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Moraga seeks to reinstate Tree City USA status

By Vera Kochan



Trees-a-plenty grow colorfully in Moraga Commons Park Photo Vera Kochan

Having been a Tree City USA member in 2008, 2009, 2014, 2015 and 2016, the town of Moraga is poised to once again apply to the program thanks to the support gained during the town council's Nov. 18 meeting. Citing fiscal emergencies between 2017-2019, the town had to redirect its tree assessments, documentation efforts and manpower in other directions. There is no fiscal impact to submit an application.

The Beautification and Tree Planting Program Implementation Committee was responsible for the initial 2008 recognition which applies only to trees located in town-owned parks and parcels. Although, it is evident that residents have done their fair share to help beautify Moraga with a wide variety of plantings.

Tree City USA was established in 1976, and is sponsored by the Arbor Day Foundation. It is administered by the United States Forest Service and National Association of State Foresters. A nationwide program, it has admitted over 3,500 cities under its umbrella. In 2019, 146 California communities were recognized as a Tree City. The state's program is administered by the CAL Fire Urban and Community Forestry Department.

According to the Arbor Day Foundation, benefits to joining the program include: reduces costs for energy, stormwater management and erosion control; savings in energy consumption by up to 25%; boosts property values; creates stronger ties within neighborhoods and community pride; urban forest management triggers improved ordinances and innovative programs; educates residents about the importance of sustainable tree management; and gains publicity and recognition for a Tree City member.

Parks and Recreation Director Breyana Brandt stated that there are four standards to achieve Tree City USA recognition. First, there must be a tree board or department. The Parks and Recreation Department would oversee the tree program while utilizing two on-call arborists, when needed, to assist park maintenance workers.

Secondly, all cities must have a Tree Care Ordinance. Moraga currently has several such ordinances in place regarding care, maintenance, removal and replacement.

In addition, each city must have an annual \$2 per capita Community Forestry Program budget. The town's annual Parks and Open Space Budget is \$417,300, of which \$93,960 is slated for tree maintenance (planting, pruning and removal). This figure comes to \$5.33 per capita based on Moraga's 17,630 residents.

Lastly, each city must have an Arbor Day Observance and Proclamation. The town's most recent Arbor Day Proclamation was in 2015. The Pear and Wine Festival's annual tree planting ceremony will help meet the requirement.

"I think the Tree City program aligns with a lot of the values reflected in town policies in the community," said Brandt. "So much of Moraga is our excellent parks and our iconic green hills. The tree is very symbolic of that."

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