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Moraga passes mandatory firearm lock ordinance

By *Sophie Braccini*

Residents stand and turn their backs during Council Member Kymberleigh Korpus' 30-minute argument against locking up firearms at the Feb. 28 council meeting. Photo provided

Moraga Town Council members approved 4 to 1 at its Feb. 28 meeting a new ordinance that will require firearm owners in town to secure weapons when not in their immediate control. The ordinance that some called a common sense measure, or a first step to improve the safety of children, garnered large public support over a year of debates, research and discussions. This final public meeting that led to the adoption was conducted in a mostly civil manner; it was an opportunity, however, for Council Member Kymberleigh Korpus to monopolize the dais and build an opposing case, albeit a failed attempt.

Mayor Dave Trotter indicated that it was the first time in all his years on the council that the city clerk ran out of speaker cards. The town meeting chamber was overflowing with residents that night who wanted to make the final push and have their position recorded on the topic of firearm storage. Over 70 people spoke or wrote a statement that night, with 65 supporting and six opposing the text.

Emotions ran high in the town chambers when gun violence survivors made a plea to the council to approve the text. High school students, numerous parents of school-age children and two pediatricians stated that an ordinance requiring firearms owners to lock weapons securely when not in their immediate control would be a first step in decreasing the risk of accidental use by youth or suicide by firearms. They agreed with the chief of police, Jon King, that this law is a first step in the direction of increased safety, and will need to be accompanied by a public education campaign.

The chief's position has evolved over the year it took to get the ordinance text approved. When he first spoke about it at the council in September he stated that if such a rule was in the municipal code, he did not see a way for his officers to enforce it. When asked the question of enforcement by Korpus this time around, he gave the example of an unruly teen party where his officers could enforce the new local law if an operational firearm was seen unlocked on the premises. He added that if his department received a complaint involving a resident not keeping firearms locked, his officers would knock on that door and question that person, but would not be allowed to conduct a search of the premises. King added that since all the local PTAs published their support of the new text, he would reach out to them to discuss how to best educate the children.

The text states that no person shall keep any firearm within a residence owned or controlled by that person unless the firearm is stored in a locked container or disabled with a gun lock that has been approved by the California Department of Justice. King reminded the audience that his department makes free gunlocks available.

Six people at the meeting who opposed the text said they feared for their safety if they did not have time to reach for their locked firearm fast enough, in case of an aggressive altercation. Others implied that anti-gun activists seeking to abolish the Constitution's Second Amendment had manipulated Moraga residents.

Korpus used similar arguments against the text. She spoke continually for 30 minutes, describing how she valued liberty above all else, an American value weaved in the fabric of this country by its founders, that would be threatened by this text since it aims at regulating what people do in the sanctity of their home. She added that even if a majority of the population was supportive of the text, majorities are not always right and it was her duty to fight a measure carried by extreme liberalism.

The mayor asked Korpus several times to conclude her remarks to give other council members an opportunity to speak. Seemingly frustrated by her long diatribe, people began to stand and turn their backs to her. Trotter stopped Korpus after 30 minutes and she finished her presentation after others were able to talk.

Council Member Jeanette Fritzky said she was offended by Korpus' insinuations that she and her fellow council members were extreme liberals driven by emotions. She said that the text made sense as a first step in the direction of increasing the safety of Moraga residents. Vice Mayor Teresa Onoda reiterated that her priority was the safety of the youth and that locking firearms was a good thing. Council Member Roger Wykle said that this new text would not regulate people's freedom in their homes more than the marijuana ordinance did and that he supported it. Mayor Trotter also said that his support was not an emotional

reaction but the result of careful study of the topic, including its constitutional implications.

The text will return to the council for a second reading and will become a part of the municipal law a month later.

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