

Letters to the Editor

Share your thoughts with our community! Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly. All published letters will include the writer's name and city/town of residence -- we will only accept letters from those who live in, or own a business in, the communities comprising Lamorinda (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only). Letters should be 350 words or less; letters of up to 500 words will be accepted on a space-available basis.
email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com; Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570



Editor:
 Given that there were no arguments against Measure A in the ballot information we received, I was surprised that it didn't pass. I would love to see letters from those who voted against it explaining their reasons. Did they simply obey the Contra Costa Times editor who felt that an additional \$18.75 per month was an unreasonable burden on our homeowners? Do they, despite all evidence to the contrary, blindly believe that the school district wastes its money and can manage just fine without the over \$6 million it's already lost in state funding over the last four years (a 30% revenue cut despite many spending cuts)? I challenge anyone to demonstrate another school district that has done so much with so little. I saw a letter in the Contra Costa Sun complaining about problems in the Mt. Diablo school district as a justification for not supporting MSD's revenue needs. The writer also suggested cutting the district's non-existent sub-superintendents from the payroll to save money. Huh?
 Everyone who moves to Moraga, moves here for our schools. If our schools go down, home values go down, and EVERYONE loses. And if you support our schools but didn't bother to vote then shame on you!
 Mike Bernhardt
 Moraga

Editor:
 I wouldn't be surprised if the Moraga School District had to come back in the next year or two with another tax proposal. The size of the reduction in state funding requires it. The proposed parcel tax of \$225 a year (\$4.33 a week) attracted close to two-thirds approval but this wasn't bocce ball. The reason for its failure that I have heard most often was that the tax would not expire. Those who held this view must have believed that the money might not be needed in the future, the chances of which surely must be close to zero. The State is in even worse shape than we thought just a few weeks ago. We need to understand that although we feel we are sending a lot of tax money up the ladder, not enough of it comes back down to the cities and even less than before to the schools. This means that we have to take matters into our own hands and generate public money that stays here. One example is the existing parcel tax for Moraga schools that

passed eight years ago by the slimmest of margins. It doesn't expire, which is a good thing because the need for that money is even greater now than it was then. I'm told that the final count shows that the recent tax proposal lost by only 95 votes, so let us focus on how to turn around those 95 votes. Perhaps the School District could propose a tax that would expire after a certain number of years. So when do we expect that our schools won't need the money anymore? Five years? Hard to believe. How about 10 or 15? Whatever the date, I believe that the District would have to come back to us for a new tax to replace that one. But if expiration is required to get it passed, I say go for it.
 Most tax proposals in California fail to climb over the 66.67 percent barrier, which was the intent of Proposition 13, which didn't get two-thirds approval itself in 1978. Fortunately, voters taxed themselves 16 years earlier to create the BART system. It passed with 61 percent. Where would we be today without BART?
 Although there is no substitute for adequate public funding of our schools, there is one thing we can do right now to ease the pain somewhat. We can donate money to the Moraga Education Foundation. In its most recent report the superintendent of schools says, "contributions to the MEF from our parents and community have helped us preserve staffing levels, programs, and services for our students." The principal of Campolindo High School says, "Campolindo would not be the school it is today without the financial support we get from the MEF." Contributions to the MEF are "tax deductible to the full extent the law allows." Most contributors are parents, of course, but many empty-nesters also send money every year to the MEF. I hope that more Moragans will consider doing so. Moraga Education Foundation, P.O. Box 34, Moraga, CA 94556.
 I am not authorized to speak for the MEF or the School District. They will learn of my letter only when they read it in the newspaper. Nor, as a senior citizen, do I still have children in the Moraga schools.
 Dale Walwark
 Moraga

Editor:
 Dependency is unhealthy—whether it is drugs, alcohol or money from Sacramento.

I was saddened by the recent failure of Measure A, our parcel tax for our schools. I don't know of anyone who likes taxes, but I feel that it was in our own self interest to pass the measure. Granted that not everyone may be motivated by the altruistic idea that we owe our children and grandchildren the best education possible so that we do not become a third world country. But the fact that the premium value of our houses -- perhaps our single most valuable investment -- is well established as a function of our outstanding school system is reason enough alone to vote for Measure A. But there is a bigger picture here, whether it be roads or schools!! For too long we have sent our money off to Sacramento, given them grossly undeserved credit for knowing how to manage it and anticipated that they would return a reasonable and fair amount to us to meet our reasonable financial needs.
 That dependency is killing us!! Year after year they keep more and return less with the end result of financially strangling our schools and municipalities. And there is no end in sight! It seems to me that, like it or not, to protect ourselves and preserve our schools and communities we have no choice but to pass these local taxes because the money stays HERE and Sacramento can't take it away from us!
 Remember when we were a lot younger -- like maybe high school -- and looked forward to being independent and calling our own shots? We're older now, but let's rekindle that "independent fire" and as a community vote for the financial means to become independent. I think we would all feel better and I think we would be the better off for it!
 Robert Foxall
 Moraga

Editor:
 The horrible roads of Orinda can be fixed without raising the city's sales tax.
 The Lamorinda Weekly (May 9) reported that the Orinda City Council received, at its May 1 meeting, information about a sales-tax hike. A higher Orinda sales tax -- a tax that could go from the current 8.25 percent to 8.75 percent or even 9.25 percent -- would drive shoppers to other locations such as Moraga, Lafayette, or Walnut Creek. If business slumps in Orinda, jobs in

In Memory

Lois May Higgs Phelps



May 21, 1927 – April 29, 2012

Lois May Higgs Phelps, a resident of Moraga, died in Redding, Connecticut surrounded by her family on April 29, 2012. Lois was born in Sacramento, California on May 21, 1927. She attended Sacramento High School where she met her life-long sweetheart and husband, Pharo Alfred Phelps, "PAP".

Lois graduated from San Jose State University in 1950 in Library Science and John F. Kennedy University in 1982 with a Masters in Career Counseling. She was a mother, librarian, credentialed teacher, and board certified career counselor, with extensive volunteer work at The Wellness Community and the Moraga library.

Lois is survived by 3 children and their spouses: Andrew & Barbara Phelps of Santiago, Chile, John & Rachel Phelps of Los Altos, California, and Dr. Jennifer Phelps & Dr. Frank Hermantini of Redding, Connecticut; 9 grandchildren: Dr. Edward Phelps, Michael, Marina, Sonnet, Hannah, Isabella, Olivia, Sebastian and Pharo Thomas; and sister Betty Gene Higgs Muck of La Jolla, CA. She was predeceased by her husband Dr. Pharo Alfred in 2004 and eldest son, Pharo Thomas in 1999.

The family will hold a memorial service and inurnment alongside PAP at the US Naval Academy, and suggests memorial contributions be made in her name to The Cancer Support Community 3276 McNutt Ave. Walnut Creek, CA 94597.

Orinda would be lost. Specifically, a higher sales tax in Orinda would be bad for the following Orinda businesses: the Safeway; Orinda Motors; all restaurants; and all gasoline stations.
 The best way to pay for road repair is for the Orinda City Council to ask voters for a parcel-tax hike of no more than \$80 per year. The January 2012 survey of Orinda voters showed that 69 percent of Orindans would be "very willing" or "somewhat willing" to pay \$80 per year. The figure of 69 percent is greater than the 67 percent threshold need to pass a parcel tax. The survey was conducted by the FM3 company in Oakland.
 An advantage of a parcel tax is that this kind of tax -- unlike a sales tax -- is deductible from one's income tax. Orinda would have more money for roads if the city cut its budget. The budget, which is approximately \$10 million per year, could be reduced 10 percent, freeing up an extra \$1 million annually for road repair. A good way to begin budget cutting would be to eliminate Orinda's Planning Department which, according to the January 2012 voter survey, has a "strong approval" rating of eight percent. By contrast, the Orinda Library has a "strong approval" rating of 76 percent.
 Orindans should consider a parcel-tax increase. Limiting the increase to two years would give residents a chance to see how well Orinda conducted its

road-repair work. If Orinda did a good job, then the city could ask voters for another tax hike at a later time.
 Richard Colman
 Orinda

Editor:
 This Lafayette resident will not be voting for Candace Anderson for County Supervisor solely because of her campaign blight. Her election signage is the worst saturation I have ever seen. Not only are her signs on every vacant piece of land in Lafayette, they are often placed one-two-three just ten or twenty feet apart on a larger parcel, as if the driver or pedestrian could possibly miss just one. Should the driver attempt relief with a turn the head, it is only to encounter still more signs across the street. This saturation is an insult to the observational powers of citizens as well as a telling glimpse of candidate ego. The only way to combat such saturation is when casting a vote.
 Karen Thomas
 Lafayette

Join our Public Forum

If you have significant knowledge about an issue facing Lamorinda or one of its cities that requires more than the 350 words to which we must limit Letters to the Editor, don't despair! You can submit your letter to our Public Forum section. Just send your letter to letters@lamorindaweekly.com and let us know you'd like to be considered for the Public Forum.

Public Forum

JOIN IT

Editor:
 The issue of off-leash dogs at Rancho Laguna Park has been brewing for many years, consuming town staff time and dividing the community. At its March 14th meeting the Town Council voted 3-2 to discontinue off-leash hours at Rancho Laguna except in a Council designated fenced area at Rancho Laguna or some other town park. Two weeks later, at its March 28th meeting, the Council agreed to postpone the ban for 42 days to give the community time to propose a compromise plan that would consider all user groups and be acceptable to a broad spectrum of the community. During this discussion, Council members indicated they would seriously consider a plan developed by Lamorinda Dogs known as "Option C."
 A Committee was formed of 15 people who either volunteered or were recommended by the Town Manager. The members represented a cross-section of Moraga park users: dog owners, non-dog owners, youth sports, scouting, park neighbors, equestrians, walkers, the disabled, parents, children and seniors. The undersigned all served on the Committee.
 The Committee met three times. We discussed all possible areas on Town property for a fenced dog park and evaluated them in terms of cost, size, usage conflict, parking, availability of water, safety issues, ADA accessibility and time needed to develop. We concluded that the only viable options were Rancho Laguna and the Back 40 at the Moraga Commons. Although two members favored the Back 40 area, most concluded that it was not suitable for many reasons, chiefly cost, time to develop, lack of water on site, disturbance to neighbors and lack of parking.
 Our discussion then focused on an actual plan for a fenced dog area in Rancho Laguna. We discussed all potential users including picnickers, scouts, soccer and other sports, walkers and people with dogs. Most members agreed that Option C would provide an appealing off-leash dog area, more than ad-

equately accommodate all other current users of Rancho Laguna and encourage use by people who may have been discouraged from using the park in the past because of dogs.
 Thirteen of the 15 Committee members agreed to propose Option C to the Town Council. Two members could not support the proposal and filed dissenting reports. One of those members, Jon Chambers, whose wife serves on the East Bay Eclipse Soccer Club Board, submitted a dissent to the Town Council which included two of his own plans, each providing for a very small off-leash area and lawn space for a dedicated full-size soccer field which is drawn as part of the plan.
 When we reviewed the Council agenda packet before the May 9th meeting, we were very surprised to see that the Committee proposal was only one of four plans (two proposed by Mr. Chambers) to be considered by the Council. The other three plans significantly reduced the size of the dog area in order to accommodate a full-size soccer field. None of these plans was ever brought to the Committee for review or consideration. We were also surprised to see letters submitted to the Council in the three days prior to the meeting from East Bay Eclipse Soccer Club, EuroSoccer Camps, Lamorinda Soccer Club, MOL Football League, and LMYA, all endorsing a design at Rancho Laguna that allows for a full sized sports field. Committee members and many other members of the public spoke in support of Plan C at the meeting, but the Town Council chose to all but ignore the Committee's proposal; the only proposals given serious consideration were the two submitted by Mr. Chambers.
 We participated on this Committee in good faith. Most of us prefer to keep Rancho Laguna as it is with a few daily hours for off leash activities and the entire park being available the majority of the day for all other users. But we supported Option C because the Council directed the Committee to come up with a compromise that was acceptable to the off-leash community

and would accommodate other users. When we were asked to balance the interests of all potential users of Rancho Laguna, we had no idea that we were supposed to be considering for-profit soccer clubs that wish to turn Rancho Laguna into a full-time soccer field. We cannot help but feel that some members of the Town Council had an agenda that was not disclosed to us and never intended to consider any proposal without room for a soccer field.
 The Council had stated unequivocally on March 28th that they wanted this issue to be resolved and directed the Committee to be formed with that goal, every one of the Council members stating in some fashion that they would support Option C if it would mean the end of this dispute. Curiously, on May 9th they were no longer interested. We came so close to being a united community again. We could have all worked together in June to install the new play equipment, create a usable and inviting off-leash area and make Rancho Laguna a true community park. Instead Rancho Laguna will become a dedicated soccer field, many long-time off-leash users will be completely deprived of their only opportunity to exercise and socialize while with their dogs and the divisiveness will continue, making it difficult for the Council to most effectively address other important matters.
 Cherie Grant, Committee Chair, Moraga
 Dick Ayers, Committee Co-Chair, Moraga
 Trish Bare, Committee Member, Moraga
 Tina Brier, Committee Member, Moraga
 Ed McCauley, Committee Member, Moraga
 Jeanne Moreau, Committee Member, Moraga
 Blair Newel, Committee Member, Lafayette
 Larry Tessler, Committee Member, Moraga
 Kate Sullivan, Committee Member, Moraga
 Dexter Louie, MD, Committee Member, Moraga