



MORAGA

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Town of Moraga:
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 Phone: (925) 888-7022
Chamber of Commerce:
 www.moragachamber.org
Moraga Citizens' Network:
 www.moragacitizensnetwork.org

Wishing the Lamorinda Community a Safe & Happy Thanksgiving!

Though it's been a challenging year for many, I hope the Thanksgiving holiday will allow time for you to reflect on all that you are thankful for. I'm grateful to the Lamorinda community for its ongoing support of my real estate business. If a change of address is something you are contemplating in the new year, please be sure to reach out. It's not too early to plan, and I would be happy to assist. **Happy Thanksgiving!**

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Town releases its 2020 audited financial report

By Nick Marnell

Further distancing itself from the fiscal emergency it declared in 2017, the town of Moraga unveiled its 2020 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report in November, which showed the town not only adhering to its general fund balance policy of 50% of expenditures but also exceeding that figure by more than \$400,000.

The 2020 report also comes a long way from the 2017 financial audit that uncovered significant deficiencies in town internal controls, including a lack of supervi-

sion over outside debt management, investment in an unauthorized money market fund and numerous basic bookkeeping errors.

"During our audit we did not identify any deficiencies in internal control that we consider to be material weaknesses," wrote Maze and Associates, the Pleasant Hill firm that audited the 2020 CAFR as well as the 2017 financial statements.

Moraga reports an unassigned general fund reserve balance of \$5 million, covering more than six months of annual operating expenses and exceeding budget by

more than \$120,000.

Town revenue increased 5.3% over 2019 thanks to higher than budgeted property tax and sales tax receipts, and significant growth in garbage vehicle franchise fees. Those three sources represent 82% of Moraga's 2020 revenue.

Expenses rose 12.1%. "The increase was due to higher health insurance premiums, benefits, pension costs and filled vacancies," said Norm Veloso, administrative services director. Pension costs of \$919,000 account for more than 10% of total town expenditures, and

pension costs are projected to increase again in 2021.


Capital assets, including land, buildings, storm drains and equipment, totaled \$64.5 million as of June 30, a \$7 million increase from the end of last fiscal year, mainly due to reimbursements for previous capital projects.

According to the town's statement of net position, net pension liability – the difference between the amount Moraga owes its pensioners and the amount of assets on hand to pay the bill – is the town's No. 1 long-term liability. The liability rose to \$7 million, up from \$6.1 million

in 2019, largely because of investment losses and incorrect cost assumptions by the California Public Employees' Retirement System, the town pension administrator.

Other long-term debt includes \$6.7 million for the Town Hall project and for 2013 infrastructure improvements.

In a refreshing bit of financial writing, the pandemic was not cited as the reason for any operational shortfall. In fact, neither the word coronavirus nor the acronym COVID appeared once in the entire 118-page CAFR.



Town Council Wednesday, Dec. 9, 7 p.m.
Planning Commission: Monday, Dec. 7, 7 p.m.
Park and Recreation Commission: Tuesday, Dec. 15, 7 p.m.,
Moraga School District Board Meetings:
 Special Board Meeting Tuesday, Dec. 8, 6 p.m.
 www.moraga.k12.ca.us. See also AUHSD meeting page A2

Town council attempts to further clarify development guidelines



Mixed Residential/Retail areas within the MCSP should be a unique combination of different land uses, including but not limited to retail, residential, office, commercial, service, entertainment, and recreation.

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga Town Council unanimously adopted a resolution Nov. 10 that established new guidelines for the aesthetic development of the Moraga Center, a 187-acre area of the town that includes the Safeway shopping center and adjoining roads and property.

The 121-page Town of Moraga Design Guidelines document, the culmination of numerous Citizens Advisory Committee, planning department and town council meetings, includes guidance to developers for what is appropriate in character and quality for the town, and assists the town in evaluating proposals for development. The guidelines align with but do not supersede local zoning standards.

The design guidelines feature eight guiding principles for town development,

including the maintaining of a semirural character, protection of ridgelines and hillside areas and "thoughtful design" to residential neighborhoods.

The guidelines are exhaustive, and include the design of landscaping, cul de sacs and even retaining walls. The document features not only detailed written descriptions but also visual examples. "The inclusion of photos is particularly helpful in illuminating the desired intent," Council Member Steve Woehleke said.

As the newly passed design guidelines are exactly that – guidelines – they are subject to interpretation for development approval. Two sentences on Page 11 of the design guidelines document further add to the subjectivity. "Compliance with these guidelines does not, however, guarantee approval. Similarly, needing to request an exception to the guidelines

does not mean that the application will be disapproved," the document reads.

"This is not going to be helping the town whatsoever," local property owner Dave Bruzzone said.

Mayor Kymberleigh Kopus summarized the council discussion, and she encouraged Bruzzone, the only member of the public to speak up, to collaborate with the town planning department. "We have a product that is going to work hand-in-hand with the (Moraga Center) zoning to encourage as much as possible the kinds of development that will work here," she said. "We've got a starting point. There is some discretion. There is flexibility."

Vice Mayor Mike McCluer concurred that the new guidelines were a start and not the final word on town development. "This is part of the journey, and this journey will continue," he said.

To view the guidelines discussed, visit the Town of Moraga website and download the agenda packet from the Nov. 10 council meeting:
<https://ca-moraga.civicplus.com/AgendaCenter/Town-Council-2>



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