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Town council gets update on Laguna Creek Restoration Project



Photo provided

Hacienda Pavilion flooding during 2005-06 winter storms

By Vera Kochan

The Hacienda de las Flores, located at 2100 Donald Dr., is owned by the town of Moraga and is the subject of the proposed Laguna Creek Restoration Project. Public Works Director/Town Engineer Shawn Knapp gave an informative update during the town council's July 8 meeting as to future steps in the continuing project.

Heavy winter storms during 2005-06 triggered the Laguna Creek's rise and eventual flow over its banks in the western vicinity of the Hacienda Pavilion. Damages were incurred to the wooden footbridge and wrought-iron gate. Additionally, more than 200 feet of chain-link fence, walkways, retaining walls, head walls, wing walls and banks of the creek bend were either damaged or washed away. The creek slope failed causing the Pavilion to flood.

The Project entails the removal of an underground culvert near the Pavilion and

replacing it with a natural channel to improve flood protection for the various Hacienda facilities. The upstream end of the culvert is located approximately 400 feet south of Donald Drive.

Watersheds from the neighborhoods of Campolindo, Carol Ranch, Rheem Valley and others contribute to the southward flow of Laguna Creek via underground storm drains or open channel creeks, all of which eventually deposit into the Upper San Leandro Reservoir.

The restoration project will reduce the flood risk by daylighting the creek and retrofitting or replacing the existing 8-foot diameter culvert. During 2007, repairs to the damaged pavilion were completed at a cost of \$37,000. Additional repairs to the creek wall and bank stabilization were completed in 2013, costing \$1.04 million. In 2014, the town council directed staff to proceed with the daylighting and restoration of the Laguna Creek

channel after a Hydraulic Study and an Alternatives Study revealed this to be the best-case scenario.

Besides removal of the existing culvert, the project will involve the construction of a natural channel to provide habitat for endangered species; the relocation of a Central Contra Costa Sanitary District sewer line; the construction of a vehicular bridge over the creek; and the improvement of public accessibility and protections.

The public works department has secured funding from the California Natural Resources Agency (\$399,980) not capable with the Federal Emergency Management Agency grant; East Bay Regional Parks District (\$599,743) the maximum possible award; and the FEMA (\$803,331) 66% allowable costs for up to \$970,000.

FEMA has approved Phase 1 of the project which entails field and geotechnical investigations and surveys; a hydraulic study and FEMA coordination; a biological resources study; California Environmental Quality Act studies; and design (up to 65%). With the 65% design, FEMA will complete the National Environmental Policy Act evaluation prior to authorizing Phase 2.

The town will incur up to \$28,066 in project costs for Phase 1. However, \$15,000 may be reimbursable and the remaining \$13,066 would be reimbursed by the EBRPD grant if the project was completed. There is also adequate funding available in Department 730 - Storm Drain Maintenance. Staff will return to council in the fall to consider the awarding of a design contract.

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Moraga welcomes new planning director



Photo provided

Moraga Planning Director Afshan Hamid

By Vera Kochan

Coming from her previous duties as the city of Vallejo's planning manager, Moraga's new kid on the government block is Planning Director Afshan Hamid. "I started July 6," stated Hamid, "and that was the same day as my first Planning Commission meeting. So, I was excited to jump right in!"

Hamid holds impressive educational credentials with a master's degree in architecture from MIT, an undergraduate degree from the University of Illinois at Chicago and membership in the American Institute of Certified Planners.

The town's size won't prove any less challenging than her previous position. "Although Moraga is a smaller town, it has all the

complexities of development and land use that a larger city like Vallejo has," Hamid said. "One of the greatest opportunities is that due to a smaller scale, I am less removed from the process and able to be more hands on. I am able to engage with all levels of project review and provide more flexibility with my skills."

Having recently completed a zoning update in Vallejo, Hamid's experience with General Plan and Specific Plan policies will hold her in good stead when the Moraga Center Specific Plan begins rolling into fruition. She looks forward to creating improvements along corridors, in the commercial center, and in general, making Moraga a better place to live.

"I am also well versed with recent state law, and recognize development challenges and opportunities for improvements and streamlining," said Hamid, noting that Vallejo's growth and flexibility allowed for economic development in a managed way. "The MCSP implementation is similar in that it creates walkable, pedestrian friendly spaces that are connected and allow for improvement and new development over time. The MCSP-Implementation Plan respects the town character and the importance of having design guidelines."

With a master's in architecture, Hamid is using her strongest asset in design ex-

perience to provide input with the town's Design Guidelines. As future projects come up, she looks forward to maintaining the town's character while making recommendations to applicants with the knowledge that these important tools can shape a community and point it in the direction of positive economic development.

Besides the massive MCSP, other planning projects on the horizon incorporate some of the town council's goals for 2020. An initial re-evaluation of the development process, regulations and needs, and design guidelines while incorporating a town grant for improvements and taking into account resident and stakeholder feedback is one of Hamid's priorities. Another is to update the zoning code to incorporate new accessory dwelling unit legislation to comply with state regulations. Additionally, California will require all cities and towns to update the Sixth Cycle Housing Element to conform with regional housing needs assessments.

Hamid lives with her family in Danville, but is excited to be part of the entire Moraga community. "I am open to listening and hearing from residents, business owners, and boards and commissions to make improvements that align with the town's vision."

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