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Published April 6th, 2016

Town Makes \$10,000 Donation to Carr Ranch

By Sophie Braccini

The Town of Moraga sent a strong signal of support to the John Muir Land Trust when the town council voted to donate \$10,000 to the campaign to purchase 600 acres of the Carr Ranch property. The vote, held at the March 23 meeting, was not unanimous, as Mayor Michael Metcalf said he would have rather waited for the coming budget cycle before agreeing to the donation.

When the JMLT announced nine months ago that it was committing to raising \$7 million to purchase Carr Ranch, it seemed a monumental task, and the largest the 26-year-old trust ever undertook.

But Linus Eukel, JMLT Executive Director, said that over \$5 million had already been committed.

"We have over two-thirds worth of support toward the acquisition of the property," Eukel said. "It comes from a mix of public agency funding, private foundations and individual supporters, most of them from Lamorinda."

The East Bay Municipal Utility District, which owns the watershed next to the Carr Ranch property, has really helped support the fundraising efforts, Eukel said.

The director added that the town's donation had not been solicited by the Trust and that it was a strong signal of local support. During the meeting he stressed the importance of getting a unanimous decision from the council. The four council members present all supported the idea of a \$10,000 donation, but differed on the way of appropriating the sum.

"Ten thousand dollars was a payment by SummerHill (Homes) for illegally cutting down a buckeye tree that was on the tree map for preservation on the Rancho Laguna II property," said Council Member Dave Trotter. "It was always contemplated that this money would be allocated to a project that would have a pro-environmental impact."

A letter from Summerhill was produced that indicated that the fine should be used to protect open space.

But Metcalf said he had never seen a written account of this transaction and that he wanted the donation to be included in the many projects up for review during the next budgeting cycle, which will start in April.

"My problem is not what we are doing, but how we are doing it," he said. "There are a bunch of things that we know are going to come up, and we have a budget process that gives us an opportunity to make an assessment of all our needs."

Council Members Roger Wykle and Teresa Onoda agreed with Trotter that there was a nexus of opportunity at this time and the donation was approved.

Eukel added after the meeting that "no deal is done until it is finished" and that the JMLT continues to need strong local support to raise the rest of the money.

On April 30 a fundraising gala will be held at Campana Farm, next to the ranch. "The sale of the seats is already going strong and we have capped the number of attendants at 350," Eukel said.

"We are so grateful to Pat Rose who gave us the place for this occasion."

The Trust's goal is to close escrow with the Carr family by July of this year.

More information about the Carr Ranch campaign and the gala can be found at www.jmlt.org.

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