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Learning from a Neighbor

By Sophie Braccini



Moraga residents visit Pleasant Hill teen center. Photo Sophie Braccini

makes it more appealing than just another plan is the prospect of high developer fees that could fall into the town's coffers within a year or two that would be primarily dedicated to recreation. So it made some sense to go see what others do when manna comes their way, either by virtue of a ballot box or other means.

"We passed Measure E, our bond measure for the park and recreation facilities, with a 75.7 percent rate of approval in 2009," explained Pleasant Hill Recreation District general manager Bob Berggren. "The measure produced \$28 million, and we ended up paying about \$33 million, with the last piece, Pleasant Hill Oaks Park, being dedicated this summer." In Pleasant Hill there is a parks and recreation district that pre-dates the city, and includes areas outside of the city. Its revenue comes from property tax and fees for services, not sales tax. Measure E funded a new senior center, teen center, community center, and the expansion of a large sports field.

The tour started with the teen center, a modern and open 5,000 square foot facility set in a park and directly connected to the city pool, where teens can hang out after school and during the summer and relax in a safe environment, engage in organized activities, and even get homework help.

Going from good to great, the group walked to the nearby senior center. Boasting 23,000 square feet, the center opens on an ample lobby that can serve for pre-reception activities. It includes a complete kitchen, computer room, game room, meeting rooms, a large dance floor and a café. "Seniors pay to participate in most of the activities," said Berggren, "the fees cover about 56 percent of our cost." Pleasant Hill is known for its extensive senior services, including a travel program that offers a different trip every week.

Going from great to lavish, the group of already impressed Moragans climbed back in their cars to go discover the city's new community center. The impressive 21,800 square foot center is open to the whole population for events, classes, and weddings, among many other things. Berggren said that rental of the facility is developing nicely, including that of the great room, which features vaulted ceilings and can host 400 people. The community center also houses a preschool operated by the school district.

As the afternoon faded and the air gently cooled, the visit ended at Pleasant Oaks Park, which offers romantic views of Mt. Diablo. The last Measure E project, the new field is set where an older

Remember school field trips? Though curriculum-related, you'd get to go places, learn new things, and the usual school rules would be somewhat relaxed. That's exactly what happened to the 20 or so Moragans - members of the Town Council and various committees and commissions - who traveled to Pleasant Hill in August to visit their neighbor's recreation and sports facilities. Late on a warm afternoon, they pranced around and marveled at what a difference \$28 million in bond revenue can make.

At a subsequent Town Council meeting, Councilmember Dave Trotter noted that what had been done there was of a magnitude that Moraga could never rival, but that interesting lessons could be learned.

For a few months now, Moraga's Ad Hoc Facilities Subcommittee has been meeting to define a sports and recreation plan for the town. What

sports field was already in operation but needed new irrigation and grass. The all-natural turf accommodates five baseball/softball fields and numerous soccer fields.

Trotter asked why a gym had not been part of the package. Berggren explained that the project had been designed to bring something to every member of the population and the money could only be stretched so far. The Moragans left with some signs of envy, even though they realized that Moraga is very different from Pleasant Hill.

(City data 2012) Moraga Pleasant Hill

Population 17,000 34,000

Median age 42 40.7

Median income \$114,256 \$72,814

Number of homes 5,722 14,000

% owner occupied 84% 64%

Median home value \$795,502 \$468,231

The Town of Moraga's total revenue is about \$8 million, of which \$3 million come from property tax. In contrast, the budget of the Pleasant Hill Recreation District alone is in excess of \$8 million; on the revenue side about \$5 million come from property taxes and \$3 million from charges for services. (Figures are from audited 2013 city reports.)

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