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Town council finally agrees on a new member appointment

By Vera Kochan

After the failure at two town council meetings and several attempts to appoint a replacement to fill former council member David Stromberg's resigned seat, white smoke could figuratively be seen rising from the town offices on Oct. 27.

With a Nov. 8 deadline looming to avoid a costly special election, the four seated council members once again tackled the issue of whether to appoint Sona Makker or Kerry Hillis to its fold.

To start things off, Mayor Mike McCluer offered an "alternative to the gridlock." He began by, once again, stating his feelings on the pros and cons of both candidates. While the pros were extremely flattering to either, the cons were a repetition of Makker's newness to Moraga and her lack of government experience within the town. With regards to Hillis, McCluer was worried about his flexibility and listening skills on issues. McCluer offered up an alternative in the form of a direct appointment by suggesting Fred Weil for the open position. Lauding his many accomplishments, McClure noted Weil's eight-year membership on the Moraga Elementary School Board; 13 years on the Moraga-Orinda Fire District's governing board; 13 years on the Acalanes Unified School District Board; the founding director of the Moraga Educational Foundation; an attorney with land use experience who supports open space; and 2019 Moraga Citizen of the Year. McCluer added, "He's been described as fair-minded; a good listener; ethical; and seeks group decisions."

Council Member Renata Sos brought up the fact that the town council had received an "avalanche" of comments from the community in support of making an appointment of either Makker or Hillis during the evening's Oct. 27 session. She felt that "the community has spoken loud and clear." Sos also referred to Council Member Steve Woehleke's comments from a prior meeting regarding the importance of the council working together, and in doing so, which of the two applicants would make a better fit with the current council. "We need to make a decision based on the cards that were dealt to us," Sos stated, while agreeing that if there were not two viable candidates to choose from, putting Weil into the mix would be a possibility. Council Member Teresa Onoda was in agreement with Sos and added that "the people have spoken."

McCluer made a motion to schedule a special meeting for the following week to interview Weil as a potential direct appointment. Woehleke agreed to second it on the basis of a significant effort to set the wheels in motion, "although, I know where it's going" as far as the final vote stands.

A split second before the vote, Sos made a substitute motion to appoint Makker to the town council with Onoda seconding.

McCluer asked that the Weil motion be voted on "out of respect" and requested Sos to withdraw her motion in order to get a vote on it.

Sos responded, "Respectfully decline."

With the motion on the table to appoint Makker as the new Moraga Town Council member until the November 2022 election, the vote was unanimously in favor.

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