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Letters to the Editor

Storm drain fee and schools

I read with great concern recent articles that Moraga's proposed storm drain fee will be levied - significantly - on our public schools to the tune of \$30,000-\$35,000 per year.

A town extracting money from the public schools is objectionable standalone. It's an order-of-magnitude more unpalatable and outrageous in the context of the town's lack of progress on any plan to address the declaration of fiscal emergency, in particular its spending priorities and unsustainable operating model as your front page article on Dec. 13, 2017 (and robust citizen discussion on NextDoor and SMARTMoraga) noted.

The Town needs to sharpen its pencil rather than seek relief on the backs of our kids.

Brent Meyers
Moraga

Storm drain fee discussion

Over the next few months Moraga residents will be hearing about the proposal to provide funding for the restoration of our storm drains. Few of us gave any thought to this unseen part of our infrastructure until the Rheem sinkhole got our attention. Working with engineering firms, the Town inspected the storm drains and concluded that the work required to fix the problem would cost more than our limited municipal finances could bear.

All parcels of property in Moraga will have one vote in May to approve or disapprove a new fee that would cost most homeowners \$120 a year. The cost to larger parcels would depend on how much of the land is covered by impermeable surfaces that cause runoff to the storm drains. The fee would appear on our property tax bills every year and would not "sunset." A possible inflation adjustment of no more than three percent would be considered every year.

Most of our storm drains were built more than half a century ago - before the Town was incorporated - and are coming to the end of their lives. They need work, and in some cases replacement, because corrugated metal culverts were installed at locations, such as at the Rheem sinkhole, where concrete should have been used.

So this is a long-term project that simply must be done. If the measure fails, another one will have to be put before the voters, although the law requires that a year must pass.

I am a member of a committee of citizens who will be communicating about the fee, including on a website: www.sosmoraga.com. We are prepared to answer all of your questions on this urgent matter.

Dale Walwark
Moraga

Orinda Private Roads

The residents of private roads are frustrated. We have attended many city meetings for almost a year. We have made no progress in getting private streets adopted for public maintenance at a reasonable cost. This can be done by changing City policy. This is about being fair to all tax paying residents who receive no support for their private road maintenance. The 20% of residents on private roads are part of the public that the City should serve and represent.

The City has no data on the private roads. It's as if we don't exist. The City doesn't know how many miles of private roads there are in Orinda and has no idea of their condition. A survey of all private roads would cost under \$10,000. These private roads clearly are part of the infrastructure. While performing this survey storm drain and fire hazard data can be obtained. Consider the possibility that during a wildfire, a 40-ton fire truck causes a private road to fail catastrophically or finds it impassable. This survey is justified for fire and flood safety and is clearly for the public good. Yet to date the City has said that public funds cannot be spent even to survey private roads.

We have informed the Council that the California Supreme Court stated in *City of Oakland v. Garrison* (1924) 194 Cal. 298, 302: [W]here the question arises as to whether or not a proposed application of public funds is to be deemed a gift [...] the primary and fundamental subject of inquiry is as to whether the money is to be used for a public or private purpose. If it is for a public purpose within the jurisdiction for the appropriating board or body, it is not, generally speaking, to be regarded as a gift.

And that the guidance from the Office of the City Attorney of LA states that:

Courts defer to the legislative body's determination of what constitutes a "public purpose." *County of Alameda v. Carleson* (1971) 5 Cal. 3d 730, 746. A city council's determination of public purpose will be upheld "so long as that determination has a reasonable basis." *Ibid*.

Thus we have asked the City Council to pass a resolution that states that it is in the public interest to survey and maintain all Orinda roads (and culverts), both public and private.

We maintain our effort and welcome all comments at <http://www.orindaroadfacts.info/>

Charles Porges

Orinda

Salaries for Lafayette teachers

Did you know that Lafayette teachers have been working without a contract since the 2015-16 school year? Since that 2% raise we received, the district has offered us zero on the salary schedule. Some will argue that the district is in danger of operating in the red in 3 years, so it is not fiscally responsible to give teachers a raise in light of this projection. In order to address this concern, I would ask that people look back to 2008-09 when the economy went into recession. The district asked teachers to take furlough days, not ask for a raise, and increase our insurance co-pay in order to help out, with the promise that when the economy improved, we would be made whole again. That's what was asked of us and we happily did our part. Well, the economy got better. One could argue it has even boomed at times in the last 10 years, yet we are still waiting for the district to make good on that promise. Over the years since, we've agreed to small raises and one time "bonuses" that were not added to the salary schedule. Our contract for the 2015-16 school year gave us a 2% raise on the salary schedule. Since that time, we have been offered 0. Again, the district argues that there isn't any money to pay us, although they value us and all that we do. We so appreciate the support of the school board. A good working relationship is important for us and for the students. However, the Lafayette School District can no longer balance their budget on the backs of teachers. We deserve a fair living wage and we are currently not earning that. Some would say, "You have good benefits, a good pension, you only work until 3:00, and you get summers off! What is there to complain about?" Many of us have master's degrees, some have doctorates, ALL of us have over a year of post-graduate training. We are highly qualified professionals that make considerably less than those in the private sector with the same level of education and years of service. Should we leave for the private sector? No! We love working with the children. This is why we teach. However, those who teach should not be treated as less than any other professional. We are parents here in Lafayette too. We should be able to afford to live where we work. A beginning teacher salary in Lafayette is \$45,862. In San Ramon, it's \$50,911, Mt. Diablo \$53,339, Dublin \$60,245 (taken from online salary schedules on each district's website). Lafayette is not going to attract the best and brightest new teachers if they continue to have a salary schedule that is markedly lower than surrounding districts. As parents and residents of the Lafayette Community, we need to stand up and say, "This is not okay." Please attend the Lafayette School District Board Meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 21 at 7 p.m. in the Stanley Middle School library. Better yet, e-mail your board members to share your thoughts at lsdboard@lafsd.org.

Christina Churchill
Lafayette

Theatre Square parking

As a resident of the Lamorinda community and an employee in Orinda Theatre Square, I have found the parking options available to employees in the area appalling. In Orinda Theatre Square, parking is a commodity and there is rarely enough for visitors or workers. The availability of parking in the downtown area includes street parking limited from 15 min to 2 hours maximum, not enough for someone working a shift, and the pay to park garage. The garage is free on weekends and holidays, but charges hefty rates during weekdays. The longest period of time one can get validation for is 4 hours, which leaves most employees picking up the tab for an additional 4 to 8 hours of parking fees. Additionally, if you stay past your validation time they charge you for the whole time, including the validated time and their "free first hour."

In my opinion, no one should be forced to pay for parking just to be able to get to their job, especially when those employees are making minimum wage at \$10 per hour. I live in Moraga so I am forced to drive and work at the theater anywhere from 7 to 8 hours at a time. I cannot park for free anywhere on the street, where the time limits and heavy ticketing keep me from using the parking. I cannot even park in front of the building where I work. So, I am forced to park below in the pay for the parking garage. The rates run me hours of my pay as a minimum wage employee and makes my employment at the Orinda Theater almost redundant.

As a result, I and many other employees in my situation, end up using our breaks and lunchtime to move our cars around, hoping to avoid spending half our paychecks just to get to work. I would like to see some free options for employees who work in Orinda Theater Square and perhaps even some spots reserved for employees. It should not cost money to go to work.

Julia Anderson
Moraga

In support of teacher salary increases

You may have noticed signs around town in support of a raise for our District's teachers. I'm a parent of elementary school-age kids, am a past PFC President and currently serve on the LPIE Board. Like many Lafayette parents, I am involved in our school and District and see first-hand how hard our teachers work. Many residents, however, don't currently have children in the District, or have children that are already grown. Why should you support a cost-of-living increase for our teachers?

1. Ask anyone with school-age children why they moved to Lafayette. They will tell you it's because we are one of the top districts in the State. Our schools can boast caring, expert teachers, high levels of parental involvement and many supplementary programs like art, counseling and music - programs most other districts have cut. Our high rankings directly correlate to your high housing values.
2. My children have been in school almost 7 years - and every year I am impressed with the level of

commitment and professionalism of their teachers. They email me at night and on weekends. They spend countless hours outside of paid contract time planning enriching field trips and collaborating on the most effective teaching practices. Lafayette teachers truly care about their students.

3. Sadly, if these dedicated professionals can't make a fair wage, we will lose them to other districts. Our children lose out and ultimately our entire town suffers.

Our teachers spend more time with our kids than we as parents do some days. We want to continue to attract and retain talented professionals - and keep our property values high. Please join me in supporting our Lafayette teachers.

Amy Zawadski
Lafayette

Pride about MCE

According to the American Lung Association, 9,200 Californians die prematurely each year due to polluted air. Rising rates of asthma, heart disease and cancer are also linked to air pollution. And, the Lung Association reports, 75% of this pollution comes from burning fossil fuels. As I learn more about the connection between health and burning fossil fuels, I want ways I can behave to support clean energy and healthier air. That is why I am so happy that my town, Moraga, joined Marin Clean Energy. With this program, that starts this April, all residents in Moraga - as well as Danville, Martinez, Oakley, Pinole, Pittsburg, San Ramon and unincorporated Contra Costa-are enrolled in getting their electricity with 50% renewables content. Rates will be the same or lower than PG&E rates.

I have decided to upgrade to their deep green program. By paying about \$5.00 more each month, I will be using 100% renewable electrical energy in my home. Since I took advantage of tax credits and rebates to get a plug-in electric hybrid car last year, this means I can drive most of the time emitting no fossil fuels. Next step? Getting bids on solar panels. MCE has informed me that I can save more money by putting solar on my roof.

We Moragans and other Contra Costa residents have reason to be proud that we brought a program like MCE to our town. We are helping to create a healthier world. And, because MCE is a non-profit with community representation, we have a resident on the governing board. Right now, it is our Mayor, Dave Trotter.

Marti Roach
Moraga

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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