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Moraga Management

By Sophie Braccini

New agreements for all employee groups, including compensation and benefits, became effective July 1. When the new two-year memoranda of understanding was approved by the Town Council, town manager Jill Keimach highlighted the fact that the negotiations went smoothly, due to employees' understanding of the town's situation and reasonable demands. According to these employees, the smooth process was the result of the mutual trust that Keimach fosters with her team, keeping them in the loop and making sure they get the rewards they deserve, when fiscally possible. This year, with increases in property and sales tax revenue, the town was able to raise employees' salaries while projecting a modest surplus. A required new accounting method also shows the town's upcoming California Public Employees' Retirement System liability will have to be taken into account.

"Thank you from me, the community, and the council for continuing to understand our limited financial resources and being part of the solution during the economic downturn," said Keimach to the town staff. "Now that we are back on track financially, I am pleased the council is able to show its appreciation to all staff in the form of two years of salary increases." As of July 1 all employees received a 3 percent cost of living increase plus a 1 percent salary increase in exchange for a 1 percent employee payment of the Town's share of its pension, continuation of the new medical benefits or similar benefits at the Kaiser gold level through the next two years, and a 0.25 percent salary increase (for police officers).

The 2015-16 budget, as approved by the council and including these salary elements, projects a \$100,000 surplus at the end of the fiscal year and is based on a 3 percent increase in property tax revenues, \$1.7 million from Measure K sales.

According to the town's employees, salary negotiations went well. Lt. John King who was the mid-management representative, and who only recently joined the Moraga staff, has worked in other public agencies and has participated in similar negotiations in different capacities. "(When entering a negotiation) the leadership factor is huge," he said, "and what we have here is a town manager who is in tune with her hard-working people and she can balance the council's priority for fiscal responsibility."

Other representatives included Kelly Clancy and Julia Elbo, and Sgt. Brian South who negotiated for the Moraga Police Officers Association. Keimach said at the council meeting that the police officer's union representative was asked to leave the bargaining table. "We didn't need him," confirmed South. "Everything went very smoothly."

Clancy, who has been part of the negotiations in Moraga two times, says that Keimach is easy to work with, and she is fair and reasonable. "This creates a certain level of trust," she confirmed. King added that Keimach always listens and is interested in hearing different sides of an issue.

The Bay Area is now close to full employment and King said Keimach understands that to keep quality people you have to compensate them well. The salaries in Moraga are not the highest in the Bay Area, and Moraga's chief of police has repeatedly explained that one of the reasons that the town has difficulty retaining police officers is the compensation package with a pension that is 2 percent at age 50, compared to other agencies that offer 3 percent at age 50.

But there are other ways to keep people happy, and Clancy acknowledged that rearranging the schedule to have every other Friday off is a good thing.

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