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CCTA requests additional half-cent sales tax

By Vera Kochan

In 2004, voters approved Measure J which provided funding to cities and towns for the maintenance of local streets and roads within the county. The Contra Costa Transportation Authority was also able to utilize those funds toward major infrastructure projects including Bay Area Rapid Transit and the Caldecott Tunnel's fourth bore.

Planning Director Derek Farmer and Senior Planner Steve Kowalski's staff report was reviewed during the Oct. 10 town council meeting. It explained the reasoning behind CCTA's request for a sales tax increase of one-half of one percent to be used for transportation purposes for a period of 35 years beginning July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2055.

According to CCTA the population is expected to double by 2035, allotting for more people using highways, roads and transit systems. As such, CCTA will need to step up its goals to reduce congestion, manage growth impacts and expand alternatives to the single-occupant vehicle.

The proposed Transportation Expenditure Plan has gained support from Lafayette, Walnut Creek, Clayton, Brentwood and Hercules with the proposed sales tax measure expecting to generate \$3.6 billion (in current dollars) over the 35 years. Moraga's southwestern sub-region of the county could expect to receive an estimated \$380,000 annually of the sales tax revenues over that period.

The plan, if enacted, could provide smoother flowing traffic; better road/pavement conditions; reduced vehicle emissions; more bicycle lanes and free or reduced transit fares for students.

Additional improvements could provide increased bus services; accessible transportation for seniors, veterans and people with disabilities; and cleaner and safer BART stations.

The Planning Department's recommendation to the town council was to support the countywide imposition of a one-half of one percent sales tax to fund transportation improvements in Contra Costa County and adopt the proposed TEP. Before the sales tax can be imposed, the County Board of Supervisors would have to place the measure on the March ballot for voter approval.

The town council made it clear that while it does not take a specific stand on the tax issue, it agreed that voters should have their choice.

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