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## Town's mayor and vice mayor conduct 'Community Engagement Tour'

By Vera Kochan

Moraga Mayor Mike McCluer and Vice Mayor Steve Woehleke conducted a survey amongst members of the town's various civic organizations in order to form a better understanding of the community's issues and concerns.

The Community Engagement Tour was the brainchild of McCluer and not in any way representative of the town council or the town of Moraga. Its goal was to "engage, discuss and listen," almost in a town hall manner, over a two month period between March and May 2021. The results were presented by the mayor and vice mayor during the town council's July 14 meeting.

Participants in the survey were members of Preserve Lamorinda Open Space, Moraga School District, Moraga Rotary, Moraga Country Club HOA, SMART Moraga, Moraga Kiwanis, Campolindo High School, Moraga Garden Club, and Moraga Lions Club.

"We had Zoom meetings for the discussions," explained McCluer. "In advance of the meeting I would send the leader of each group the survey link (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VL2D3SV>) and mention we are seeking feedback. I also mentioned the survey during the discussion. Fully optional. I also noted surveys are from Mike and Steve and not the town, as we conduct these meetings as mayor and vice mayor. These meetings were different from the typical 'mayor presents 40 slides and offers a few minutes for questions.' I think it was special to have 90% of the meeting as discussion with average meetings lasting over an hour." The survey involved seven questions that required either a written reply or checking a box with a ratings response. The top five issues of concern in Moraga were: retail services, financial management, development/open space, infrastructure and the retail look. Additional key issues were: safety, fire safety, traffic, diversity and lack of recreation - meaning, some type of all-purpose indoor sports facility.

As to whether the town is focused on the right issues, the overwhelming response was "sometimes," with "not sure" coming in second, "yes" at third, and "no" at fourth.

Areas that need improvement were significantly directed at retail services, with nearly equal votes coming in second for retail look. Both McCluer and Woehleke acknowledged that this response comes as no surprise.

"The two centers have been adjusting over time, and will continue to do so," replied Woehleke. "The town needs to continue to focus on enhancing relationships with the center owners/operators, working towards achieving the potential viability which can support significant refreshing." Also, financial management came second, followed by communication, and development/open space.

Woehleke added, "I was a bit surprised that while the town spends significant efforts in communicating via About Town, MCN and other means, several of the tabulated survey responses suggest there are opportunities." McCluer was disappointed that climate action didn't make an appearance in the top issues.

As to whether the town is performing up to residents' standards, the votes for "average" came in first, followed by "good," "poor," "excellent" and "failing."

When asked whether Moraga was moving in the right direction, surveyors put "neither yes/no" first, followed by a very close "somewhat yes," dropping down to "yes," "somewhat no," with "no" and "not sure" tied for last.

"I was very happy to bring 17 specific resident action items to the town council with many new items and ideas," said McCluer in regards to write-in responses from those surveyed.

"This endeavor was well worth the effort," stated Woehleke. "I strongly commend Mayor McCluer for originating and leading this effort, and essentially performing all the work. Every group we met with expressed appreciation for the direct community engagement. And, I learned much from them."

McCluer added, "Also, I can't express how much I truly enjoyed these meetings, connecting with the residents that I work for and one of the most effective actions I've taken since being a town council member."

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