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Stephanie Hom Moves On, But Leaves the House in Order

By Sophie Braccini

Moraga Administrative Services Director Stephanie Hom will be leaving the town staff and returning as of July 1 to the city of Oakland as its deputy city manager, a professional opportunity she says she couldn't pass up. During her time in Moraga, Hom set in place financial and other administrative systems that should continue to keep the town in check. Town Manager Jill Keimach noted at a recent meeting that Hom had "made an indelible mark on the organization and the community." Hom has accomplished a lot during her four years in Moraga. "First the council had a goal of creating a five-year financial planning tool," she said. "And we didn't build a binder that would sit on a shelf; we built it into the budget process. It is ongoing and allows us to make financial projections." The document includes financial policies, such as the recently approved structural balanced budget.

The town received an award two years in a row for another financial system created, the publication of a Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR). The main driver behind developing the document was when the town issued a debt of \$7.2 million (against the 1 percent sales tax measure revenue stream), said Hom. "We have to report to all these investors what our trends are every year. Now we have all the data in one place, and we can just send them the report that also contains 10 years of history of the town."

Hom was also in charge of the town's human resources. "People before me set up systems and had documents, I just took those and improved and expanded them," she said. The town now uses a comprehensive personnel rules manual, thanks to Hom. "We will have to keep up with changes in regulations, but we now have a basis for how things are done," she said.

Focusing on internal operations, Hom also improved the management and compliance of all contracts by subcontractors. "Things were spottier before," she said. "Now the contractors have to have the right insurance and a signed contract with us." She also reviewed employees' safety and ergonomics.

Hom is confident in the town's approval of Measure K, designed to fund the deferred maintenance of Moraga's infrastructure. She agrees with the Audit and Finance Committee that there are still millions of deferred maintenance costs not being addressed. "The committee worked with staff to come up with an inventory and a schedule of deferred maintenance," said Hom. "The town should spend about \$600,000 a year to replace its assets, and there is also a backlog. This is the biggest challenge this town has." She is hopeful that increased property tax revenue will be directed toward maintenance in Moraga. She believes that the community will need to have a discussion on ways to address the issue, possibly using some influx of money from developers' fees at the onset and increase savings into replacement funds.

Hom believes one of Moraga's challenges is dealing with the sales tax leakage caused when residents purchase goods outside of town, including gas - an ongoing trend, she says.

While Hom says she has learned a lot and built strong connections in Moraga, she feels pulled by the bigger issues facing Oakland and is excited by the fact that Oakland's new mayor, Libby Schaaf, is providing great leadership. Hom will join an all-female team with two assistant city managers.

"Everybody is ready to make a positive change," said Hom, who has 18 years of previous experience at the 4,000-employee city of Oakland. As she did in Moraga, Hom will focus on internal operations such as finance or business processes.

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