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License plate readers in sight for Moraga

By *Sophie Braccini*

A generous and anonymous Moraga family is offering a matching grant of \$15,000 to the Moraga Community Foundation to complete the \$60,000 in necessary funds to purchase video security cameras for the town. The foundation has through the end of August to raise the matching \$15,000 from the community.

Tom Schnurr, current president of the MCF, explains that the nine-person foundation board is mobilized to raise the money and he sees the generous grant as an opportunity to successfully end a campaign that started last May. "Then we will hand the money to the police department, earmarked for purchasing the license plate readers," he says. At the end of July, the MCF had raised \$36,000 toward the purchase of the camera system.

The town council approved the installation of five cameras back in 2016, but funding became impossible, so Moraga residents decided to take it upon themselves to find the money. Paul Cohun and Kristen Beckwith convinced the MCF to become the fundraising arm of the campaign.

The police department's plan is to install the cameras in strategic places around town with the sole purpose of taking pictures of cars entering and exiting the town, and reading their license plates. The images are transmitted to a server at the police department. Chief of Police Jon King indicated in his original presentation that the information would be transmitted on a private network and would not be accessible via the internet.

King also stated that the information collected would only be used in connection with and during an investigation into an actual crime. Recordings will be stored for only 30 days before being destroyed.

The MCF campaign has consisted of presentations to service groups and active presence at different public events such as Fourth of July or the farmers' market. The MCF will have a table at the market on Sunday, Aug. 20. The person staffing the table will be able to answer any questions or concerns residents might have regarding the cameras.

Schnurr wants to thank the anonymous donors for their generosity. He believes the license plate readers have proven their utility in Lafayette and Orinda where the crime statistics have improved significantly since the systems were installed.

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