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Letters to the Editor

Lafayette Planning Commission rules

I am responding to your article regarding the Lafayette City Council serving as the Planning Commission due to the fact that the Planning Commission no longer has a quorum in response to the new conflict of interest rules passed by the City Council.

The new rules require that all Planning Commission and Design Review Board members resign if they have, or any family members or working colleagues have, business in the city of Lafayette. Previously, and in accordance with state law, these members were required to recuse themselves as opposed to resign if they found themselves in this situation.

The City Council refused to apply the new conflict regulations to themselves. But now that they are sitting as the Planning Commission and these new rules apply to the Planning Commission shouldn't the rules apply to them as well? I know so and as a result resignations should be forthcoming.

As the saying goes, what's good for the goose is good for the gander.

Patricia Curtin

Lafayette

Orinda Library Parcel Tax, Measure J

My family is a family of readers. When my family of five moved to Orinda eight years ago, one of our favorite family community activities was visiting the Orinda library. My kids were 1, 3 and 5 when we first moved to Orinda, and back then, we spent many afternoons sitting in the children's section of the library, reading books. As my kids have gotten older, we don't have quite as much time to sit in the library reading books, but my kids relish the opportunity to stop by the library and check out books. When the summer reading program begins every year, my kids beg to sign up for the reading program and eagerly complete their summer reading. Personally, I love perusing the New Releases at the library whenever I can, and loading up on new books to read. My family of five has been known to stop by the library on any given weekend and check out a large stack of books for all of us to enjoy.

Our Orinda library benefits the Orinda community in so many ways. It provides a safe space for school-aged children and teens to meet after school to do homework, research class assignments, or just read for pleasure. It provides meeting spaces for local community volunteers. It also offers an indoor activity space for families with young children to encourage book exploration.

I strongly support the proposed Orinda library parcel tax, Measure J. The tax will only assess residents an additional tax of \$30 per year. In exchange, the library will be able to remain open 7 days a week. Measure J funds can only be used for the library, extending library hours from 35 hours per week (which is what the country provides) to 60 hours a week. Please join me in voting Yes on Measure J on the June ballot.

Hillary Weiner

Orinda

Vice President, Orinda School Board of Trustees

PG&E work on St. Mary's Road

At the most recent City Council meeting, PG&E discussed this summer's large gas pipeline replacement project along St. Mary's Road. The project is a Capacity project, according to PG&E, which means the width of the underground pipeline will be widened from 4 inches to 8 or 12 inches in order to serve more customers. It's a large and expensive project that will cause traffic nightmares, so why is this PG&E's first priority? There are much more urgent pipeline safety concerns in our community.

Ten years ago Lafayette residents reported the 4-foot exposed pipeline near Beechwood Drive to PG&E, yet the pipeline remains exposed to corrosive elements to this day. By law, PG&E should have all segments of pipeline under at least 36-inches of soil. Also, Lafayette has no automated or remote shut-off valves which would lessen fire, property damage, or injuries in the case of accidents. Pipeline experts tell us internal "pig" inspections are the best safety practice, however these have never been conducted in Lafayette, nor are they planned for in the near future.

So, what's in the ground behind our yards and in our parks? PG&E admitted in the City Council meeting that their "critical infrastructure" of pipeline along St. Marys Rd was installed in 1952 "before modern radiography was used to inspect welds" and that welding inspection was "only visual." We know from earlier PG&E reports that other pipelines are even older, and this is the exact problem that resulted in the explosion in San Bruno and killed eight people.

Think about that for a moment: PG&E knows the Lafayette pipelines were installed with outdated materials and techniques, have uninspected welds, can't be shut off automatically, wind through busy neighborhoods, lie exposed above ground, and won't be internally inspected. And their top two priorities in our community is to increase service capacity for Moraga and to cut down 500 trees in Lafayette and Briones Park?

We asked these questions, and PG&E's inability to answer the simplest of questions as to project safety prioritization shines a bright light on the flawed and reckless safety decisions made by their risk management group. Every single Lafayette resident is affected by pipeline safety. It is the responsibility of each resident to hold our utility and elected officials accountable. A PG&E Open House to promote the tree removal maintenance program to residents is an unnecessary distraction from the true safety issues that

need to be revealed and discussed.

We request the City Council to discuss this issue as an official agenda item during the next City Council Meeting, consider recalling this unnecessary and destructive Tree Cutting Agreement which was made under the false pretense of urgent safety, and force PG&E to address the true safety risks that lie beneath our feet. We ask City Council to stop defending PG&E now and get on the residents' side of this matter of community safety.

Michael and Gina Dawson
Lafayette

No on Storm Drain Fee

Have you ever played Jenga? You know, the game where you pull blocks out from the bottom of a stack of other blocks, and hope like heck that it doesn't fall down. If it does ... you lose ... and you might have to take a shot or something.

This is exactly how our state and local tax increases work (but without the shots). Since we voters need to approve them, politicians must sell us on the need and assure us that the money won't be spent elsewhere. As so they tell us, "This money can only be spent for Purpose X." Why? Because it's what we want to hear. It's a sales tactic ... and it works!

But is it the truth? Technically, yes - but's it's like Jenga. The blocks at the top of the stack are the "new guaranteed Purpose X tax money" we just voted for. But the blocks at the bottom are the existing budget for Purpose X with no such guarantee. What happens to these blocks? Well ... they get pulled out, of course, because that's how the game is played. But instead of putting them back on top of the stack, they get used elsewhere. So what taxpayers get left with is Purpose X sitting on top of a wobbly stack of underfunding - which is exactly where we started.

And do we really want our taxes to be guaranteed for any specific purpose? In a perfect world - probably not. Our politicians would then be able to use our money for it's highest value use and not get locked into "emergency funding problems" that seem to be arising every week. This, however, would require a considerable amount of trust in those who spend our tax money ... and I most certainly am not going to sell you that bridge.

Some of you probably remember when the California Lottery came along, which is a sugar coated tax on the poor. They promised us that those proceeds could not be used for anything other than funding our schools. Technically, they told us the truth, but then pilfered all of the "unguaranteed money" from our schools instead. Now we have this Storm Drain Fee in Moraga with the same "guarantee."

I just love games ... don't you?

Doug Home
Moraga

Yes on Storm Drain Fee

Moraga property owners - I urge you to vote YES on the storm water fee.

Our problem is clear - Moraga's storm water system is old and parts of it are failing.

There is a plan to make things better. Doing nothing will only make things worse.

Now, our choice is simple:

Vote YES - Provide funds now to repair our deteriorating storm water system.

Vote NO - Wait for the next sinkhole and pay the excessive cost for an emergency fix.

If you have not voted, find your ballot, mark it YES, sign it and send it in. You don't even need a stamp.

If you can't find your ballot, contact the Moraga Town Clerk (925-888-7022) for a replacement - then vote YES.

If you have already voted, thank you.

Moraga needs to solve its storm water problem. Moraga needs to adopt and execute its Storm Drain Master Plan. Vote YES to make it happen.

Bob Reynolds
Moraga

More on storm drains

Our family moved to Moraga 46 years ago. Since then, I have been continuously and extensively involved in our Town's governance. Based upon that experience, I'd like to share some insights I believe are relevant to our storm drains problem.

First - no Question - we have an extremely serious problem.

Our storm drains were built to County standards in the 1960s and early 1970s. They are reaching the ends of their useful lives;

Unless we act now, major sinkhole failures are likely to occur throughout Moraga in the near future;

Addressing the need now is far cheaper and much less disruptive than waiting to incur the extreme costs of fixing sinkholes after they develop;

The magnitude of the total need means it will be extremely expensive to fix;

Our Town's financial reserves are minimal. Any new, major storm drain problem could well exceed the Town's resources;

New financing must be found to repair the existing system, and for continuous maintenance and long-term replacement of the system's elements.

Second, there is no "hidden pot of gold" nor feasible major changes in the cost of the Town's current operations that could conceivably solve the problem.

As a leader in our Town's 1974 Incorporation drive I can attest to the fact that our Town was designed to run on the cheap with minimal staff. That's how our Town was initially run. It's exactly how it continues to

be run today;

A 12-person, blue ribbon Committee I chaired found the Town is run with fewer staff and a significantly smaller per-capita cost than any city in our county or any comparable city in our region. A recent update of our committee's data confirmed that continues to be the case;

The amount and timing of hoped-for future disaster fund reimbursements is unknown. The timing of any future developer fees is also uncertain. Neither potential fund source would be nearly enough to solve our storm drains problem.

We need to act now. I've voted for the Storm Drains Fee. You should also!

Dick Olsen

Moraga

Request for transparency

For all that is structurally wrong with Moraga's proposed storm drain tax - including taxing schools, churches and the fire department, and no articulated financing plan attached to it - one item often lost in the discussion is the opacity with which the Town has handled the entire process. This includes councilmembers forming an "independent" advocacy group before even voting on moving forward with the ballot initiative.

Most recently, it includes double-dipping and taxing residents for money it already has.

Specifically, a \$1.1 million creek daylighting project at the Hacienda is part of the proposed storm drain tax. However, the Town has secured \$1million in grants to fund that project, yet still intends to tax residents the full amount.

Residents deserve more transparency, and should only be asked for what is actually needed.

Therese Meuel

Moraga

"YES" on storm drain ordinance makes the most sense

Those opposed suggest there has been fiscal mismanagement by Town government and/or Town Council/Mayor, claiming funds should have been budgeted for years to ensure properly maintained storm drains. Moraga receives much less back from the county from our property taxes than Orinda or Lafayette and our town's budget has always had more services/projects to support than funds available. What happens? The most important, pressing needs are funded and those deferrable without immediate serious effect are deferred. That's often not a problem for a while, but long deferred maintenance suddenly results in a major sinkhole which has to wait until funds can be scraped out of other budget categories to address the now very costly repairs. Budgeting with insufficient funds by crisis management puts us where we are today. That's not fiscal mismanagement; that is struggling to do the best job possible with inadequate funds to accomplish everything important. I grant very little, if any, credence to the "no" camp's slogan "fiscal responsibility first." The facts don't support the claim.

For the average homeowner, the fee is \$120 annually. Long ago, \$120 was a significant amount of money.

Today it is not. \$120 annually is 33 cents a day.

Fellow Moragans, 33 cents isn't even postage stamp money, it's parking meter change (except in San Francisco.) Less than a postage stamp per day will fund long deferred maintenance/repairs to our aged and collapsing storm drain infrastructure, hopefully preventing another sinkhole requiring major repair expenses.

The need is great, urgent and the cost is minor and manageable by virtually all homeowners, schools and churches. (Rainwater runoff is directly proportionate to structure roof area and (land) property size.

It is entirely appropriate that all property, including schools and churches pay the fee.

Ballots must be received at the town offices by May 15 and can be delivered there or mailed as soon as possible. If you haven't yet voted on this very important measure, please vote now and please vote YES! It is the right and wise action to take.

Fred Marschner

Moraga

Vote Yes on Measure J

It's easy to take for granted that our library will be open whenever we want to borrow a book, read and study quietly in a comfy armchair, or attend an educational program. After all, nearly 200,000 items were checked out - 11 per Orinda resident - and almost 8000 adults and children participated in library activities. However, our library's accessibility and high level of service are in jeopardy.

Unfortunately, the county provides only enough funding to keep the library open 35 hours a week. The current parcel tax passed a decade ago increased service to 60 hours and seven days a week, but its purchasing power has eroded over the years. That's why it is important to pass Measure J which adds \$30 to the existing tax or about 8 cents per day - a small price to pay for such a valuable community resource.

Please vote Yes on Measure J either absentee or in person on June 5th.

Susie Epstein

Orinda

Measure J

To the editor:

I can't remember the last time I checked a book out of the library, but I'm pretty sure I can count the years since in double digits. Still, I'm supporting Measure J for what the Orinda Library brings to this community I call home.

I choose to live in a community where everyone has equal access to information and entertainment, where

my retired friends can read professional journals, my book club friends can borrow the latest bestseller, and my friends learning a foreign language can reserve a room for their study groups to meet.

I value a community that values children and education. I'm always delighted to see students get off the bus after school and head to the library, or to watch a toddler proudly carry her latest selection of books to the car.

Even though I may not check out a book anytime soon, I want to know that my library is ready and open seven days a week, not just for me, but for my community.

Sincerely,
Pat Rudebusch
Orinda

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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