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Voluntary temporary furlough program for town staff

By Vera Kochan

Besides changing the way the town provided services, with the town of Moraga closing its offices and facilities to the general public after the March 16 shelter-in-place order and many of the town's employees shifting to telework, the economic impact from COVID-19 on the town may not be as large as originally feared.

Moraga's General Fund revenues for Fiscal Year 2019-20 are projected to decrease by \$421,000, according to a May 27 presentation for the town council by Town Manager Cynthia Battenberg. "Initially we were very concerned regarding the impact of COVID-19 on our operations and our revenue," Battenberg stated. "We were hearing some really scary news that revenue was going to be severely impacted. The town of Moraga appears to benefit in an economic downturn in the same way that we don't benefit from an economic upturn in that our revenues are relatively flat, so we're not seeing a huge impact to our revenue that leads me to be concerned that we need to look at furlough programs."

The decrease will be partially offset by \$155,000 in expenditure savings at which point the town is expected to meet the 50% General Fund Reserve policy at year's end.

Deciding to look at the big picture and take proactive steps to protect the town's finances throughout the COVID-19 situation, Moraga's council members voted unanimously to enact a voluntary temporary furlough program effective through June 30, 2021.

"Almost all staff have continued to work without taking extra time off, even through COVID-19, and many people are busier than before," Battenberg explained. Now that construction has restarted, the planning department has been in demand again. The parks and recreation department has become occupied with the start of the camp season. The biggest impact is for town staff with kids at home. No layoffs have been necessary as yet, but the town felt it prudent to have a program in place for future needs.

The Voluntary Temporary Furlough Program allows employees to reduce their regular hours by either 10% or 25%. Furlough hours will be calculated for each bi-weekly pay period and can be taken in increments of one hour, and employees who are unable to work full-time due to personal issues or a lack of work will be strongly encouraged to participate in the furlough program. A request to participate in the furlough program, however, will not be granted if it will result in the need for another employee to work overtime to perform the duties that would otherwise be completed by the employee taking the voluntary furlough time off.

In order to avoid unintended overtime liability, Moraga Employees Association employees may not perform work while on furlough or work additional hours during the work week to make up for lost productive time. Any employees who participate in the program would continue to receive 100% of their normal medical benefits along with vacation and sick leave at their current accrual rates.

The Voluntary Temporary Furlough Program would not be offered to members of the Police Officers Association.

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