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Party House Causes Plenty of Noise at Moraga Council Meeting

By Nick Marnell



An unusually quiet exterior of the home on Wandel Drive Photo Nick Marnell

Angry neighborhood residents lashed out at the Moraga Town Council June 24 for the town's failure to cite Saint Mary's College students living in a rental house at 14 Wandel Drive who repeatedly violate the Moraga loud and unruly party ordinance. Describing the Wandel neighborhood as a crime scene, and calling the unit - dubbed Hotel Wandel on a Facebook page - an unregulated Saint Mary's dormitory, neighborhood residents demanded that penalties be increased for both the violators and the landlord.

Wandel Drive resident Fanny Wilson said that on May 8, one month after a student resident apologized to the council and the neighbors for the behavior at the rental house, the students were back to the loud partying, including dancing on the roof and throwing beer cans. The residents were not cited for violating the loud party ordinance. "Please strengthen the ordinance," she pleaded.

"It's disheartening to hear this," said Mayor Roger Wykle, who suggested that Saint Mary's has skin in the game as well.

"Saint Mary's is as unresponsive as the landlord," agreed a neighborhood resident.

"I'm getting tired of this subject," said Vice Mayor Mike Metcalf. "It's time for Big Brother to step in. There are sanctions the college can apply and it's time that they do it."

"As soon as we are aware, we respond," said Tim Farley, the college director of community relations. "I have confidence that our tribunal system takes these situations seriously." A Saint Mary's student concurred, saying that behavioral issues are handled by the Peer Conduct Council, but not as rapidly as some would like. This newspaper attempted repeatedly to talk with the student residents at 14 Wandel Drive, with no success.

The council acknowledged that it cannot tell the college how to run its business, and instead focused on its own. Four council members - minus Phil Arth - discussed amendments to Moraga municipal code chapter 9.08, including larger fines, citing the landlord, a longer probationary period after the first warning, reclassifying violations from criminal to administrative, registering tenants and zero tolerance for bad behavior. Only Metcalf supported the zero tolerance concept. City Manager Jill Keimach opposed tenant registration, cautioning that the town should be regulating behavior, not the type of tenant.

Until the town staff returns with a strengthened ordinance, the council charged Chief of Police Robert Priebe to enforce the current municipal code to the letter. The chief said that his department now documents all responses to loud party complaints and issues citations as allowable under the ordinance.

"These people need our help, and they deserve it," said Metcalf of the frustrated Wandel Drive neighborhood residents.

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