



Moraga Civic News

Public Meetings

Town Council

Wednesday, Jan. 8, 7 p.m.
Wednesday, Jan. 22, 7 p.m.
Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School,
1010 Camino Pablo

Planning Commission

Monday, Jan. 6, 7 p.m.
Moraga Library, 1500 St. Mary's Rd.

Design Review

Monday, Jan. 13, 7 p.m.
Moraga Library, 1500 St. Mary's Rd.

Check online for agendas, meeting notes and announcements

Town of Moraga:

www.moraga.ca.us
Phone: (925) 888-7022

Chamber of Commerce:

www.moragachamber.org

Moraga Citizens' Network:

www.moragacitizensnetwork.org

School Board Meeting

Moraga School District

Tuesday, Jan. 14, 7:30 p.m.
Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School Auditorium
1010 Camino Pablo, Moraga
www.moraga.k12.ca.us
See also AUHSD meeting page A2



Police Report

Moraga Police Blotter will be back next time.

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Moraga's New Mayor, Ken Chew

By Sophie Braccini



Ken Chew Photo Sophie Braccini

This is the second time Ken Chew will sit in the mayor's seat and wield the gavel as the leader of the Town Council, setting the tone for the town in 2014.

Chew, a professional civil engineer and project manager in the construction and transportation field, was born and raised in Malaysia. After completing his education at the University of Wisconsin, he and his wife Aly relocated to the Bay Area and raised two sons in Moraga. The well-traveled Chew believes that Moraga is the best place on earth.

Although the title comes with no additional voting power, being mayor means Chew does have a few privileges – like working with the town manager to set Town Council meeting

agendas and keeping order during meetings.

During his tenure on the council, Chew has been known for saying what he thinks. "I have the courage to speak my mind, and I don't feel pressured to be popular," he said. "Some politicians are afraid of the elections and say that they you have to be careful in an election year; I don't do that. I believe that if I make the honorable decision, Moraga residents will continue to appreciate my service and support me."

This year Chew would like to further a change of style as the head of the town. "I will rely on staff a lot; listen to, and value, their recommendations," he said. "I want our very competent staff to be involved in issues from the beginning. People should not try to push issues through council members alone; communication can and should start with staff members, who then will bring the topic to the council if needed." Chew believes it is respectful to allow staff to do their jobs. "It is not to discourage (residents from) open communication with their elected officials," he said. "The role of the council is to make policy decisions and not to advocate issues for any special interest group; and staff's role is to make recommendations based on their professional knowledge and experience."

In developing an initial list of goals for the town for 2014, Chew has

already brought some change. "We are working together with Jill (Keimach, the town manager) to prepare for the goal setting session," he said. "This year we will not have hours of brainstorming because the council has done a great job in the last few years steering the town in the right direction. Many of this year's goals are continuations of those set in previous years. Together with input from fellow council members, staff, and residents, I will set most of my new goals for 2014 by building onto our successes in the past."

The preliminary list includes what is always the first goal in Moraga: fiscal sustainability and a balanced budget. Chew would like to see refinement of the capital improvement plan for all of the town's assets. "We are doing very well with our roads, but the town owns other properties and we need to be very clear on the maintenance and/or future of these assets," he said, including the land known as the "Back 40" that the town leases to the Moraga Country Club.

"This year we will complete Phase 2 of the Measure K neighborhood streets pavement program and the retrofit of 331 Rheem where we will conduct our public meetings," said Chew. Having a permanent meeting place will finally permit the realization of something Chew has been asking for since his first term: live video streaming and recording of

Town Council meetings. "This is part of the enhancement of transparency and communication," said the mayor.

Other activities will include building on the good relationship with Saint Mary's College, a dialogue between the town, the school district, the high school and the college for shared use of sports fields, a strategic plan for the Hacienda de las Flores and emergency preparedness training for council members.

In addition Chew will support several efforts that are already underway, such as streamlining the planning process, revising the sign ordinance and completing a climate action plan. As to the planned review of rules that apply to hillside and ridgeline development, "We will receive community input and consider zoning revision as appropriate," said Chew.

This is the last year of Chew's second four-year term on the Town Council; he plans to run for a third term next fall.

The goal-setting session for 2014 will be Tuesday, Jan. 14, 6:30 p.m. at the Hacienda de las Flores – all Moragans are welcome. The mayor encourages residents to submit suggestions for goals in advance of the meeting to Jill Keimach, town manager, jkeimach@moraga.ca.us.

Restoring Natural Habitat in the Heart of Moraga

By Sophie Braccini

The Moraga Planning Commission recently reviewed Summerhill Homes' application to

build 26 houses off of Camino Ricardo, one of the first projects in the area governed by the Moraga

Center Specific Plan to come to fruition. Already approved by the Design Review Board, the homes did not elicit much controversy. Planning commissioners also spent some time reviewing the proposal for a 5-acre passive park contiguous to the homes; the unique visual and educational area in the heart of Moraga will be donated to the town.

The portion of the 14.2-acre site located between Laguna Creek and its tributary was initially proposed as a neighborhood park with recreation equipment. Discussion with the Planning Commission and Design Review Board revealed that a passive park, for walking or informal picnics, was preferred. However, the developer intended to drop on the lot a large portion of the earth that would be excavated to place the homes and road. "It does not make a lot of sense to kill the vegetation by dumping eight feet of dirt on the site and then replanting it with native plants," said commissioner Teresa Onoda. She passed around photos she had taken of the site with a ladder illustrating the height of the excavated dirt, which made it clear that nothing would survive such a burial.

Residents pointed out the existence of a native animal population at the site, including the protected dusky-footed wood rat, and asked for as little disturbance as possible. Commissioner Nancy Schoenbrunner said she had learned that the creek was the place where local rainbow trout were originally discovered and she wanted an investigation into whether Moraga was still a spawning ground for the fish. The commissioners unanimously agreed that the developer must haul away all of the excavated dirt. The new

park is destined to be restored to pre-agriculture vegetation and will serve as a place of discovery and education about local flora and fauna.

Denise Cunningham, of Summerhill Homes, said that it might be possible for the company to use the excavated dirt as fill on the other Moraga property it is developing – Rancho Laguna II, near Rheem Boulevard.

Residents living next to the project acknowledged efforts made by the developer to minimize the visual impact of the new homes. "In Moraga, the code protects public views from being impacted by new development, but not private views," commented senior planner Ellen Clark. Summerhill worked to protect the views of neighboring homeowners by redesigning some of the houses to be single-level and moving the building pads; they asked to bend the setback rules slightly to accommodate the new design.

The Planning Commission is expected to approve the project's Conceptual and General Development Plan, the Vesting Tentative Subdivision Map, the Hillside Development Permit, the Grading Permit, the Conditional Use Permit, and Design Review in early January. These documents will be approved together, which is unusual in Moraga. Shawna Brekke-Read, Moraga's planning director, explained that any property that is zoned for planned development needs to go through a three-step process. Summerhill was asked to consolidate the process into one single phase, because the Camino Ricardo project is part of the Moraga Center Specific Plan that was seven years in the making and included many preliminary studies such as a traffic impact report.



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