



See public meetings schedule on these pages and check online for agendas, meeting notes and announcements  
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**Town Council Special Meeting:**  
 Wed., Aug. 28, 5:30 p.m.  
**Town Council Meetings:**  
 Wed., Aug. 28, 5:30 p.m.  
 Wed., Sept. 11, 5:30 p.m.  
**Planning Commission:**  
 Tuesday, Sept. 3, 6:30 p.m.  
**Parks and Recreation Commission:**  
 Mon., Sept. 9, 6:30 p.m.



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## EXPERIENCE MATTERS



LINDA EHRICH



## Moraga Council Member Kerry Hillis has another title — winegrower

By Vera Kochan

Besides serving on Moraga's town council, Kerry Hillis has another passion — turning his grapes into wine. Having acquired about 10 grape vines in 2020 when he and his family moved into their home, he decided to take up the banner and try his hand producing grapes good enough to bottle for wine.

"I wasn't sure how to take care of grapes, and received an educa-

tion from my landscaper and a wine guy," stated Hillis. The next thing he knew, Hillis was busy fertilizing and giving fungal treatments made of a sulfur compound to his vines (two cabernet sauvignon, two zinfandel, and six merlot) that would prevent mildew through Moraga's micro-climate and occasional morning fog. Summer heat waves can also have an adverse affect on the grape-growing process even with the proper irrigation.

Feeling confident enough to expand, the following year Hillis added an additional 18 vines (14 cabernet sauvignon and four cabernet franc -- "to bring out the flavor"). This year saw a planting of six more vines (sangiovese) in the hopes of producing chianti, with a blend of 70% sangiovese and a 30% mix of merlot/cabernet sauvignon. However, he'll have to wait a bit. "It takes about 3-4 years

before you get grapes," he explained. "But, the roots grow really deep once the vine is established."

About two months before Hillis spots actual grapes on his vines, he puts netting around them to keep the birds and other critters from eventually munching on the fruit. "I'm the caretaker through the year," he said. "I call the wine guy [Brian Wheeler] when my grapes are starting to turn purple, and he performs periodic tests for sweetness before he finally picks them."

This year's harvest is scheduled to take place between late August and early September. Wheeler is responsible for the grapes and eventual wine from the minute he leaves with the harvest. The grapes are crushed immediately, and according to Hillis yeast, sulfur dioxide, and oak chips are added to the mix. A process called "racking" begins when fermented wine is transferred



Photo Vera Kochan

**Kerry Hillis' back yard grape vines produce his "Hillis House" wines**

from one carboy (typically a 5-gallon jug) to another to erase the sediment or "leeds" from the bottom of the jug in order to have a clearer wine juice. The final product, his bottled wine, gets delivered back to Hillis in March.

Producing approximately three-and-a-half cases of wine each year, the "Hillis House" label sports a colorful image of a monarch butterfly — an homage to the Moraga Garden Club's efforts to save the endangered species. As an added touch, the 2024

label carries the royal blue seal (depicted on town-wide banners) honoring Moraga's 50th anniversary of incorporation. Each bottle is sealed with a wax cap for added elegance. For the most part, Hillis keeps the final product in careful storage at home for personal consumption, but acknowledges that he's given bottles away as gifts.

Hillis admits that being a winegrower takes a lot of time and work, but "It's a labor of love."

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## Town council appoints all candidates to fill upcoming vacant seats

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With a vote of 4-0 (Council Member David Shapiro was absent), the council appointed the three candidates to the Moraga Town Council and canceled the Nov. 5 local election.

During the meeting, it was noted how qualified for the positions the incoming candidates are. Dolan has recently served as Interim Town Manager, Maglio besides being an attorney has served on the Planning Commission and is a vice president with the Moraga Community Foundation, and Thiel is into his second

term with the Planning Commission.

While Dolan could not be present during the meeting, Maglio and Thiel had the opportunity to say a few words. "There are some big challenges that I'm looking forward to, and one of those, I do agree with many, is implementing the Housing Element -- I have a great interest in that," said Maglio. "I have a great interest in affordable housing, and I look forward to working with the town on making sure we are able to implement our fair share of affordable housing, but there are many

other challenges that I look forward to, too."

"It has been an honor and privilege working in my current capacity as a planning commissioner for the Town of Moraga," Thiel stated. "I look forward to working with you -- the ones who remain, and I wish to thank the ones who are departing for their time and service and commitment to this town. I look forward to doing them the similar honor in continuing on in the work we have yet to accomplish."

"It's a wonderful time for our town as we look to the future with

optimism and hope," Onoda said. "We are fortunate to have three outstanding candidates stepping forward for the town council. Each brings unique strengths and a deep commitment to our community. Their dedication to our town's values and their vision for our shared future makes them more than qualified to lead us forward."

The three candidates will officially be sworn in as council members during the Dec. 11 regular meeting.

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