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Town attempts to combat negative press coverage at council meeting

By Jennifer Wake

The Moraga Town Council at its Sept. 27 meeting briefly discussed the necessity to respond officially to the Sept. 15 San Francisco Chronicle article, "Town tapped out: Moraga's fiscal crisis shocks, baffles residents." Staff felt that that the article text misrepresented the town and contained many errors, and it wrote a draft response to the article to be sent to the paper.

The draft letter listed 13 bulleted responses to portions of the article, including areas of discrepancy in how comparisons were made between Moraga and other cities that had declared fiscal emergencies, a more detailed explanation about the town's much needed storm drain repairs, and how comparisons to the City of Orinda's total operating budget were flawed due to how police contract positions are included in Orinda's salaries and benefits allocation.

The council members acknowledged that while they believed that the article contained factual errors, engaging in a battle with the media was a waste of time and energy. News of the agenda item and a copy of the draft response, however, reached the Chronicle editorial desk anyway.

In a Sept. 26 email response to council members and staff from the Chronicle's editor-in-chief about the alleged errors in coverage, Audrey Cooper wrote: "None of them are actual factual lapses as much as they are preferences that the article should have been

presented more from your point of view and not included the voices of people who disagree with current town policies. Respectfully, that is not how news coverage works. ... Our news decisions reflect topics we believe will better inform people in the Bay Area and Northern California. Our role is to inspire informed civic discourse, and we reject pressure to tilt coverage in any direction. We report hundreds of stories a week. As I often say, there has never been a story we couldn't have made better with more time and the benefit of hindsight, but there is a large void between that an (sic) actual factual errors that mislead voters. I hope you come to see the distinction."

The council members agreed that what mattered most was their constituency, the Moraga residents, and that the town should focus on publishing any clarifications or corrections to information stated in the article on its website. Mayor Teresa Onoda and Council Member Kymberleigh Korpus volunteered to work on this text, which will be brought back to council at a later time. Council Member Jeanette Fritzky, thinking that no action was necessary, voted against spending more time on the topic.

To view the draft letter and response submitted as part of the Sept. 27 Town of Moraga Staff Report, visit http://www.moraga.ca.us/council/meetings/2017/092717/TC-092717_Agenda%20Regular%20Final%20-%20Corresp%20Added.pdf

Dismantling of the Canyon Bridge

... continued from page A1



The bridge is gone Photo Andy Scheck

The work started as scheduled the week of Sept. 18, with the main part of the bridge gone a week later. Public works director Edric Kwan says that the bridge will be completely cleared by Oct. 8. He further explains that the town is now signing the contract to have the preparation work for the installation of the temporary bridge to start right after the demolition is completed.

Brian Coyle, Canyon school board vice president, tried to have the demolition stopped. A significant difference of perception persists between the Canyon school board and the Town of Moraga. Coyle states that only inspectors with a federally approved bridge inspection certificate can assess the safety of a bridge and Moraga had not called such professionals. When the town, following its plan, decided to remove the bridge, Coyle filed a request to restrain the town from

demolishing the bridge. A judge denied the request.

Coyle made a further request that Moraga cease denying what he calls the 2016 CalTrans assessment, and that it permits Canyon school district representatives an opportunity to make a presentation at a Moraga Town Council meeting. That request was heard by a judge on Sept. 29 and denied.

Kwan explains that the installation of a replacement bridge was a complex project to plan. The contractor that will prepare the abutments and piers to retain the hillside and allow for a safe installation of the temporary bridge could not start the work before the bridge is demolished. Kwan says that the site is too narrow for two contractors to have their diverse equipment on site at the same time. He says that the bid documents for this work have been published and a contract would be signed in time for the work to start on the heels of the demolition.

The third company involved in the project is the one that will rent an appropriate bridge to the town. Kwan says he is in the process of selecting one. He continues to forecast the installation of the temporary bridge at the end of November.

The termination of Sinky the Sinkhole

Sinky the Sinkhole, as one resident nicknamed the year and a half crater at the intersection of Rheem Boulevard and Moraga Road, is now nearing its end. Kwan reports that the repair is proceeding as planned. The new 96-inch reinforced concrete culvert for the creek was installed and encased in a slurry backfill. The utilities that were installed in the hole were secured in place last winter, a new traffic signal system needs to be placed on site, and the pavement rebuilt. Normal traffic is projected to be re-established by the end of October.

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Meet our Featured Agents ...

<p>Rose Brudigan 925.765.6490 CalBRE#00571094</p>	<p>Lisa Shaffer 925.528.9278 CalBRE#00996886</p>	<p>Sheri Wedlake 925-324-2091 CalBRE#00872175</p>	<p>Julie Georgiou 925.200.8246 CalBRE#01043977</p>	<p>Tania DeGroot 510.367.1422 CalBRE# 01094898</p>	<p>Regina Englehart, Broker-Manager 925.876.9076 CalBRE# 01308462</p>
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