



# Moraga Civic News

## Public Meetings

### Town Council

Wednesday, Feb. 12, 7 p.m.  
Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School,  
1010 Camino Pablo

### Planning Commission

Monday, Feb. 3, 7 p.m.  
Moraga Library, 1500 St. Mary's Rd.

### Design Review

Monday, Feb. 10, 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, Feb. 11, 7:30 p.m.  
Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School Auditorium  
1010 Camino Pablo, Moraga  
www.moraga.k12.ca.us  
See also AUHSD meeting page A2

### Correction, issue date Jan. 15, 2014, "The Moraga Park Connection:"

This article indicated that the size of the nature area Summerhill Homes plans to dedicate to the town, as part of its new development on Camino Ricardo, is 5 acres – it is actually 2.5 acres.

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## Council Considers Wright House

*It's hard to build on a slope in Moraga*

By Sophie Braccini

It's not that the architect James Wright didn't take the safest route. As he designed the creative, modern home he wanted to build on a steep slope at 1800 Donald Drive in Moraga, he worked with planning staff to make sure the project adhered to all of the town's building rules regarding height, grading, and other requirements. After more than three years of work and close to \$100,000 spent in local fees, the project that received approval from both the Design Review Board and the Planning Commission was appealed by neighbors. On Jan. 22 the Moraga Town Council upheld the appeal and the property owner was instructed to obtain a grading permit in order to proceed.

"I worked with two different planning directors, the town engineer and the town consultant to design a home that fit all of your town's re-

quirements," said Wright, an award-winning Orinda architect. The project, which would build a large home (more than 4,000 square feet) on a downslope off Donald Drive, was supported by town staff who recommended rejecting the appeal. One after the other, the town consultant, the planning director and the town manager explained that the plan fits the criteria for the amount of grading and the number of stories, which were the two main elements that caused concern among some of the council members.

The bulk of the discussion settled around the amount of dirt that would be moved to build the house. In Moraga the rule is that if a home requires more than 50 cubic yards of dirt to be moved, it requires a grading permit. Moving dirt for elements such as foundations and utilities are not taken

into account in the formula because it could become a safety issue.

Two council members, Dave Trotter and Roger Wykle, did their best to dig deeper and challenge staff's recommendation. Wykle was particularly tenacious, trying to demonstrate that the house had in fact three stories, and that the driveway that's an elevated structure should not be considered an essential element of the house, meaning that it should require a permit as a structure encroaching on the front setback.

Trotter argued that the amount of dirt that would have to be moved would be greater than estimated and that it would be better to seek a grading permit now rather than to stop construction down the road when, as he predicted, the 50-cubic-yard limit would be exceeded.

Mayor Ken Chew, although he

did not pose an argument during the discussion, was also in favor of stopping the project.

At the last minute, Trotter said he would change his vote if a grading permit were required from the applicant and the height of the windows reduced from 12 to 10 feet. The applicant will therefore have to apply for a grading permit and return to the Town Council. It is not clear what this will mean to the project since in staff's professional opinion it does not require a grading permit. Conscious that this project could set a precedent for building on hillsides in town, Trotter asked that the conditions of approval state that this specific lot was declared constructible before the town was incorporated and that the approval, if it happens, would not set a precedent.



## Moraga Police Department

Gas Theft, 1/13/14 A Donald Drive resident parked her car on the driveway with a full tank of gas. When she went out the next morning at 8:30 a.m. the vehicle's tank was empty. Estimated loss \$60. Clearly that thief sucks.

Brazen morning burglary, 1/14/14 The window on the side of a Sanders Drive home was smashed, unknown suspects entered the home and took a new television and several pieces of jewelry and check-books. The theft occurred sometime between 8 a.m. and 12:50 p.m.

Self storage? 1/16/14 At 8:30 a.m. Moraga police responded to an Ascot Drive apartment for a welfare check. They contacted the reporting person and found him locked in a storage closet. The individual was evaluated and determined to be a danger to himself, so the fire department transported him to the Contra Costa Regional Medical Center.

D.U.I./drugs, 1/16/14 There was a solo vehicle traffic collision near the corner of Camino Pablo and Rimer Drive. The 22-year-old driver from Moraga reported that a deer stepped in front of his car, causing him to swerve, hit a road sign and run into a ditch. Suspicious police found a 5-gallon bucket across the roadway that contained less than an ounce of pot and a small bundle of cocaine; 10 hypodermic needles were found in the bushes just outside the passenger side of the car, a sunglasses container in the vehicle held five small baggies of suspected cocaine and 28 extended release Xanax tablets. No comment from the alleged deer, but the driver was taken to jail in Martinez and the car was towed.

Kid hosts party, 1/18/14 There was a loud party in an Ascot Drive apartment complex. Police dropped in, although they surely didn't receive an invitation, and discovered over 20 people under 21 years of age inside the apartment drinking alcohol. The 16-year-old host jumped out of a window and fled police. Cops cleared the remaining party guest and noticed – what a coincidence – a 16-year-old walking nearby. It was determined that he was drunk and was hosting the party while his dad was away. The young man was cited for Hosting a Juvenile Party with Alcohol, he was later released to his mother.

House ransacked, 1/17/14 Police responded to a burglary at a secluded home on Buckingham Drive. Apparently an unknown suspect had gained entry by smashing a rear window and ransacked the entire house. The value of stolen property has not yet been determined. Sadly nothing was seen or heard, and there are no suspects or leads at this time.

**In addition, the following crimes were reported between Jan. 14 and Jan. 21:**

- False alarm** Moraga Rd, Larch Ave, Laird Dr
- Drunk in public** Donald Dr
- Suspicious circumstances** Country Club Dr, Moraga Wy
- Petty theft** Augusta Dr
- Identity theft** Calle La Montana, Redfield Pl
- Traffic incident** Rheem Blvd, Moraga Rd
- Civil dispute over tree** Deerfield Dr
- Attempt to scam** Wandel Ct

## Does Moraga Need More Police Officers?

By Sophie Braccini



Police Chief Robert Priebe  
Photo Sophie Braccini

Frank Melon is a persistent individual; the general manager of the Moraga Country Club came to the Moraga Town Council's goal setting session Jan. 14 to ask, for the second year in a row, that police services be reinforced in Moraga. The Town Council agreed that the time has come to look into the issue.

"The average number of police officers is one per 1,000 residents," Melon told the Town Council. "That would mean there should be 16 officers in Moraga."

Moraga's budget currently allows for 13 officers but the town has had an average of 11 officers at any one time during the last three years.

Police Chief Robert Priebe knows these numbers well. "Moraga ties for the lowest number of police officers per 1,000 residents in Contra Costa County, with a ratio of 0.7," he said, "and Moraga is the absolute last if you look at police cost per resident, at \$142.07."

With officers on duty 24 hours per day, seven days per week, having less than 14 means that someone has to work overtime; and it gets worse when an officer goes on vacation or is out sick or injured. "Some officers say they like overtime when I hire them," said Priebe, who always discloses the situation to new recruits, "but after a while, over-working takes its toll."

Moraga's police department al-

ways seems to be in the process of recruiting new officers and losing others. Priebe thinks that salaries below the region's average and reduced benefit packages are not the only reasons for the high turnover. "When someone joins the police they want the excitement, they want the chase and to catch the bad guys," he said. "Here we have a different kind of policing – more prevention, more making sure that everyone stays safe. It is not enough for some of the officers." Priebe is nonetheless proud that the young officers who are trained in Moraga do very well and quickly advance in their careers when they go somewhere else.

Priebe said that 16 officers would be an ideal number for his department. He explained that he has never lobbied for additional staff because that it is a decision the community has to make and that other departments in town should be considered as well. "This community needs to look at the level of service it deserves, and how it's going to pay for it in the future," said Priebe. ... continued on page A11

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