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## Town of Moraga sees to Rheem sinkhole repairs

By Vera Kochan



Rheem sinkhole repair complete Photo Vera Kochan

With most of the community sheltering in place, many may not be aware that the gaping sinkhole in the Rheem Shopping Center has finally been repaired.

Just over a year ago, when the sinkhole first appeared, Moraga experienced a *déjà vu* moment as memories of a prior sinkhole, located across the street from the current one on Moraga Star Gas Station's property at 398 Rheem Blvd., was recalled. For a while, any obvious repairs had come to a screeching halt when the last apparent bit of progress occurred in May. At that time, the property owners had set up two sediment basins to remove debris from the damaged corrugated metal pipe below street level.

Further progress had stalled until the town issued a Notice and Order to Abate in September followed by a special town council meeting in October regarding the property owner's appeal hearing.

The town's greatest concern was for public safety, and with that in mind, it received approval of an inspection and abatement warrant from the Superior Court of Contra Costa County that was issued on March 9 with a 10-day delayed start date. According to Public Works Director Shawn Knapp, "This allowed the town's contractors to order specialized materials that were needed for the sinkhole abatement work and to stabilize the 8-foot diameter storm drain pipe that runs under portions of the gas station and Rheem Shopping Center. The construction work began on March 19, the first allowed construction day of warrant, through April 8, the last day of warrant." The repairs were completed on time earlier that day before the warrant expired at 6 p.m.

"The gas station and Rheem Shopping Center property owners were responsible for the final surface restoration work of repaving the asphalt gas station driveway and Center Street road," Knapp added, "along with re-pouring the concrete sidewalk and driveway approaches, which they have completed and reopened to the public."

Due to the property owner's delay with the sinkhole repairs, the costs increased as the size of the sinkhole grew larger and more material was damaged in the process. Knapp stated that the town doesn't have final expenses from the contractors, as yet. Once they are compiled the town will, in turn, prepare an invoice for the project to send to Moraga Star's property owners.

"It cannot be overstated how important it was to complete this work when we did. The damage caused by a complete failure of the underlying pipe - which our consultants told us was only a matter of time - would have been catastrophic and many times more expensive to repair," said Knapp. "The 398 Rheem Blvd. sinkhole abatement work was designated an essential project by the Town of Moraga due to its importance and urgency."

Every effort was made to provide the work crew with a situation that conformed to coronavirus safety precautions put forth by the Contra Costa County Health Department. Hand washing stations were located on-site and hand sanitizers were available for frequent use throughout the day. "The work was completed safely, quickly and efficiently," Knapp added, "with minimum interruption of public access to Rheem Boulevard, the shopping center and the gas station."

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