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Town council contenders participate in Candidates Night 2022

By Vera Kochan

Election Day is less than a month away, and in order to help voters make an informed decision on Nov. 8, the Moraga Citizens Network and Saint Mary's College co-hosted Candidates Night 2022 on Oct 3. MCN encouraged the community to email, in advance, potential questions and concerns for the candidates to address.

Two candidates, David Shapiro and Kendall Langan, are running for the two-year term that was remaining on former Council Member David Stromberg's term. The other two candidates, Steve Woehleke and Kerry Hillis, are running unopposed for the (two) four-year slots.

MCN President Shari Simon opened the evening, which also included candidates running for the Moraga School Board, as well as Moraga-Orinda Fire Districts 1 and 3 candidates. SMC's Executive Vice-President and Provost Corey Cook served as the moderator.

For brief biographies on each of the candidates, visit lamorindaweekly.com and look for the Aug. 31 article titled "Three Council Member Seats to Fill in Moraga; Four Candidates Running", under the archives header. While Hillis and Woehleke's appearances were a mere formality due to the fact that they are as good as elected they, never-the-less, read their prepared responses to questions. Hillis, currently Moraga's Planning Commission Chair, was concerned about building more housing in Moraga especially with a constant threat of wildfires in a town that is virtually a cul-de-sac with regards to escape routes. With more housing comes increased congestion. On the other hand, he acknowledged that the state mandates of Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) could boost Moraga's shopping centers through mixed-use developments. Hillis also expressed the need for more affordable housing not only for seniors, but also first-responders, teachers, and college students who commute to Moraga. He is committed to making state leaders aware of Moraga's limitations to safely add a large influx of new housing.

Moraga Mayor Woehleke, spoke about affordable housing and explained to the viewers the requirements of RHNA, and that there is basically nothing municipalities can do about their assigned housing allocations. Any attempt to fight the state would result in penalties. He agreed that mixed-use housing would do much to revitalize both of the town's shopping centers, but that RHNA would still impact the limited public transportation, schools, fire risks, infrastructure and environment.

Shapiro believed that RHNA's affordable housing mandates will encourage both of Moraga's shopping centers to revitalize and create new commercial enterprises. He felt that this was a great opportunity to build upon the things that the community really wants. Shapiro stated that the town must learn to limit its expenses; increase revenues (not through taxes); continue to seek grants for project funding; and add to the tax base through additional residents.

Asked to comment on prior town council meetings where civility among members was lacking, Shapiro felt that conditions have improved, noting that while there may be some disagreement it was clear that the current council does respect each other. As an attorney, he has the experience to look at situations and modify them in order to appease all parties involved.

Shapiro supports the idea of residents doing as much as they can to voluntarily help the environment and encourages residents to use mass transit or carpool. Another possibility is to offer incentives to the shopping center developers to subsidize a shuttle bus service.

Kendall Langan was invited to participate in Candidates Night 2022, but declined.

To view the video recording of the Candidates Night, visit <https://moragacitizensnetwork.org/2022-candidates-night-information/>

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