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Published June 1st, 2016

## Town Denied Federal Transportation Funds For Sinkhole Repair

*By Sophie Braccini*

The Federal Highway Administration denied the town of Moraga the funding to repair the sinkhole that formed mid-March after the heavy rains.

The town is disputing this initial decision, which Interim Town Manager Bob Priebe announced at the May 25 town council meeting, and will contact Cal OES, the Governor's office of emergency services to discuss the situation. Priebe said that repair work will proceed as planned whatever the results of the negotiations with the agencies.

The California Department of Transportation is the agency that made an assessment based on information the town provided and made the determination that the town did not qualify for federal funds. Priebe is drafting the appeal to Caltrans, and given the urgency of the need to begin repairs as soon as possible, is contacting Cal OES to get some guidance on their process.

At the beginning of May the council had decided to authorize repairs of the damaged 96-inch culvert that caused the road collapse at the intersection of Rheem Boulevard and Moraga Road. Cost estimate for the repair is \$3.3 million.

In the meantime, town staff will present the bid package for repairs to five pre-selected contractors. Priebe said that the town continues to do everything it possibly can to get the repairs done quickly, continues to support the business community during the repair phase, and is seeking financial assistance until all options are exhausted.

The town manager added after the meeting that there is no additional impact on the town's current budget, because Moraga will have to initially fund the repairs no matter what financial assistance is obtained. Any state or federal monies are reimbursements. The 2006 sinkhole took two years to receive the FHWA money.

"Clearly, if the town is denied state or federal assistance, it will impact future budgets," he said. That money that will not be replenished to offset the costs that will be borne in the current fiscal year and next year's fiscal year's budget. They will be presented on June 8.

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