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Published April 20th, 2016

Town: Sinkhole Repairs Will Take Until September

By Sophie Braccini

Work to repair the sinkhole that formed over a month ago in Moraga is moving according to plan, but final repairs will not be made until fall.

Town Public Works Director Edric Kwan said that his team has worked diligently to analyze all the elements of the incident, including subsurface exploration and laboratory testing.

One of the main problems the city faces, however, is paying for the repairs. Kwan stressed the fact that the forensic report is key to getting the necessary state funding. He said he recalled how in Richmond, where a larger hole formed under his watch, the state first denied the emergency funding. "Getting the forensic (plan) together helped the state change its mind," he said.

The forensic study will be completed in time for a report to be presented to the Moraga Town Council on April 27.

At the meeting Kwan will present repair options. He said he plans to expedite the bid process that will be presented to the council at its May 11 meeting. A few contractors will compete to get the repair work that should start in June. Kwan expects the repair itself to take three months, which puts the finished product sometime in September.

Kwan said he knows that everyone is eager to see repairs start, but he added that even if the town had all the money in the world it would still need to assess the extent and reasons for the damage, including what is happening with the 96-inch Laguna Creek culvert that runs deep at the crossing. It was the same culvert that broke on the other side of the Moraga Road/Rheem Boulevard intersection 10 years ago. The incident had less civic impact in part because no other utilities were damaged in the first sinkhole.

In the meantime, staff is working at finding funding sources for the repairs. Even if the state declares the emergency, the town will have to front the money. The town council will determine what source of funding will be used, such as the town's reserves, the Palos Colorados fund or Measure K money. Kwan said that each option will have consequences. There are other ongoing infrastructure projects to be completed, such as the repair of Bollinger Canyon, Larch Avenue and Corliss Drive.

The state will reimburse the town if it recognizes the Moraga emergency. "(It's a) very lengthy process," Kwan said. As of April 15 the director had not yet been given a date for a visit from the California Office of Emergency Services' representatives.

The whole town staff is mobilized on the issue, from Amy Cunningham, the administrative director working on the budget and capital improvement plan, to Interim Town Manager Bob Priebe, who is lobbying Sacramento staff and elected officials to speed the process. City staff is also working at improving the signage around the Rheem Shopping Center (See story on page A1), and also at communicating with Lafayette and Orinda that Moraga is still open for business.

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