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## Letters to the Editor

Editor:

Imagine, if developers of Rancho Laguna II and SummerHill Homes (building projects in Moraga) were planning developments that would cause noise, animal odor and become a breeding place for flies, pests and vermin. I think most Moraga citizens would object strenuously. This is exactly what is being planned in the farm animal ordinance being submitted to the Town Council on November 18. It is not planned for new developments, it is being planned for the other side of all of our backyard fences.

A survey of backyard chicken owners, done by UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine in 2013, lists complaints by neighbors: complaints about noises and smells; manure management; flock size management; handling aggressive chickens; lack of veterinarians trained in treating chickens and lack of reliable "chicken sitters." These multiple nuisance factors regarding chickens, etc. and the invasion of space of neighbors living in close proximity are real, regardless of antidotal stories you hear from chicken owners. The ordinance would allow chickens, turkeys, doves, pigeons, quail, game birds, rabbits and honeybees to be housed in small backyards in residential neighborhoods. Presently, the Moraga General Plan requires a minimum lot size of just under an acre and an approval for housing these animals.

The proposed ordinance is patterned after the Lafayette small farm ordinance. Had the search been widened to Orinda, staff would have found that our neighboring city regards distance and proximity to neighbors as important, requiring structures housing small animals to be set back, "not less than 60 feet from the front property line or any street line, and shall not be less than 40 feet from any side or rear property line." Distance between chickens and neighbor's yards is the issue. There begins the neighbor vs. neighbor conflict with no measurable standards and no enforceable repercussions.

Yes, there have been public disagreements in Moraga, but at the end of the day, we have had a place to come home to where we could peacefully enjoy family and neighbors - the last bastion of peace in this contentious world. I urge Council members to send this proposal back to staff/planning commission to address the unintended negative consequences of the proposed ordinance.

DeEtta Kay Reynolds  
Moraga

Editor:

Your report that Lafayette is considering the Simpson-Lescure building for parking doesn't make a lot of sense. It drives me a bit nuts when I see these projects discussed as if they were stand-alone. They are not! In the current context, we have the development above the Veterans Hall, the Lennar development of 66 condos coming in at Dolores and Mt. Diablo. The intersection of Mt. View/Dolores/Mt. Diablo is already slow. Since there lights have changed on Mt. Diablo (which is a good thing), the wait to turn left from Mt. Diablo to Mt. View is already long. The cross lights are also long. When the two projects above get built, along with the Post Office and TJ, we will have a major problem at this intersection.

This location is also bad. It is off the center of town and not near any major shopping, except TJ and the Post office. Do you really think that people will park here and walk to Lafayette Mercantile? It makes much more sense to put parking on Moraga Road at the parcel the town purchased and the old library which is very central to the major shopping areas. But the best solution to parking would be for the town to get together with BART and create parking at the BART lot. I know the Happy Valley crowd doesn't care for this option, but a garage in this location, would be smack in the middle of town. As a side advantage would be additional BART parking that will lessen the impact of BART users who park in town.

Leonard Dorin  
Lafayette

Editor:

An article in the November 4th issue of the Lamorinda Weekly, "No Draught in EBMUD Employee Compensation," made a couple of claims comparing MOFD to EBMUD that requires clarification.

- 1) "MOFD experienced a property tax decrease". In the eight years since 2007, MOFD revenues, 92% of which are property taxes, have increased 25 percent. Inflation has only increased 20 percent over that same time period. MOFD property tax revenue has not decreased.
- 2) "The firefighters received no raise from 2008 until 2015. In fact, their wages were cut a further 3.5 percent in 2014." While this is technically true, over the same eight year period total compensation increased slightly more than inflation; a total of 21 percent. It did not decrease. All of the increase has come from the increased cost of benefits; medical and pension. In fact, total salaries (base plus overtime) has decreased 8 percent. However the number of firefighter per shift has also decreased from 19 to 17 (11 percent) so the average salary per firefighter has actually increased a small 3 percent, which is still not good from the employees' perspective, relative to inflation.

What has decreased is service to the taxpayers. All of this because retirement benefits were underfunded due to overly aggressive pension plan investments (high risk and "supposedly" high reward investments) which have not borne fruit and due to the fact that medical retirement benefits were not pre-funded at all. And the community and the firefighters themselves are now paying for this lack of foresight.

Are current "assumptions" correct or are we still betting on investments which are questionable rather than taking a more conservative route?

Steve Cohn  
Orinda

Editor

Nick Marnell's op-ed piece, "No Drought in EBMUD Employee Compensation," represents an extraordinarily shallow piece of reporting, and I am left puzzling about why it was written. While Marnell points out that EBMUD employee salaries have not decreased since 2012, and compares that to cuts by the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, he provides no context for his implicit suggestion that EBMUD salaries should have been reduced. Why target EBMUD? What about BART and its overpaid unions? Why not discuss the compensation of some of our local city managers or staffs? The fact that MOFD had salary reductions amounts to "so what?" How are the two districts comparable? What is the history of past pay increases? What are pay levels for different jobs, and on what basis are the jobs the same or different. EBMUD serves many multiples more customers than MOFD. I am not an expert on these issues and I do not know the answers to these questions, or even whether they are the appropriate questions to ask. The fact that I am as uninformed after reading the article as I was before reading it shows that it imparted no useful information except that Marnell has a bone to pick.

Eliot Hudson  
Lafayette

Editor:

We are seniors at Miramonte High School who are doing a research project. We are writing to you in order to inform you of the issue of animal testing. According to the Humane Society International, animals used in experiments are commonly subjected to force feeding, forced inhalation, food and water deprivation, prolonged periods of physical restraint, the infliction of burns and other wounds to study the healing process, the infliction of pain to study its effects and remedies, and many other things. One specific company, Church and Dwight, that manufactures brands such as Oxi Clean,

Arm and Hammer products, and Kaboom inhumanely treats their animals when testing their products. Our goal is to raise awareness of this issue so that we can further create laws that will protect the health, safety and well-being of these animals that are being used in labs.

Cecilia Gee and Danielle Chan  
Orinda

Editor:

Edna St. Vicent Millay once said, "It's not true that life is one damn thing after another; it's one damn thing over and over."

Developer proposes 40 units. Citizens complain. Builder builds 36 units. Developer proposes 60 units. Citizens complain. Builder build 54 unites. Developer proposes 80 units. Citizens complain. Builder builds 72 units. Over and over . . .

It was time to take our Pointers, Pierce and Puncture, for a walk. We surveyed the proposed building site next to the Moraga Fire House. Critics are correct; it's not really large enough for 35 three-story units. However, it's perfect for three 35-story units . . . with a 35-story parking garage. Think of Andy Scheck's four beehives as the inspiration for "Mellifera Manor of Moraga." Now that's a name that sticks. Visualize those four hives as four buildings flanking a multidimensional "roundabout" for trucks and autos, motorcycles and bicycles, go carts and golf carts, wheelchairs and walkers. From the 35th floors, a spectacular human kaleidoscope! Architectural rendering to be provided – 'soon as I find my rendering pen.

How fitting the new head of administrative services for Moraga comes from Dublin where the population grew from ". . . the size of Moraga today" to 50,000. Now she can help Moraga grow to 50,000 and Lamorinda grow to 180,000. How exciting! Perhaps she can help transform an image of Andy's beehives into a Lamorinda logo since our residents seem destined to live like bees in hives. Over and over . . .

Edward C. Hartman  
Moraga

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