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Moraga Library HVAC woes continue

By Vera Kochan

While libraries are known for their quiet atmosphere, the Moraga Library has been a little quieter since the heating system malfunctioned on Jan. 12.

Public Information Officer Brooke Converse with the Contra Costa County Library said, "Pickups and drop-offs remain steady for this time of year, but patron visit times are shorter, and three children's story time sessions were canceled early on. We have since moved story time activities to the main program area." She added that space heaters have been strategically placed throughout the library.

Parks and Recreation Director Breyana Brandt gave a repair progress update during the Feb. 27 town council meeting, asking for council's authorization for Town Manager Cynthia Battenberg to award a construction contract to repair the HVAC system in an amount not to exceed \$40,000 from the Minor Capital Improvement Program.

Two separate contractors recommended that the full boiler needed replacement at a cost of roughly \$30,000. Brandt is in the process of obtaining a third contractor's opinion of the situation.

The town manager has a threshold authorization of \$15,000 for the job. Any amount beyond that is above her authority. By asking the town council to grant her the authority to exceed that amount for repairs it is hoped that the process can begin much sooner.

Public Works Director Edric Kwan recognized that while the repair estimates came in at \$30,000, "the extra \$10,000 is important in order to have a slight contingency in case other problems are discovered in the course of repair." He added, "The funding is identified in the Capital Improvement Project - a fund used for these specific cases. Whenever there's a failure of some of our minor assets we can come in there, utilize the money and make those necessary repairs."

Vice Mayor Kimberleigh Korpus questioned the thoroughness of the contractors' diagnoses by their "I can't make it work - it must be the boiler" assumptions.

Brandt assured Korpus that, "We have replaced main circuit boards and smaller circuit boards and have replaced everything that possibly could be replaced individually at this point without proceeding and replacing the entire unit. The boiler is not getting power and the power is on."

Mayor Roger Wykle had paid a visit to the boiler room stating, "I can tell you the cabinet is fairly well corroded and the piping is corroded. It's got some serious issues inside of it."

Council Member Steve Woehleke had called the boiler's manufacturer and was told by a technician that he doesn't like the library's boiler model as it's a complex system with more components to it than average. Woehleke recommended that, in the future, the library purchases a system with less bells and whistles to fix.

Korpus will ask her husband, an electrical engineer, to take a look at the boiler and possibly provide some diagnostic answers.

During the public comment portion, Friends of the Library Board Member Jane Low cited additional existing maintenance issues. "The library is an old building. It's not at the top of everybody's list for maintenance. My concern is unless you make a lot of complaints, nobody really pays a lot of attention to it. I urge you to pay more attention to the library."

The town council unanimously gave the town manager authorization to use funds in the Minor Capital Improvement Program not to exceed \$40,000 toward the Moraga Library HVAC repairs.

The library will remain open during the repair process, which is expected to be completed by mid-April.

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