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Cost of temporary Canyon bridge: \$2.6 million and possibly many months

By Sophie Braccini

The town of Moraga is moving toward the installation of a temporary bridge on Canyon road, depending on funding availability. But even this interim solution would take months to become a reality and reopening the link to Canyon will still have to wait.

Moraga Public Works is working on installing a 160-foot-long, one-lane bridge to temporarily replace the current bridge that was closed last month because a landslide jeopardized its foundation. The installation will require the stabilization of the nearby hill and the removal of the existing bridge; cost estimates came out at \$2.6 million. In the meantime the bridge is closed to all traffic, and circulation to and from the Canyon community is diverted through Orinda and the western hills.

Moraga residents who have children attending Canyon school came to the town council on May 10 to ask that the replacement of the bridge be made a town top priority. Bob Priebe, town manager, responded that it was indeed that.

The temporary one-lane bridge would be installed west of the current bridge that would be removed. It would stay in place during the construction of a new bridge, something that had been already approved last year. The big question mark for the temporary solution is its high cost.

Resident Edy Schwartz said that some residents were shocked when hearing the cost announced by the city and asked Priebe if all solutions had been studied. The town manager answered that yes, every option had been looked at, including borrowing a bridge as a resident had suggested. "We could borrow it, but then if they have an emergency they will need their bridge back and we will be left with nothing."

Public Works Director Edric Kwan adds that Moraga is seeking emergency funding, and working with its insurance company, but needs to have a contingency plan if no funding possibilities are found. He warns that the completion will take several months anyway. The council has to approve the plan, the hill will have to be stabilized and at this time a complete diagnostic of the condition of the hill and future possible consequences have not been completed. The town is cooperating with EBMUD to finalize the assessment of the site.

The financial consequences for Moraga are going to be quite profound no matter what. Amy Cunningham, the administrative director, said that the \$2.6 million price tag is the total of the town's reserves. Moraga could be reimbursed over time by federal agencies but will have to curtail spending in the meantime. She anticipates an operating budget in the red and that some tough decisions will have to be made by the council when discussing the budget in June.

The town has opened a specific page on its website at www.moraga.ca.us/Canyon-Bridge-Closure-2017 where the latest information is posted.

And how about the sinkhole?

In some good news, Moraga town staff believe that the town is only days away from receiving the final approval from the Federal Highway Administration and being able to approve the bids and award the repair contract for the sinkhole near Rheem Boulevard and Moraga Road. Public works director Edric Kwan says he is confident the repairs can be done during this construction season.

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[back](#)

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