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Letters to the Editor

Information about storm drain fee

Here are some answers to questions about the proposed fee to fix Moraga's storm drains:

All property owners in Moraga soon will receive ballots to approve or disapprove a fee for work on our storm drains, with one vote per parcel.

The deteriorating storm drains are at the end of their expected life spans. Some of the underground pipes, such as the one that failed in Rheem in 2016, were built with deficient materials.

The new fee revenue can be spent only on the storm drain project. Some Moragans appear to be unclear on this.

Included in the project are all underground pipes, inlets, catch basins, culverts, ditches, and channels that convey stormwater from Moraga to reservoirs and rivers.

This work will take many years, so the fee will be collected for many years. It will appear on our property tax bills.

The costs are beyond the ability of the Town's present financial resources. A dedicated revenue stream is required.

The Town of Moraga's spending per resident is one of the lowest in Northern California. It has to be a lean operation because it gets back only 5.32 per cent of the property taxes we pay, which is less than most cities receive.

The deteriorating storm drains can only get worse, and the opponents of the proposed fee have not put forward an alternative plan for this much-needed work.

This fair voting procedure was approved by California voters in 1996 to help public agencies improve and maintain essential infrastructure. Although new to Moraga, it has been employed by other cities throughout the state.

Ballots must be returned by May 15 in the self-addressed, postage-paid envelopes provided. Only signed ballots will be counted.

John Haffner
Moraga

A vote of no

Moraga's proposed storm drain ballot has resulted in a lot of discussion and division within the community. It is as much about the process as the need for money itself.

It seems to me this is in large part because of the town's haste to take advantage of the recent memory of the sinkhole and a declaration of fiscal emergency (which the town hasn't addressed or provided updates on since last summer/fall). Town officials have selected a special ballot process that subjects schools and churches to taxes, requires excessive contingencies in forecast needs because of the uncertainty and incompleteness, is costing taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars to get to a special ballot, and then creates confusion among voters.

It also has (rightly so) eroded trust in the town council's honesty and forthrightness, with only the Lamorinda Weekly and SMARTMoraga calling out inconsistent statements and partial truths, while other websites and newsletters simply parrot the town's messages.

All of this could have been avoided if the town waited just a few months to craft a well thought out plan and put this on a regular ballot. It's quite clear that the town hasn't sufficiently explored all the options available to it, nor has it even presented a viable financial plan for using the new tax money if the measure passes.

I'm voting "no" because I don't agree with the way the process is being handled and that there is no definitive plan on what they will do with the money raised. I'm voting "no" to send the message to the town that they should do this the right way.

Linda Johnson
Moraga

Teacher salaries

We as teachers are so grateful for everything that the community does to help us educate the future members of Lafayette. As teachers we work hard to help your children be thoughtful and prepared citizens of the world. Along with the children, we are the bedrock of one of California's top rated school districts.

In this capacity, we, the teachers of Lafayette School District, are asking for your support. Right now we are negotiating for a fair contract for 2016-17 with the district. We are currently working without a contract. Unfortunately, the district has offered no pay increases on the salary scale for teachers for the second year in a row. As anyone who lives in the Bay Area well knows, aside from inflation (around 2%), the costs of housing, food and transportation have all risen sharply in recent years and continue to climb. Over the last 10 years our raises have averaged 1.39% annually. We deserve more.

The district is working with a challenging budget. However, teachers, the foundation of any education program, are not prioritized in financial planning. Last year the superintendent of SF Unified made a firm financial commitment to teachers. The Chronicle quoted him saying that maintaining fair wages for teachers would be a financial stretch, but the district was willing to make it work because of an "ongoing commitment to attracting and retaining talented educators." Lafayette needs to make a similar commitment to its teachers to retain and attract talented educators. Teacher salaries must be prioritized.

If you care about maintaining the high-quality education that the students and parents in Lafayette have come to expect, you can help us. Please write to the Lafayette board members, attend board meetings, and ask your children's teachers what you can do to show support. As a community we know how much you do for this district and the children who live here. One of the best ways to support the children of Lafayette is to support their teachers.

Respectfully,

Christina Freschl, Katie McSherry, Betsy Morris, Kitty Hellman, Shannon Venturini, Kim Stern, Jan Broad, Katie Norris, Sue Somers, Chelsea Doolan, Danielle Boone, Stephanie Tompkins, Molly Shannon, Evelyn Dykstra, Wendy Duncan, and Joannie Wedell
Teachers of Happy Valley Elementary School

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