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Moraga Community Marquee Enters the 21st Century

By Sophie Braccini

The rustic community sign located along Moraga Road opposite the Commons Park is living its last days under the Moraga sun. By the end of May, a brand new lit and colorful electronic sign will be installed in its place. On April 8, Parks and Recreation Director Jay Ingram presented policies for use of the new electronic marquee. The price tag for users will stay almost unchanged; besides nonprofit event messaging, personal communication will be possible, as well as some limited commercial information.

Staff will no longer need to come once a week on Friday afternoons to painstakingly change one letter at a time. Now from the comfort of their office or other remote location, authorized personnel will be able to change any of the six messages that will rotate every 8 to 12 seconds.

There will be little left of the rural charm of the old black and white sign with the new state-of-the-art system by Ad Art Company. When Ingram presented the project last year to the Moraga Town Council, he described a roughly 8 foot by 8 foot monument made of materials mimicking the look of natural wood and stone to reflect the semi-rural character of Moraga. The most important part of the sign is the 20-milimeter full-color LED electronic message board in its center. Lexan, a high-impact resistant, transparent plastic material, will protect the LED displays.

Those wanting to have color messages that can incorporate graphics displayed will provide them to staff. Per the Design Review Board recommendation, animation will be minimized. Six different messages, three on each side, will be displayed each week. The new marquee will be brightly lit during the day, and dimly at night; it will be off between midnight and 4 a.m. The fee for using the sign is similar to what it is today: \$80 a week.

Ingram recommended that marquee messages be reserved for announcements about Lamorinda events either sponsored by the town, a local nonprofit or any other local governmental or educational entity.

Two members of the public in attendance, Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Kathe Nelson and commercial real estate professional Dave Schnayer asked the council to consider commercial messages. "I would argue that businesses are part of this community as a whole and should be considered in this policy," said Nelson. "We're not talking about Safeway advertising 'buy one, get one free avocado.' We are asking that when a business is sponsoring a community event, it be mentioned." Nelson also recommended lowering the price for displaying messages, to encourage more participation and keep the messages fresh and interesting. In a written communication to Ingram, Chamber of Commerce member Larry Tessler asked the director to leave the fee at the current level of \$70, arguing that the town would still at least double its current revenue.

Schnayer added that a new business, which provides the town with sales tax revenue, should be able to inform residents of its grand opening on the community marquee. He added that announcing church-sponsored events would benefit the community.

Council members agreed that business-sponsored community events should be displayed on the marquee. The council added that the chamber of commerce could sponsor the grand opening of a business with a welcome message if the business is a chamber member.

The council members also supported the idea to allow messages of a personal nature, such as anniversaries and births of grandchildren. Councilmember Teresa Onoda proposed a fee waiver for 100-year-old residents' birthday announcements.

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