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Mayor Onoda declares a vibrant business community is within Moraga's grasp

By Sophie Braccini



Mayor Teresa Onoda delivers the State of the Town address. Photo Sophie Braccini

In her State of the Town address, Moraga Mayor Teresa Onoda said that the thrifty town had been built on a nonsustainable financial canvass and that things needed to change.

Her address was part of the Moraga Chamber of Commerce mixer on March 29.

Onoda also started a discussion with chamber members about the economic future of the town, reaffirming her support of the business community and challenging retailers to add charm to their storefronts and create the shopping experience Moragans deserve and want.

Onoda talked about the Moraga Center Specific Plan zoning and how work was being done to create a vision for the downtown. She explained that hillside and ridgeline rules were also being defined according to the town's principles to make the development process more predictable and simple for developers. She also explained how two elements of the town financial reality clearly showed that Moraga is underfunded: infrastructure, like storm drain maintenance, and staff compensation.

The mayor explained that Moraga gets only 5.3 percent of what its residents pay in property tax, the second lowest percentage in Contra Costa County that was frozen by Proposition 13 in 1978. The consequence, according to Onoda, is that the town that was incorporated in 1974 with a minimal government principle is not equipped to face today's requirements and obligations, such as paying competitive salaries to staff and saving money to repair its infrastructure. She said that this year a measure to levy extra tax for repairs would be studied.

Kevin Reneau, past president of the chamber of commerce and owner of Senior Helpers in Moraga, asked the mayor how to convince people of the necessity for more taxes. Onoda responded that designing a measure with clear goals and educating residents was key to success, as was done to get the 1 percent sales tax approved.

Onoda stressed her support of economic development in town and support of streamlining the regulatory processes for new and existing businesses. Council Member Jeanette Fritzky added that development takes a lot of pieces and parts, and that Moraga needs a long-term economic development plan. She said that the risk was that one day Moraga would have no other choice than becoming part of a larger entity.

The mayor said that the town has the economics to keep businesses in town but that the online competition means that businesses would have to reinvent themselves. Edy Schwartz, a former chamber president, challenged everyone in the audience to communicate on social media about all that businesses in Moraga have to offer. Onoda added that she does it regularly when she has lunch out with her husband and she recommended that everyone participate in this buzz about the Moraga experience.

Kathe Nelson, chamber executive director, shared the unique atmosphere that is developing in Moraga where a business, Amoroma, decided to support another Moraga business, Moraga Produce.

The current chamber president, Wendy Scheck, concluded that she was hopeful that the attitude in Moraga was changing and that the close-knit and vibrant community everyone desires would be attainable. To top this optimistic mood Onoda announced a townwide hike scheduled on Oct. 14 on the Carr Ranch trails.

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