

Published December 25th, 2019

Mayor's 2019 Year in Review precedes an unprecedented town council reorganization

By Vera Kochan



From left, Contra Costa County Supervisor Candace Andersen awards proclamation to outgoing mayor Roger Wykle. Photo Vera Kochan

Exiting Moraga Mayor Roger Wykle gave the customary Year in Review presentation during the Dec. 11 town council meeting, noting that while 2019 began as an uphill battle the town bounced back at an amazingly productive pace.

"As we close 2019, I am especially proud of all of the hard work our dedicated staff successfully completed," Wykle said. "Specifically and under the exceptional leadership of our town manager, Cynthia Battenberg, we completed several studies to fully understand all of the financial needs of the town. This accomplishment is also a positive endorsement of past and the present town councils who had the courage to identify these needs while currently no funding sources exist."

Wykle added, "I'm sure 2020 will also be an interesting year as well, as we work on these financial challenges and strive to make Moraga even better than it already is."

Among the many highlights of Wykle's presentation were the following achievements: implementation of the Moraga Mobile app; continued progress to lease a restaurant at the Hacienda; Moraga recognized as the fourth safest city in California; the town's emergency preparedness response was phenomenal; six new businesses have opened in the shopping centers; updated community and limited commercial zoning to

allow outright permitted uses; Rheem Theatre reopened with new additions to the rear of the building coming; Moraga Center Specific Plan implementation meetings; more new housing; Climate Action Plan implementations; vast improvement to the town's road conditions thanks to Measure K; major crosswalk improvements; storm drain operations and maintenance programs; construction of new Canyon Bridge on the horizon; council adopted protocols to establish policies and procedures; and according to the state auditor's office, Moraga's financial situation has improved to become better than 87% of 471 California cities.

Vice Mayor Kimberleigh Korpus acknowledged Wykle's tenure as mayor by stating, "The past year has been a very productive one, and I want to express my deepest appreciation to you for your leadership and your partnership during a time that has been so critical in making 2019 a success for everybody."

While the 2019 Year in Review portion of the meeting went smoothly and with an occasional injection of humor, the town council reorganization process contained moments of stunned silence.

It began uneventfully enough with Council Member Renata Sos' nomination of Korpus for mayor. The nomination passed 4-1 with the lone opposition being Council Member Steve Woehleke.

Wykle handed the gavel to Korpus who, as new mayor, opened the nominations for vice mayor. Korpus nominated Sos, and Woehleke nominated Council Member Mike McCluer.

Woehleke commented, "Renata is a non-elected official, so if we go ahead and elect Renata here she will be on the path and potentially mayor of the town - it's never been done."

Korpus asked Assistant Town Attorney Denise Bazzano if there was a known issue with this type of nomination. Bazzano replied, "There's no distinction. Once a council member has been appointed, they are a council member for all purposes. I'm not aware of any significant legal issues - there's no distinction. They act in every capacity as an elected official."

McCluer stated, "I want to say that I think Renata is a very talented council member, and I think everybody up here is very talented. For me, the idea of an appointment for council members not being elected versus other elected council members of thousands of residents is a big difference to me."

Woehleke responded that 5,000 people voted for McCluer, to which Wykle, citing the newly adopted

protocols, replied, "Based on seniority, Renata was appointed by duly elected town council members who received in excess of 5,000 votes."

Sos calmly said, "I respectfully take issue with any suggestion that someone who's appointed is somehow less worthy or of lesser stature than someone who's elected." She added, "I think I could do the vice mayor job well, and I would do it proudly, but I think I'm going to withdraw my nomination." Sos explained that she felt it would be difficult to perform the vice mayoral duties given the comments that were made.

Korpus stressed that an appointed council member is not a second tier council member and urged Sos to reconsider the nomination by renominating her.

Sos acknowledged that she didn't take the comments as a criticism of her abilities and allowed the re-nomination to stand, because at this point it fell to second in line after McCluer's nomination.

Wykle expressed his impression that given the circumstances, Sos seemed hesitant to accept the re-nomination and shouldn't be forced to accept it if she didn't want it.

When given the opportunity, Sos withdrew a second time, to which a vote was taken, and McCluer was unanimously elected vice mayor.

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