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General Plan Workshop deemed a success

By Vera Kochan



General Plan Workshop attendees listen to a presentation before breaking into interactive stations. Photo courtesy Scott Mitnick

rotation to another station, thus keeping the groups moving and eventually providing feedback at all four stations. After each station visit, passport cards were marked, and at the end of the event gift cards from various town businesses were awarded for those lucky enough to have their card drawn. Before the station visiting process began, there was a brief Q & A session. Also in attendance to answer any questions were Mayor Teresa Onoda, Vice Mayor Steve Woehleke, Town Manager Scott Mitnick, Moraga Police Chief Jon King, and Lieutenant Steve Borbely.

The workshop's focus was on four elements of the General Plan: Sustainability, Economic Vitality, Transportation, and Community Design. When residents first checked-in, Administrative Assistant Suzie Mele handed out tote bags and numbered name tags, which would determine the group someone was assigned to for station participation. The interactive stations each involved some form of feedback that would later be evaluated by staff. Economic Vitality was manned by Hamid, Sustainability and Resilience was hosted by Associate Planner Mio Mendez, Community Design was operated by Principal Planner Brian Horn, and Transportation was helmed by Public Works Director/Town Engineer Shawn Knapp.

The Economic Vitality station focused on sustaining existing businesses while attracting new ones, adapting to workplace changes, maintaining fiscal health, and working collaboratively with SMC. Visitors to this station were asked to place post-it notes on an aerial-view map of one of the town's shopping centers with comments specific to improvements they would like to see implemented.

At the Sustainability and Resilience station, it was noted that Moraga's existing Plan was prepared before climate change and sustainability were crucial issues. Questions to keep in mind for the attendees were, "How can Moraga be a more sustainable community?"; and "How can we be more resilient to wildfire and other effects of climate change?" Participants were given dot stickers and asked to place them after a variety of questions by ranking them on a scale of low to high in importance.

With regards to Community Design, the new General Plan will provide guidance on the "look and feel" of development in the two commercial areas. This station had four panels of photos exhibiting various types and styles of architecture, featuring 48 images in total. Visitors to this station were given a scorecard and asked to rate each image with respect to the possibility that these styles could be incorporated into Moraga's future building facades.

For Transportation, this element will be updated to address future transportation needs. It would include bicycling, walking, and public transit, in addition to managing vehicular traffic. Also included would be safety and technology issues. At this station, residents were given five dot stickers and tasked with placing them below only five out of 15 statements listed that ranked as the most important to them. "Ensure the safety of children walking or bicycling to and from school through 'safe routes to school' programs, including improvements to sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike lanes near schools", was one example. Another was, "Improve connections between Moraga's two commercial centers and nearby neighborhoods, making it easier to get to these areas without driving."

At each of the stations, attendees were encouraged to ask staff additional questions and/or fill out comment cards. Once the station visits were completed, everyone reconvened to their seats for a final Q & A session before the event ended.

The Town of Moraga invited residents and stakeholders to attend its April 30 Envision Moraga 2040 General Plan Community Workshop. The event was held at Saint Mary's College and drew approximately 60 individuals. Planning Director Afshan Hamid stated, in her opening remarks to the attendees, "The community wanted to provide feedback to the town, and that's what this is all about."

Hamid also mentioned that long-range planning helps the town protect its hillsides and ridgelines; preserves the semi-rural character; achieves attractive infill development; manages transportation and infrastructure; prepares for emergencies; and protects Moraga's quality of life.

Consultant Barry Miller's overview of the workshop's format gave everyone an idea of what was expected from them with regards to each station. After 15 minutes, a "horn" would indicate that it was time for a

"The town staff was very impressed with the community turn out for this well run Envision Moraga 2040 General Plan Workshop," said Knapp. "The community was very engaged on the topic of transportation, asking me many questions and recommending where the Town should focus transportation and roadway safety improvements."

"The success of the evening was measured by the interest the community took in visiting the stations, and that most residents stayed for the entire evening," Hamid stated. "The residents were engaged in meaningful conversations with each other and staff throughout the workshop. They were listened to and were part of the process. Also, there was a diversity of demographics at the workshop."

"The feedback provided from this meeting will be added to that received from other meetings (well over a dozen) Afshan has held this year," replied Mitnick. "All of this information will be compiled and shared with Town Council at a future council meeting as part of the General Plan Update process. There are more public outreach meetings to go."

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