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Moraga's New Mayor Discusses Town Goals and Development

By *Sophie Braccini*



Mike Metcalf Photo Andy Scheck

This is the third time that Mike Metcalf will hold the gavel on the Moraga council dais when discussing important issues in 2016, such as the rules for hillside and ridgeline development, the Moraga Center Specific Plan zoning, the Hacienda de las Flores development plan, finding revenue sources for the millions of dollars in delayed maintenance, or partnering with the school district for recreation facilities usage. But there is one thing the new mayor does not want to hear about: a moratorium on development in town. In Metcalf's view, current development plans are not excessive, especially considering that Moraga has been quasi stagnant for the past several years.

One of Metcalf's many characteristics is that he calls a spade a spade. "When I hear Lafayette blaming Moraga's development for their downtown traffic, I ask, what development?" he says.

According to the town's 2015-23 Housing Element, only 10 new homes were built in Moraga between 2007 and 2014. His opinion is that Moraga has long been overdue for building some new housing units, and that the 74 that will be completed in 2016 (Rancho Laguna II off Rheem Boulevard, the Camino Ricardo subdivision, and Via Moraga across from the Rheem Shopping Center) is not an excessive number. "Some people say that we have 600 units planned in the (Moraga Center) Specific Plan area," he adds. "Let's be serious about this." The new mayor notes that the Camino Ricardo and the Town Center Homes developments (both part of that plan) were supposed to have 100 units, and that the actual number is only 72. Metcalf thus deduces that the maximum build-up of the MCSP will be much less than 600 units, and says it is likely to take years.

Metcalf believes that the best way for residents to have an impact on what will be coming next in this area is to participate in the discussion of its zoning. "The process that has started with an advisory committee is hugely important," he says. He hopes that the public will soon be involved and the outcome adopted in 2016 (see the Lamorinda Weekly Dec. 16 article, "Residents Can Weigh In on Defining Downtown Character" in the online archives).

As far as development rights are concerned, Metcalf's view is there needs to be a compromise made between property owners who have entitlements as stated in the fifth amendment of the Constitution, and the public interest. "There is tension between property rights and community interest," he says. "The trick is to turn them toward each other for a complementary (result). There is a trade off. There is a negotiation. It can't be one way."

Another important goal for Metcalf is to move a transformation plan forward for the Hacienda de las Flores. "I went to a meeting there last week," he said, "and there was just one group of people in La Sala doing exercise. It was mostly empty and dark. It is so sad." Metcalf supports a public-private partnership that would bring the necessary money to update the building, and he is in favor of giving more time to the architect who has been working on the plans and a marketing study. "We have to be patient," says the new mayor. The architect's report was scheduled for October 2015

and should be made available in February.

Metcalf would also like to see the completion of the ridgeline and hillside regulation amendment that he has been working on with a committee for over a year. "We want to fill the holes in the existing regulations, clarifying rules and getting back to the spirit of MOSO (Moraga Open Space Ordinance that was adopted by the people)," he says. The planning commission should begin discussing the text on Jan. 20.

When it comes to tackling the issue of delayed maintenance and storm drains, in particular, Metcalf is careful. "There is no revenue stream for that (\$8.9 million of high priority work)," he says. "If the voters don't want to vote for something, there is nothing you can do about it." He adds that at least the town government knows what has to be done technically. The challenge is to get the story out and convince people that it is needed. He recommends that the question be asked of residents as part of a community outreach preference survey.

Metcalf supports a new process that will involve residents more than ever to complete the list of the town's 2016 goals. An online town hall interface is open to residents to list the town goals in order of their priority and to add their own. Residents are also invited to a goal-setting workshop at 6 p. m. Thursday, Jan. 21 in the Council Chambers, 335 Rheem Blvd. To voice your opinion, visit moraga.ca.us/opentownhall.

Ten goals proposed for 2016

Develop a sustainable funding strategy for Town assets and infrastructure.

Complete the Moraga Center Specific Plan implementation project form-based zoning, and streetscape and park consolidation standards.

Complete an update of hillside and ridgeline regulations.

Improve the interconnectedness and public awareness of Moraga's trail system.

Re-open discussions with the school district for new and shared community recreation facilities.

Adopt a balanced budget and continue high quality financial reporting.

Develop a concept and plans for a financially sustainable Hacienda de las Flores.

Work with Saint Mary's College to complete the design and financing plan for St. Mary's Road roundabouts.

Install new streetlights in critical areas around town.

Complete the community preferences survey and develop a revenue measure for the 2016 ballot.

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