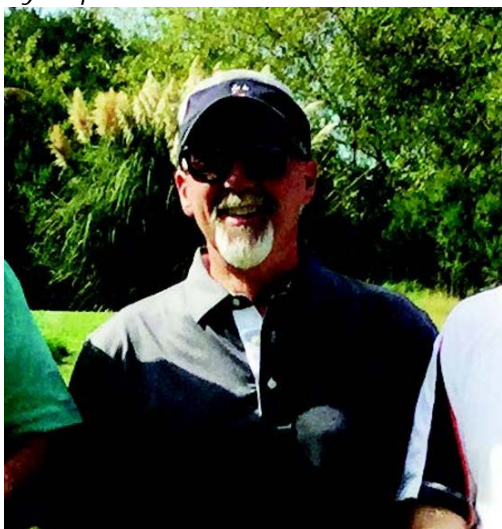


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Process launched to recruit new town manager

By *Sophie Braccini*



Bob Priebe participated in the recent Moraga Chamber golf tournament to support the Moraga Orinda Professional Firefighters Association Photo Wendy Scheck

posted by a resident on social media.

Moraga town manager Bob Priebe is adamant: He says that the snafu that followed the town's declaration of fiscal emergency and the questioning of staff's pay raises at the time have nothing to do with his resignation this month.

The manager, who will be 66 in a few months, explains that the impact on his family life was beyond what could be expected when he signed a three-year contract in 2016 taking the town manager position. He will retire on Dec. 17.

The Moraga Town Council approved signing a contract with Peckham & McKenney on Sept. 13 for the recruitment of a new manager. The search is expected to last six to nine months, probably past Priebe's last day in office.

Priebe says that he wished to make the announcement himself, after the vacation he took for the birth of his fourth grandchild in Oregon. The town council was informed of his decision and according to Council Member Dave Trotter, the town's attorney advised against making a public announcement immediately, though the news about Priebe's resignation had been

When Priebe replaced departing manager Jill Keimach as interim in Feb. 2016, he climbed the stairs that separated his former chief of police office to the town manager's office with great pride and excitement. In March of 2016, the massive sinkhole formed on Rheem Boulevard, and Priebe and his team rose to the challenge. He says that emergency situation management is in his DNA. The following September he signed a three-year contract to hold the permanent position.

Then in April of 2017 the Canyon Bridge was closed and Moraga's reserves thinned so much that Priebe, with his administrative director Amy Cunningham, decided to propose declaring a fiscal emergency to the council. The decision alerted the residents about a situation that has been a reality for years: The town is underfunded and has not maintained its assets and infrastructure to the necessary level.

The dramatic move attracted a lot of media attention across the country, sometimes spreading misleading or inaccurate news such as a potential bankruptcy of the town, or that Orinda spends only 14 percent of its budget on employees - that percentage includes only direct payroll and not the police force that is contracted through the county.

Several residents and media also started questioning the salaries paid to the town's employees. Priebe, as well as the council members, have always been very supportive of staff, highlighting the long hours and quality of the work of the 36 staff members. The manager said that what he calls a smear campaign is the work of a minority of misinformed people. If anything, he says that the attacks would make him want to stay longer.

But Priebe says that the impact on his personal life has been excessive. He cites his last stay in a hospital in Oregon where his daughter was giving birth and where he spent hours in a quiet spot of the hospital talking to media, responding to emails, preparing documents and not being able to be there for his loved ones. He has now made his choice, and will leave the position when possible to enjoy his family, read books, pick up his trumpet and smell the roses.

The council decided to appoint Peckham & McKenney without competitive bidding to handle the recruitment. The same firm handled the enlistment of Jill Keimach seven years ago, as well as tens of top public service executives in the Bay Area. Cunningham said that all the recruitment firms cost about the same, and that the \$27,000 payment to the firm will be funded by savings accrued when employees agreed not to reclaim some vacation days. Priebe explains that for some years the number of vacation days given to employees was uncommonly high, up to eight weeks, and that he was able to negotiate going back to a more traditional benefit level.

Council Member Kymberleigh Korpus asked if it would make sense to save the money spent on the recruitment firm. Priebe responded that agencies that post jobs online are inundated with hundreds of

irrelevant resumes; Cunningham added that specialized recruitment firms are connected, know the potential candidates and can reach wide through specialized media.

The idea that the recruitment of the next person would be public was dismissed because it would preclude currently employed personnel to apply, but Mayor Teresa Onoda asked that public input be collected to hear what people will expect from the next town manager; Trotter agreed that the profile would be defined during a public session to be announced.

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