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Lamorinda municipalities meet jointly on traffic, development

By Sora O'Doherty

The annual joint meeting of the councils of the cities of Orinda and Lafayette and the Town of Moraga got off to a surprising start when citizen Doug Home spoke in the public forum to advise that virtually all problems can be resolved by making prayers in public schools mandatory. It was not the only controversial subject to arise that night.

At the March 1 meeting, Mary Bruns made a plea to Orinda to fund the Lamorinda Spirit Van, which provides transportation for seniors in all three jurisdictions. Orinda City Council does not fund the Spirit Van because Orinda has a separate program for seniors, Seniors Around Town. However, the Orinda Community Foundation does support the Spirit Van. Orinda residents represent about a quarter of the rides provided, with the other roughly three quarters being split between Lafayette and Moraga, with Lafayette usage being somewhat higher. Seniors can also use County Connection LINK paratransit services, Road to Recovery, operated by the American Cancer Society, Senior Helpline Services, and private providers, such as taxis, Uber and Lyft.

James Hinkamp, transportation planner for the City of Lafayette, reported that they are analyzing projected growth and trying to plan traffic mitigation measures. The primary "pinch point" is the intersection of Moraga Road and Mt. Diablo Boulevard. Measures being considered include a second northbound right-turn lane from Moraga Road (which would require the removal of two crosswalks), a southbound left-turn pocket, and the use of smart corridors and signal timing management. These methods may be phased in gradually as needed.

Moraga is still awaiting authorization to get its sinkhole repaired, and has experienced further delay in the Rheem Boulevard closure owing to the large amount of rainfall. The all-access playground at the Commons is receiving a lot of support. As to housing development in Moraga, Planning Director Ellen Clark noted that Camino Ricardo's Harvest Court will add 20 homes and a new public park, while Via Moraga will add 17 new homes. Other projects include Rancho Laguna on Rheem Boulevard, Bollinger Valley (126 single family homes), and Indian Valley along Moraga Road towards Canyon (71 lot subdivision).

Saint Mary's College is not anticipating substantial growth over the next 15 years and has a long range master plan. Barry Behr noted that Saint Mary's is a town within a town, a jewel we all enjoy, and employs 5,000 people.

Lafayette development projects are proceeding under its 2002 General Plan, with goals of preserving hillsides and encouraging multifamily housing downtown under its downtown specific plan. There are currently 515 units, and two more compounds will be build. Where the defunct Celia's restaurant is there will be an additional 66 units, including a restaurant space and retail space. Woodbury Highlands, over Woodbury, will add something upwards of 90 units.

Orinda Mayor Eve Phillips spoke about Orinda's pavement repair progress. Under Measure L Orinda is spending \$10 million annually on residential road repair, and will need an additional \$3.5 million each year for ongoing maintenance. For arterials and collections \$20 million is needed annually, and for storm drains the city will need more than \$15 million. As for development, Wilder will add 245 residences when complete, J&J Ranch will add 13 homes, and eight at Lavenida Lane.

A number of Moraga residents turned out to address the situation of two houses that suffered great damage in a landslide last year, and many residents blamed EBMUD for not fixing the problem. Katy Keough and Susan Romak also asked Lafayette and Orinda to join their voices to Moraga's to urge EBMUD to act.

The meeting concluded with a presentation by Community Choice Energy of Marin (MCE). Dawn Weisz of MCE explained that when Lafayette joined MCE 11 per cent of users went to MCE in the first few months, with 2 percent of users opting for the "deep green" 100 percent renewable energy. MCE has 24 projects all over California, with \$1.6 billion committed to solar, wind, and biogas power. MCE, a not-for-profit public agency, employs union labor, with 2,800 union jobs, and pays prevailing wages. Lafayette has a goal of 20 percent greenhouse gas reduction by 2020, and is on track to meet that goal in its first year with MCE.

Moraga would see a 66 percent reduction in its first year, should it choose to join MCE, and Orinda would reduce 44,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide in its first year.

In response to questions from Orinda City Council Member Inga Miller, the cities do not share in liabilities, and that customers can opt back into PG&E service at any time. Council Member Jeanette Fritsky of Moraga inquired about longterm prices and rates, and was assured that rates should stay low as there is an oversupply of generated energy and the system is not even close to saturation.

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