living in this community. I would like to see the quality of education in Moraga remain outstanding for my grandchildren and for future generations.

Susan Johnson-Sperry
Moraga

Editor:

Here we go again in Moraga with signs and mailers that can't be traced to their source. Opposing the Measure B school tax is acceptable if we know who is doing the opposing and if their information is accurate. The leader of the movement is anonymous and one of the active subordinates doesn't even live in Moraga. The mailer they sent out is misleading in that it frightens voters into thinking that the pensions for retired school superintendents are paid by the Moraga School District. The truth is that these pensions are paid by the California State Teachers Retirement System. The School District pays nothing after they retire and it has no unfunded pension liability. The mailer's list of superintendents' salaries also is misleading, although it does show that Moraga's superintendent's salary is the lowest of the districts listed. However, a comparison of total compensation would show a greater difference because the others typically receive things like health insurance, relocation allowances, and car allowances. All that Moraga's superintendent receives is his basic salary and a \$75 monthly cell phone allowance. I'm told that he has yet to receive a raise because things are tight and the district is trying to squeeze as much as possible out of declining revenue. For education. For the children.

I recognize that many voters of my generation (age 77, a 34-year resident of Moraga) resent the size of some public pensions, but let us address that issue separately. It shouldn't be used as an excuse to vote against needed funding for our schools. Every penny of the Measure B revenue will go to support classroom instruction. None of the money can be used for administrative salaries. We shouldn't be voting on pensions in this election. We should vote yes to make up for reduced funding from the State. That is the issue here.

Dale Walwark
Moraga

Editor:

"[F]rustrated and weary" are the words used to describe Orinda City Council members attending an October 1 city-council meeting that examined Orinda's Housing Element (Lamorinda Weekly, Oct. 9).

The Housing Element is a plan that "is intended to benefit all Orinda households, with a particular emphasis on seniors, persons with disabilities, and persons of low and moderate incomes" (City Council Staff Report, Sept. 17, 2013).

Page 35 of the report (also designated as page 3-25) lists several categories of income. "Extremely Low" income is defined as a median household income of \$26,790 per year. "Very Low Income" is defined as \$44,650 per year.

The Staff Report does not explain how income is verified or calculated. For example, the report does not state if income levels are verified by examining a low-income person's recent tax returns (assuming there are such returns).

With low-income households, there may be additional government-provided income derived from food stamps, housing allowances (often called Section 8 money), medical benefits (called Medi-Cal in California), and energy assistance grants. Some or all of this government-provided income may not be taxable. The Staff Report does not address the calculation of income.

A low-income person could be asset-rich. Such a person could have huge assets in gold coins stored in Canada. These coins could easily be converted into American dollars and brought back to Orinda. The report does not mention if Orinda will be examining a low-income person's total assets.

There is nothing wrong with low-income people living in Orinda or anywhere else.

However, there are plenty of objections to Orinda's failure to determine if a low-income person is really a low-income individual.

Richard S. Colman
Orinda

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