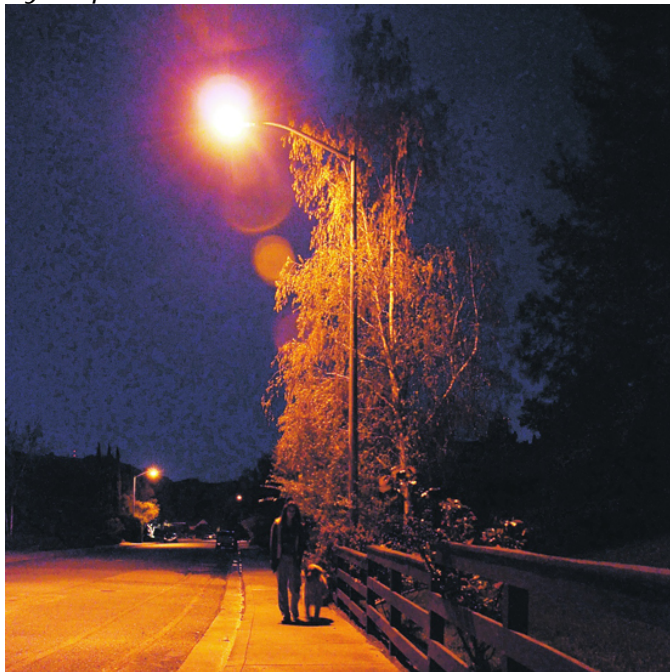


Published March 30st, 2010

Some Moraga Homeowners to Vote on Assessment District

By Sophie Braccini



Dog-walker under streetlight Photo Andy Scheck
safety for motorists and pedestrians," according to the report.

On March 24th, Moraga's Town Council unanimously agreed to send ballots to local property owners asking them to vote on increasing the assessment currently levied for streetlights that service their neighborhoods. If passed, single-family residences would see the charge they currently pay for street lights increase from \$19 to \$56 per year beginning in 2011 (see side bar).

"Right now the cost of the street lights is \$212,000 a year and the present assessment district only contributes \$50,000," explained Town Manager Michael Segrest. "This rate was fixed 31 years ago without an adjustment mechanism to take into account increases in cost of living, and as a result, the General Fund has been subsidizing the lights for years." As budgets get tighter, the Council agreed that it was only fair that those who benefit should pay for the service, "If we can't increase the rate, we will have to reduce the lighting or cut other Town services," added Segrest.

The LCC, Inc., the civil engineering consulting firm that reviewed the feasibility and impact of increasing the assessment rate reported that the public lighting system was a subtle but important element of the town's infrastructure, " ... without the warm glow of the evening lights Moraga neighborhood streets would be enveloped in darkness, leaving neighborhoods less safe and secure. Street lighting increases security for homeowners and improves the appearance of property frontage during the hours of darkness. Street lighting also improves

Only those properties serviced by streetlights and off main road arteries are affected by the Council's decision. Lights on main arteries like Moraga Way, Moraga Road, Rheem Boulevard and Camino Pablo are considered general benefit and are not included in a Lighting Assessment District. Other properties are excluded if they're served by a private road and street lights are paid by a homeowners' association. Segrest estimates the number of impacted residences to be 3,000-4,000. The easiest and quickest way to see if your residence is included in the Lighting District is to check your property tax bill and see if it includes the line "Assessment District 1979-1."

Ballots will be mailed to affected property owners on April 9th, and must be returned to the Town by May 26th. Returned ballots will be weighted in accordance with what the property owner currently pays and the results will be tabulated by Town staff. If voted down, the increase will automatically be rejected. If voters approve the increase, then the Town Council will revisit the subject to decide whether or not to enact a raise.

"My concern is that this might be perceived as a tax increase," said Council Member Mike Metcalf at the Council meeting, "this adjustment should have been made years ago, but previous Councils refused to consider it." Council members agreed that increasing the assessment to reflect real costs was a matter of fairness. They recommended that staff conduct community outreach to explain the decision. "We will mail a letter to all the residents in the district at the beginning of April to explain our proposal," responded Segrest. Information including the staff and consultant reports will be posted on the Town's web site, www.moraga.ca.us.

Proposed Lighting Assessment District Increase

Type of property Existing rate Proposed rate

Single-family \$16 \$58

condominium/townhouse \$2 to \$16 \$20.88

multifamily (apartments) $\$0.16 * f + \$0.52 * f + \$6.38 * n$

commercial $\$0.16 * f + \$0.58 * f$

LAMORINDA WEEKLY | Some Moraga Homeowners to Vote on Assessment District

institutional - non profit $\$0.16 * f \$0.29 * f$

institutional- public agency $\$0 \$0.29 * f$

vacant lot $\$0.16 * f \$0.29 * f$

f: frontage in feet, n: number of dwelling units in complex

Source: Town of Moraga Staff Report

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA