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## Council Changes Direction, Keeps Moraga Road Four Lanes

*By Sophie Braccini*

Moraga Road between Corliss and Donald Drives will retain its current four lanes.

After deciding earlier this year that the segment of roadway would be reconfigured to three traffic lanes and one turning lane, the town council voted against that option. Concerns over possible congestion and a desire to compromise led to the flip.

During a well-attended council meeting on June 22, each argument for three or four lanes was met by an opposing justification.

Proponents of three lanes argued that the lack of left lane turn was making the segment dangerous. "Three people have died here," said resident Ravi Singh, explaining that when people stop on the left lane to make a left turn on either Devin or Draeger Drives cars waver between lanes at high speed. Others noted how dangerous the fast moving car lanes and lack of dedicated space are for runners - including the very active Campolindo Track team - and bicyclists.

On the four-lane side of the issue, the main argument was traffic flow. Randi Rosso reminded the audience that Moraga Road had been expanded to four lanes because of lack of capacity. The level of service at peak hour would indeed have an impact over time, confirmed traffic consultant Tom Krakow from DKS. Krakow's position was nonetheless in favor of the three-plus-one left turn lane configuration because he explained that what causes congestion are capacity, stops and turning opportunity with no left turning pockets. "It's the unexpected activities that causes ... congestion," he added.

The biggest discrepancy appeared over the residents' different input over the three years the plan developed. A first group of interested residents participated in workshops and study sessions and, along with staff and the different town commissions, reached a consensus for the three-plus-one configuration. The second group comprised residents who were subsequently polled with an online survey, and they rejected the idea of reducing the number of travel lanes southbound by a very large majority.

Interestingly enough, a discussion involving about 60 residents grew on Nextdoor.com after council member Teresa Onoda proposed to take interested Moragans to a walking tour of the area. "I changed my vote because I walked it," said Dr. Susan Bittner who had favored the four-lane option before observing traffic and people forcing their way in the main traffic lane from what is Corliss' right turning lane.

Council member Roger Wykle was the first to withdraw his former support for the three-plus-one configuration. "The town might not be ready for it yet," he said before proposing to maintain four traffic lanes but still construct a multi-use path and bike lane. Onoda, who had also been a champion of the three-plus-one, decided that what Wykle had proposed was the way to go. Vice-Mayor Trotter had always opposed reducing the number of travel lanes.

By the end of the meeting, only Mayor Metcalf stood for the creation of a turning lane. "What we are talking about here is just changing about 750 feet of road," he said. Metcalf explained that the traffic issue was not how much lane capacity, but the interruption of flow due to the lack of turning lane. He said that the survey had created controversy and showed contradictory findings. For example, as Onoda noted, 74 percent of the respondents had agreed that the three-plus-one option was safe for drivers. "There may be an election coming up... but I have not found a reason to change my mind," said an unwavering Metcalf.

The objective of the Moraga Livable Road plan is to improve the north-south connection and the safety for all users, from Campolindo to the Commons Park. It includes other less controversial changes along the corridor such as a new traffic light at the Corliss intersection. The council approved the plan option proposed by vice mayor Dave Trotter.

Planning Director Ellen Clark explained after the meeting that the implementation would start during the summer. "We will take advantage of the resurfacing of Moraga Road that is scheduled for

the summer to change the stripping," she said. Clark added that a continuous pedestrian sidewalk may not be possible to set, but she was confident that the continuous multi-use trail would be delineated.

"We will close as many gaps as possible," she said, adding that the undergrounding of PG&E lines along the segment will also help free space for common use. As far as a new light at the Corliss intersection, she said that her department will prepare the plans and that funding, in the form of grants, will be sought. She does not see that new light being installed before the 2017-18 fiscal year.

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