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## Viva Moraga: A movement for Moraga economic development

By Sophie Braccini



Stefani Gray talks about Viva Moraga Photo Rob Lucacher

Viva Moraga is a new citizen-led group that wants to support the town's economic vitality using a constructive attitude. Started a few months ago by Stefani Gray, Viva Moraga recently held a meeting with about 30 residents of all ages and perspectives to discuss possible actions. The group seeks to inform, educate, support and create a positive climate to encourage more services and amenities to set up shop in Moraga.

About a year ago Gray met with Edy Schwartz, former president of the Chamber of Commerce and 2010 Citizen of the Year, to discuss the future of the town where they both reside. Gray is a friend of Schwartz's daughter, who moved with her young family to the town a few years ago. She says that she and her friends, new homeowners in town, feel that they have invested in expensive homes but do not find the commercial services and amenities they seek in town.

Passing along her passion for civic action to the young woman, Schwartz urged Gray to work toward affecting the changes she wants. This led to Gray's creation of Viva Moraga.

Gray also met with members of the Orinda group What's Up Downtown, which has similar objectives for Orinda and was instrumental in bringing food trucks to the city on Thursday nights to create more fun community spirit downtown.

Maura Wolf, who teaches at Saint Mary's College and lives in Moraga, supports Gray and came to facilitate the Jan. 16 meeting held at the Moraga Country Club. She says that Viva Moraga would like to see more citizen involvement in supporting Moraga's commercial development.

In her introductory presentation, Gray insisted on the importance of education for the residents who want to get involved. She said that many want more development and to create a shared vision of the town. Residents want more restaurants, more retail options, family-friendly entertainment and a stronger connection between the town and Saint Mary's College. Gray lived in Boulder, Colorado, and would want a similar dynamic and vibrancy in Moraga.

Gray expressed her optimism for the future of the town, recognizing that many things have been started and developed by motivated Moraga residents in the areas of sports, schools, or recreation.

Groups were formed to discuss different topics, including attracting new businesses; discussing a shared town center vision; communication channels and promotion; educating residents and promoting engagement; and creating a broader vision for the town.

Gray felt very hopeful after the meeting. She noted that younger and older residents came to the meeting, elected officials and large property owners, as well as ordinary citizens. News was shared of new businesses getting ready to open in town: a brewery at the corner of Canyon and Country Club Drive and Joy in Motion, Justin Cole's dance school, which will be opening a studio where the old post office was located on School Street.

Viva Moraga's founder said that she would convene with a small group of people including Ron Haas, Moraga Country Club's general manager and Maura Wolf, to define the goal and big picture for Viva Moraga. A next meeting is scheduled for Feb. 13 during the day, to accommodate parents unavailable at night. Other evening meetings will also be proposed. To follow the group's progress, connect to its Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/vivamoraga/](http://www.facebook.com/vivamoraga/).

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