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Goals Setting in Moraga

By Sophie Braccini



Jill Mercurio (Public Works Director / Town Engineer, left) presents Public Works goals to (clock wise): Mike Segrest, and Council Members Howard Harpham Dave Trotter, Mayor Ken Chew, Vice Mayor Karen Mendonca, and Michael Metcalf Photo Sophie Braccini

discussion with the property owner. "If we designate special usage in specific locations, then when the spaces are rented Town fees will be waived and the permit process with the Town will be expedited," said Salamack, "this could start a meaningful conversation with them." "This is a great idea," agreed Chamber of Commerce President Edy Schwartz, "but we first need to identify the right person to talk to. We have tried to connect with them (Kimco) for the past two years with no result so far." It was decided that a delegation including Town staff members, a Chamber of Commerce representative and some elected officials would be formed within a month, with the purpose of actively engaging the property owner and finding a solution for the Rheem Center.

Regarding the revitalization of the other shopping center, the Moraga Center, all participants voiced their desire to see the Town start to work on a development agreement with the property owner to implement the recently adopted Specific Plan. Reviewing the sign ordinance was high on the priority list, as was streamlining the Town's business permitting process.

Other critical goals identified by the Council were to conduct outreach to inform residents about how the Lightning Assessment District works in Moraga and why it needs to be amended, and improvement of the Town's web site to allow residents to easily access information.

Participants also defined some "important goals," which include objectives such as making improvements to the Hacienda de las Flores, assessing flood risks at the library, resolving the issue of an off-leash dog park, and the finalization of the Moraga Emergency Plan.

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On the morning of Saturday, February 20th, the Moraga Town Council met with staff to brainstorm and prioritize action items for the coming year. The public meeting started with a brief financial update that showed a bare bones budget, with a positive balance. It was no surprise that most of the critical objectives selected by the participants revolved around increasing the Town's revenues through revitalization: limiting sales tax leakage and engaging Kimco Realty Corporation, owner of the Rheem Center; implementing recommendations of the Revenue Enhancement Committee; working toward the establishment of a development agreement with the main property owner of the Moraga Center; improving the cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce and Saint Mary's College.

"Let's work on the sales tax leakage," proposed Town Manager Mike Segrest. Sales tax represent about 14% of the Town's revenue and it is widely acknowledged that Moraga suffers from sales tax seepage due to a limited range of shopping opportunities. The very first issue that was raised was the Rheem Center with its 20% vacancy rate. "I have contacted a new Kimco vice-president, and he agreed to come to Moraga," said Segrest. "An efficient way to do this is would be to have a small group of folks meet with Kimco," said Council Member Michael Metcalf, "Rheem is just a footnote in the portfolio of this company, and we really don't know what their strategy is for this center."

Planning Director Lori Salamack proposed yet another way to start a