

Published January 27, 2016

Hard to Choose an Image for Moraga

By Sophie Braccini

Taking public surveys and having multiple meetings that go on for hours about the colors and symbols on new town wayfinding signs could seem frivolous to a misinformed outsider. But the matter is not trivial. As the passionate controversy over the new electronic town marquee showed a few months ago, Moragans are demanding when it comes to signs - and for good reason. Formal or whimsical, low- or high-tech, subdued or flashy, public signs say a lot about how a town sees itself.



Four wayfinding sign options Image provided

they proposed four design options that have been created to differentiate Moraga from its neighboring cities and to reflect the character of the town.

The four members of the Design Review Board met on Jan. 11 to decide whether there should be a pear or no pear on the signs, and a blue or a green sky over a silhouette of hills. As a historical symbol of the town of Moraga the pear has merits, according to Helder and board member John Glover. The other two members, Ramona Escano-Thompson and Chris Crews, were less enthusiastic. The blue sky also garnered no real consensus for or against.

Glover was less concerned about the color palette than the number of future signs planned, "so Moraga does not start looking like Las Vegas," he said. What was important to Glover was that the number of signs be limited to what was needed for direction and safety. The consultant said a preliminary study showed that about 18 vehicular signs, five pedestrian signs, and 20 bike signs would be included.

The four sign options were proposed to the public through an online survey. Option one is all green with a white pear outline in the top left corner, option two is the same as option one with no pear; option three adds a blue sky with a pear, and option four has a blue sky with no pear. Of the 123 votes submitted in the online survey, nearly half were for option four. None of the other three options received more than 20 percent of the vote.

The four options were also presented to the citizens committee that meets to discuss the pedestrian and bicycle plan. Their comment was that the blue sky could distract passers-by from the main objective of the sign, which is to inform about direction, so that would eliminate options three and four.

Escano-Thompson suggested creating temporary mockups of the different versions so people could get a better feel for what these signs would look like. The consultant agreed that paper mockups could be made.

The town council will have a chance to weigh in on the proposed signage within a few weeks. Studio L'Image will then finalize the plan, including positioning and material used.

Moraga Planning Director Ellen Clark noted that the four gateway signs that signal the entrance to Moraga on Canyon Road, Moraga Way, St. Mary's Road and Moraga Road are going to be redone thanks to a donation from the Moraga Movers.

The financing of the new wayfinding plan was not discussed. The grant only funds the study.

Moraga Movers Gives \$40,000 to the Town and Local Groups

The largest dues-paying organization in Moraga, the Moraga Movers, gave the town of Moraga \$10,000 to build four gateway signs at the entrance of the town. Philip Arth, president of the Moraga movers, indicated at the Jan. 13 council meeting that in 2015 the seniors group found itself with a \$40,000 surplus and decided to donate half of that money in 2015, and the remainder in 2016. Other Movers' beneficiaries are the Saint Mary's Scholarship Program, the Saint Mary's High Potential Scholarship Program, and Lamorinda Adult Respite Care. "The feeling was that they (the gateway signs) are worn, they are too low to the ground, they are dated, and some are obstructed by vegetation," said Arth, when explaining why the group decided to give money to the town.

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