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MCN Sponsors Town Council candidates' forum

By Vera Kochan

The Moraga Citizens Network sponsored a Moraga Town Council candidates' forum Oct. 3 at Holy Trinity Cultural Center. Unlike the Sept. 17 forum held in the Moraga Library, questions to the candidates were submitted by MCN subscribers.



Current Moraga Mayor Dave Trotter, Mike McCluer and Steve Woehleke are running to fill two council seats in November's election. The event was moderated by Chris Laszcz-Davis and began with each candidate allowed two minutes for opening comments.

One of the questions brought up involved infrastructure and services. The concern is for the current status of storm drains, and the long-term plan, road maintenance, and a community gymnasium.

Woehleke feels it's important to minimize costs by bringing in industry experts and volunteers who live in the community to better predict what the annual costs will be. Maintenance is crucial. He does not advocate a community gym. "All the facilities are already available and exist outdoors in Moraga," he said, adding that he's not in favor of the town financing one.

McCluer wants to be proactive, stating, "We need to have funds for road replacements and then maintain them." He feels that the town has the ability to save on expenses and apply the savings to infrastructure. McCluer supports a community gym.

Trotter said, "The town budget can probably deal with ongoing maintenance costs for storm drains, but doesn't have a budget for major capital deficits such as repairs." He would like to apply surplus from property tax receipts toward infrastructure. Trotter wants funds from Palos Colorados to pay for a community gym and to partner with the Moraga School District.

The Rheem Theatre in recent years has gone through closures and reopenings. The candidates were asked if they support community ownership. Trotter said if it meant keeping the theater open, he would give serious consideration to making it an historic landmark. He appreciates the efforts of the Moraga Community Foundation to keep it open and beautifully maintained, adding that it helps bring business to other retail institutions in the area.

Woehleke stressed that the town doesn't own the theater, so it doesn't have total control of its fate. As far as town ownership, he's open to alternatives. If something is designated as an historic landmark, the owners are restricted with what they can do with their facilities. McCluer already considers the Rheem Theatre an historic landmark. With regards to community ownership, he'd like to keep an open mind and listen to proposals.

Candidates were asked if they would support a local ordinance banning or limiting the use of plastic straws and plastic/Styrofoam to-go containers. McCluer stated that there would be a large monetary impact on businesses, and they would need lead time to make the conversion and find a replacement product that would please the customers. He suggested checking other towns' solutions. Trotter reasoned, "If there's a statewide rule it is easier for businesses to comply. If food is taken to-go, there really is no alternative other than plastic. Plastic containers can be reused or recycled." Woehleke believes people need to self-monitor their actions, stating that Moraga shouldn't wait for government to make environmental changes. He proposed a town task force.

Other questions asked of candidates involved pension and healthcare liability, council actions and town procedures, commercial development and major landlord relations, residential growth and traffic and congestion issues. To see the full forum, which was video taped in its entirety, visit www.lamorindaweekly.com/html/MCN-Candidates-night-2018.html.

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