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Coming soon to your mailbox: the Moraga stormwater fee ballot

By Sophie Braccini

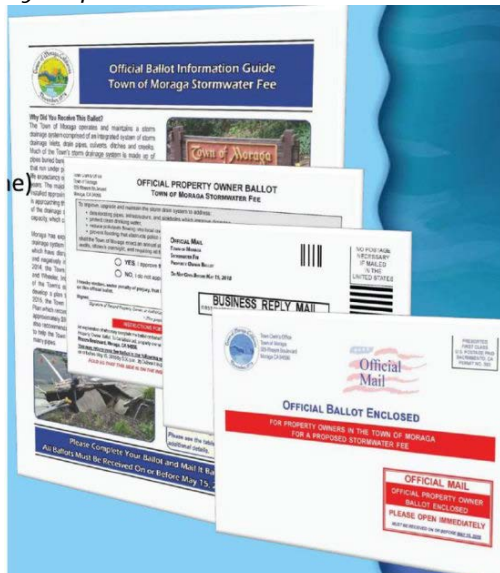


Image provided

An opportunity to decide the future of Moraga's infrastructure is on its way to your mailbox. In keeping with proposition 218 proceedings, the town can now send a ballot by mail to each property owner to decide whether or not to approve a stormwater fee.

Less than 5 percent of property owners opposed this voting process in writing. Opposing property owners had to provide the town clerk with their formal written protest by the March 15 council meeting. If more than half of the town's property owners, equaling more than 2,500 people, had opposed the balloting, the process would have ended there. Only 273 residents logged a written protest.

While the written opposition was small, a spirited discussion over a stormwater fee took place during the meeting. More than half of the speakers were opposed to the fee, and the town chambers overflowed with residents interested in hearing or speaking about it.

The process will continue as prescribed by regulation. The next step will involve printing and mailing one ballot per parcel at the beginning of April. The mailing from the

town will include a ballot that has to be signed after voting yes or no. The back of the ballot will list the parcels belonging to the same owner(s). Most people own one parcel and will have one vote, but those with multiple parcels will have as many votes as they have parcels. The ballots will have to be returned to the town clerk, who is the official tabulator, in a provided envelope. A simple majority is required for the fee to be adopted.

Jerry Bradshaw, a consultant for the town on this issue, explained that this process follows the rules laid out by proposition 218. He explained that the stormwater fee would be no different than the light assessment residents pay for municipal lighting at night, and that the cost of \$10 per month for the average homeowner will be in keeping with the fees paid to utilities such as the Central Contra Costa Sanitary District or PG&E.

Public Works Director Edric Kwan made a compelling presentation of the needs that exist in town to update the subterranean runoff infrastructure, and opened his talk with Rheem sinkhole images.

Among the people who came to register their opposition to the fee, few disputed the need for repair and maintenance. The comments focused mostly on the town's management of its financial resources.

Approximately seven residents said that they would not support the fee because either they did not trust the proposition 218 process, or they thought that the process was being rushed when millions of dollars will be coming back to the town sooner or later, or that the town had been spending money for other projects, on consultants or legal fees when the resources should have been prioritized to maintain the town's assets.

Some residents disapproved of the fact that the fee would impact the Moraga schools, Campolindo High School and Saint Mary's College. These large entities will pay depending on the amount of impermeable surfaces that cause runoff, the most taxed entities being the commercial areas.

A representative of the largest property owner in the Rheem Shopping Center, U.S. Realty Partners, came to voice its support of the fee, saying that it is better to be proactive than reactive.

Moraga Chamber of Commerce president Bob Fritzky added that businesses had been negatively impacted by the collapse of the culvert under Rheem Boulevard and that the chamber therefore supported funding a plan to prevent future infrastructure failure.

Other supporters of the fee said that repairs after something fails cost a lot more than prevention, that events like the sinkhole can disrupt not only businesses but also schools, and that unmaintained infrastructure can affect home values.

The town has a web page dedicated to the subject at www.moraga.ca.us/StormDrainFunding.



This sinkhole developed in March 2016 Photo provided

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