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Back and Forth Bargaining Between the College and the Town

By Sophie Braccini

Two topics emblematic of the dynamics between Moraga town officials and Saint Mary's College leadership were discussed at the Town and Gown Committee meeting Oct. 15. First, the town received its initial report on the improved lighting system at the intramural field that had negatively impacted some residents; second, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was approved to share recreational facilities at no cost for either party. As Saint Mary's College desires to grow and improve its student services, the town seeks to control that growth while making Moraga more of a college town.

While not public meetings, Town and Gown discussion items often end up as subsequent action items at the town council meetings. Diego Rios, a SMC senior and Associated Students president, asked that he and his successors be invited to the town and gown breakfast table to make student involvement in the town a priority.

The report on the lighting system's modification, presented by consultant Leslie Davis of Lighting Design who said it used state-of-the-art equipment to measure the glare of the old and the new system, drew absolutely no comment from the attendees. Davis noted reductions in glare from 32 to 90 percent, depending on where the measurements were taken in the neighborhood that adjoins the lighted field.

Optimizing the lighting system to reduce the glare on residents' homes is part of the conditions of approval for the extended hours of operation on the intramural field to 10 p.m. Measures to limit noise pollution are also part of the conditions of approval, and the 10 p.m. limit will be reviewed after one year for compliance.

The second topic of the night was an agreement between the college and the town to use each other's recreational facilities at no cost. Jay Ingram, the parks and recreation director, presented the agreement as an opportunity to expose residents to the campus and to encourage students to be a part of the town. All of the town facilities are listed in the agreement, such as the parks, the Hacienda, the electronic sign, the new town chambers, or the sand volleyball court at the Commons Park. The text of the agreement notes that SMC's facilities are first and foremost to be used in the fulfillment of Saint Mary's mission and that the first priority for use of the college's facilities are regular and special college programs. The facilities that the town can use include the Soda Activity Center, the outdoor basketball courts, the Chapel, and Hagerty Lounge. Sports field and tennis court usage are subject to review by Saint Mary's Athletic Compliance office in order to avoid situations that could be or could lead to possible NCAA infractions. The sharing of McKeon Pavilion and the Joseph L. Alioto Recreation Center are not included at this time and will be reviewed in two years.

A previous agreement was signed in 1991 for a 20-year period; the new MOU expires in five years. When Councilmember Dave Trotter asked why the shortened period, Tim Farley, director of community and government relations for the college said, "Saint Mary's is going through (its) master plan right now, and there is some concern about the use pattern of our recreation center. And as Saint Mary's goes forward in the next phase of our master plan, we want this agreement to be for a brief period of time, and have it relooked at in another five years." Trotter responded by suggesting that the conditions of approval of the college's master plan provide an additional opening to discuss a different term for the MOU. Farley indicated he would relay this comment to the college.

The MOU was approved by the Town Council and will take effect once the college's president, James Donahue, signs it. It applies to the government of the town only, not to any other local organization.

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