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Moraga Art in Public Spaces Committee Approved

By Sophie Braccini

Moraga Councilmember Teresa Onoda, a plein air painter and active member of the Lamorinda art scene, has worked to bring more art to the town since she joined the council at the end of 2014. She attempted to convince her fellow council members at the Nov. 18 council meeting to secure enough funding for the newly adopted art in public places policy, trying to get vice mayor Mike Metcalf, and councilmembers Dave Trotter and Phil Arth to consider increasing the \$5,000 budget they approved to promote the new policy by an additional \$5,000.

While Onoda did not succeed in garnering support for the increase in the short term, the ordinance was approved and a newly formed Art in Public Spaces Committee will begin operating in 2016, seeking artists willing to display their creations in Moraga public spaces for free.

In September the council discussed mirroring Orinda's public art policy and directed staff to draft a similar ordinance. The text formalizes the process artists should follow if they want to lend a piece of art to be displayed in Moraga for up to two years.

Moraga resident Dale Walwark stated skepticism at the meeting for what he feels Orinda does in respect to art choices. "There is a lot of bad art out there," he said. "(In) Orinda, the stuff they have sitting on the street is ridiculous. Their policy is that art (is) intended to enrich the public environment. That stuff fails to accomplish that objective." But Vice Mayor Metcalf was fast to say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Walwark also said that the council should not spend money thoughtlessly, a comment that was better received by the council.

Parks and Recreation Director Jay Ingram proposed using the Palos Colorados developer's fund to finance the program. There is currently over \$1 million of "Palos money" in the fund.

"We are nibbling away at the Palos money; \$5,000 is (more than) enough," said Walwark about funding. The plan presented by Ingram included \$5,000 for the marketing of the program and another \$5,000 as seed money for a fund to purchase the pieces of art that were on loan to the town, if the public wants to buy it. "I can support \$5,000 (from the Palos money), but I don't know that I want to appropriate any further funds," said councilmember Dave Trotter.

Onoda explained the importance of having enough money in the marketing fund so artists can get some benefit from displaying their art for free in Moraga. "When I go into a gallery (where my art is displayed) one of the questions is, 'How are you going to market me?'" said Onoda. "We are going to have their work and they want to know that people are going to see it. You don't do it by being in the newspapers, you do it online and you say we are looking for artists to donate. There is a process to do that, and it takes money, and you guys don't understand this process." While Metcalf, Trotter and Arth did agree to the \$5,000 for marketing, they proposed that another \$5,000 be allocated to an art purchasing fund at the next budget cycle, if surplus is available.

The members also approved the charter of the art committee that will approve the proposed donations. This group will include one councilmember, one park and recreation commission member, one design review board member, one Moraga park foundation member, and three Moraga community members. Onoda was appointed as the councilmember on the committee.

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