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Public Outreach to Address Infrastructure Quandary

By Sophie Braccini

At his last regular Town Council meeting, outgoing Town Manager Mike Segrest gave an hour-long presentation advocating a year-long plan to inform, quiz and listen to Moraga residents regarding the town's lack of adequate funding for the maintenance of its infrastructure. The Town Council approved the multi-phase plan that will ultimately determine what revenue enhancement measures should be put on the November 2011 ballot.

During the spring and summer of 2010 the Revenue Enhancement Community Outreach to Neighborhoods Program (RECON) conducted focus groups and an online survey to assess how much residents know about Town finances. One of the results was that, even if the general perception is that times are hard, the population in its majority does not have a clear grasp of the facts.

"What is the state of the Town's finances-trends, projections, reserves? How do we compare in taxes, expenditures, staffing, salaries, etc., to other similar towns? Is the Town being run as efficiently as possible? What are the Town's unmet needs? Those are some of the questions that the focus group participants asked," said Segrest, "and they want to know the answers so they can make informed decisions about the future of the town."

The Manager suggested that a document, which answers all of the questions, be prepared and distributed to the focus group participants; once the text is refined based on focus group feedback, he recommended the town begin an outreach program to Moraga's 17,000 residents, or at least those of voting age.

"We will need volunteers to become involved in that outreach program," added the Town Manager. His proposal to the Council included the creation of a speakers' bureau to train volunteers who will complete the outreach talks in the Town, talking to organized groups, but also knocking on doors and engaging everyone.

Once the outreach program is complete, Segrest believes that the Town should conduct a formal professional survey of residents to determine their preferences regarding projects and service improvements, as well as revenue enhancement options.

"Finally, the Town Council will make a decision regarding which improvement programs should be chosen, and the financing strategy to implement those improvements will be put to the ballot," concluded Segrest. The plan would take a full year to implement. "This is a very ambitious plan, but it is doable," commented Segrest's successor, Jill Keimach, who will take charge on November 1st.

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