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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 agendized 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](http://www.moraga.ca.us/council/meetings/2017/092717/TC-092717_Agenda%20Regular%20Final%20-%20Corresp%20Added.pdf)

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