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Published July 30th, 2014

Setting the Agenda

By Sophie Braccini

With the inclusion of new council chambers in the retrofit of the town's building at 331 Rheem Blvd., Moraga mayor Ken Chew recently asked that the Town Council discuss the idea of installing bulletproof protection for the council dais. The mayor got little traction on the topic, but the idea prompted council members to question whether one of them should be allowed to propose a discussion item for their agenda if it's a subject that the majority of members are not interested in talking about.

"We are constructing this new council chamber," said Chew, "and I have been hearing a lot about a common practice in many cities - putting a metal shield in front of the dais for bulletproofing purposes. I'd like to see if there would be something inexpensive we could look at."

Councilmember Mike Metcalf indicated that this idea had been brought up about a year ago, although the mayor had no such recollection, and there had been no interest at the time.

Councilmember Philip Arth indicated that he didn't feel threatened by the public. "Even if we do not always see eye-to-eye I don't think it ever rises to a level of being life threatening," he said.

Chew said later that he was not feeling threatened, either, but it would be timely to study the topic while the space is being remodeled. "I want to make sure that no one will be hurt in the future," he said.

With a majority of the council clearly against bulletproofing, the town's attorney was ready to dismiss the idea of putting the topic on a future agenda. In response to a query from Chew, she said that to her knowledge there was nothing in the town's code that defined whether or not a majority was needed but the Brown Act recommends the approval of the majority.

"Putting an item on the agenda is a privilege of council members," said Councilmember Dave Trotter who, although not interested in considering bulletproof protection himself, added that if a council member felt very strongly about a topic, that member should be able to have it agendized for discussion even if other members are not interested, "as long as this privilege is not abused," he said.

Staff proposed that the agenda for the council's next meeting, Aug. 27, include a discussion about rules for putting items on agendas.

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