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## Town Poll to Ask, 'How Many Lanes for Moraga Road?'

*By Sophie Braccini*

The Moraga Town Council decided Feb. 25 that all residents should get the opportunity to weigh in on the future configuration of Moraga Road. A year and a half of outreach and committee meetings concluded that reducing the arterial from four to three lanes between Corliss Drive and Donald Drive was the most efficient configuration. But the town's political leaders decided to allocate \$35,000 for a two-phase process that will ensure broader public input. The first phase is to create a focus group to fine-tune survey questions. The second, to mail the survey to all residents.

Godbe Research, the company that conducted a similar process for the 1 percent sales tax in 2013, will select two or three groups of 12 to 14 voters to help frame topics and issues for the larger quantitative survey. These residents will represent a statistical sample of the population in different quadrants of town. Each household will receive one survey, which could lead to healthy discussions about traffic, pedestrian and bicycle needs and safety, since most families have more than one driver in the home.

During the meeting, the pollsters said they expected to get about 15 percent of the surveys back. The overall project is anticipated to last 10 weeks.

The Livable Moraga Road project was a way to improve connectivity for all modes of transportation between the north and south sides of town, as well as to resolve the Campolindo High School bottleneck that happens during peak hours. Most improvements proposed along the arterial to build a continuous bike/pedestrian path and improve safety at intersections were well received. The only contentious item is the possible reduction of the number of lanes between Corliss and Donald drives. There are three proposed options for that section of road: no change in lane configuration; three lanes (one southbound, one middle lane for turning, and two northbound); or two lanes with turning pockets. Residents will be asked to voice their preference for this section alone. Each option includes differing allocations of more or less space for pedestrians and bicyclists.

The earlier outreach process and the work of an advisory committee resulted in a quasi-consensus favoring the three-lane option. "The town advisory committee had extensive outreach in the form of public workshops where people learned a lot," said Councilmember Phil Arth. "I'd hate to have the information that was provided by people who learned about (the different aspects of the situation) and thought about it, diluted by people who would just fill out a mailer."

Christine Kuckuk, chair of the Planning Commission, questioned how to address such a complex issue in a two-page mailer. But she liked the idea of reaching out to people who might not have been involved in the earlier process, since Moraga Road is an arterial that impacts everyone. "Sometimes at workshops people would come with a quick solution, ... but after hearing other aspects (of the issue), they would completely turn around," she remembered. "It is very important to get the right questions and I'd like the advisory committee to be involved in it."

Town Manager Jill Keimach tried to steer the council away from reviewing the survey questions. With tact and diplomacy, she said that leaving the review of questions to professionals would remove any political pressures from the process. There are council members who have publicly voiced their opposition to reducing the number of lanes on Moraga Road, no matter what.

Councilmember Dave Trotter said that his only concern was that all the information is presented. The rest of the council agreed.

The 10-week process should start in the spring of this year.

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