County agency reports challenges faced by Lamorinda municipalities

By Nick Marnell

Lamorinda municipalities provide sufficient public services but, though in good financial shape for the most part, are deficient in some areas, according to a Contra Costa County report that analyzed services provided by each of the county's 19 cities and towns and four of its community service districts.

The report, the Municipal Services Review, was published under the direction of the Local Agency Formation Commission, an agency that regulates boundaries and service areas in Contra Costa County. Categories covered in the document include demographic information, governmental structure, capacity to deliver adequate service and the financial condition of each public entity. "The MSR serves as a resource to help the public better understand how municipal services are provided," says the document introduction.

Likely of surprise to no

one is that in all three Lamorinda municipalities there are fewer jobs than there are housing units. Data in the MSR was compiled for 2010 and projected for 2040, with Lafayette and Moraga coming just under a 1:1 ratio of jobs-to-housing units by 2040. Orinda projects at under 80 percent jobs-to-housing for the same period. Similar data was presented by all three Lamorinda municipalities as a rebuttal to the regional housing plan developed by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which called for more housing units in Lamorinda.

Unlike the 2009 MSR, which provided an exhaustive listing of all government functions and services, the updated report also pointed out specific deficiencies in the management of each public entity.

Lafayette was noted for its capital spending not keeping up with asset depreciation, and failing to maintain current infrastructure needs.

According to the report, Lafayette has identified only $1.7 million out of the $2.3 million needed to maintain its roads at the pavement condition index of 77, exceeding the 75 target set by the MTC.

"City Engineer Mike Moran has been working with the Capital Projects Assessment Committee to develop cost estimates for the future maintenance of our roads in order to maintain the PCI at an acceptable level," said Niroop Srivatsa, Lafayette interim city manager. "CPAC and Mike will present their report and findings at the April 22 Council meeting."

Sharing the lower than acceptable PCI standard was Moraga, which was also cited for its shortage in capital funding. Broadband service delivered to the town as reported by the East Bay Broadband Consortium does not meet standards set by the California Public Utilities Commission, and the town's unfunded pension liability, which could increase from

$250,000 to $770,000 in four years, "may reduce funding for other priorities," according to the MSR. Moraga officials did not respond to requests for comment on the report by press time.

Orinda broadband service did not measure up to CPUC minimum standards, and the city CPI index was the lowest in Lamorinda at 60. The LAFCO report faulted Orinda for late issuance of its comprehensive annual financial report and recommended that the city "could incorporate changes to improve the transparency of its financials," finding fault with the readability of certain financial tables in the CAFR.

City Manager Steve Salomon blamed the late CAFR on the 2017 Miner Road sinkhole and its commensurate challenges, and also that Orinda went two months without a financial manager and changed city managers that year. "Orinda has been spending a huge amount of money on our roads. By next

year, the residential component will be complete, and the city is on a path to be one of the best-rated in the Bay Area," Salomon said.

Overall, the MSRs concluded that the Lamorinda municipalities appear to be in good enough financial condition to continue providing services and to accommodate infrastructure expansion, improvements or replacement over the next five years.

"MSRs provide a wealth of information," said Lou Ann Texiera, LAFCO executive officer. "The MSRs are interactive reports with input from the local agencies under review. LAFCO welcomes comments and input from the public."

All three Lamorinda agencies are expected to present the MSRs for review at public meetings, and LAFCO will hold its own public hearing April 17. The final MSRs should be available in June.

MOFD short-term finances sluggish, long-range forecast improved

Rather than the 7 percent figure the pension plan administrator uses, the district assumes a 6.25 percent discount rate on future obligations and a 6.25 percent investment earnings rate, the same figure

MOFD uses to calculate its retiree health care liability. Between the required annual CCCERA payments and the money the district places into its pension and retiree health care trust funds, MOFD forecasts that it will pay down nearly $35 million of its cur-

rent $49 million net pension liability and $11 million of its $14.8 million retiree health care liability by 2029.

Using the forecast of a 3 percent property tax revenue increase, the district projects a deficit into 2022, partly due to pension bond and trust

fund payments, and its capital projects fund shows a deficit in eight of the next 10 years.

Through 2029 the number of district personnel remains at 78, including 57 on-duty firefighters and three battalion chiefs. The rebuild of Fire Station 41 and the dis-

trict administration building is planned for 2019.

The projection for the current fiscal year, ending June 30: Total general fund revenue of $24.7 million, with expenses of $23.5 million, and a general fund balance of $6.4 million.

Campolindo High School's 2018-19 educator of the year

I thought I was going to be a lawyer for a while, too, for I enjoyed the idea of defending the Constitutional rights of citizens, but did not pursue that direction."

After feeling that he needed to find a job that was less "life-draining" and something that he could feel passionate about, Verbanszky volunteered with America Reads, an organization that connects mentor readers with struggling third graders. After positive feedback from a

supervisor and students he decided to quit his regular job and become a substitute teacher. Finding the experience extremely rewarding, he went back to school for his teaching credentials and a master's in education, while working as a social studies teacher on an emergency credential at a low-income school in Southern California. He stated, "I went from depressed feelings and hating my job to waking up every morning happy to go to work – tired, but happy!"

While Verbanszky never

planned on becoming an educator (his music teacher father discouraged it), he enjoyed learning and working with others. He has now been teaching for 18 years beginning in 2001 and joined the Campolindo staff in 2004.

When asked what made him choose social studies as his field of expertise Verbanszky replied, "Ironically, it was a good teacher I had in college that inspired me to pursue history. I wanted to study everything, but I gravitated toward history classes. The people's

stories are what matter."

Verbanszky's wife, Stephanie, a science teacher at Campo, is thrilled about his recognition. They have two daughters who are pleased with his honor. "My third-grade daughter asked why I did not win sooner. My daughter in kindergarten admitted to being happy for me, but she apologetically also stated that she thinks her teacher is really good, too." He added, "Unfortunately, my parents are not alive anymore to witness my success despite my father's efforts of trying to

get me not to become a teacher."

The award came as a complete surprise to Verbanszky. He was on a field trip with his students when his wife texted him the news. His students feel it's a well-deserved honor.

Verbanszky will be recognized at the May 1 school board meeting along with the finalists from Acalanes, Las Lomas and Miramonte. He is required to write an essay, be observed and interviewed by the county committee in order to win at the next level.