

Is Moraga Ready for Extreme "Traffic-Calming"?

- Install Rheem Shopping Center-style speed bumps on Camino Pablo?
- Dismiss with impunity the Moraga-Orinda Fire District's objections to the Camino Pablo speed bumps?
- Reduce Moraga Road to one lane in each direction between Corliss and Donald Drive (with the possibility that it be extended all the way to Rheem Boulevard)?
- Contemplate extreme "traffic-calming" devices for other major Moraga thoroughfares?
- Impose Berkeley's divisive "traffic-calming" model on Moraga?

Dear Fellow Moraga Residents,

This is to alert you to some very alarming traffic management measures being considered by the Moraga Town Council that will impact all Moraga residents.

These changes go beyond mere daily travel inconvenience in and around Moraga to matters that could seriously impact the speed of our fire and rescue service, our property values, the town's litigation risk, and our reputation as a community that addresses matters of common interest thoroughly and openly. This issue is on the agenda for a Special 7:30 p.m. January 16 Town Council meeting at Joaquin Moraga School auditorium. Whatever your point of view, please try to attend.

Benign-Sounding Label of "Traffic-Calming"

The contemplated changes are being pursued under the benign-sounding label of "traffic-calming." For example, the automobile frame-jarring speed bumps in the Rheem Shopping Center near Starbucks and the Laundromat—Level 3 Aggressive speed bumps, absurdly characterized by the Town as "slightly-raised crosswalks"—are considered traffic-calming devices. And to directly quote new Moraga Mayor Lynda Deschambault in an email to Town Staff, "I like the way the ones are done at the Rheem shopping center."

She apparently likes them so much that when the Town Council installed three Rheem Shopping Center-style speed bumps on Camino Pablo near CP and JM Schools, Ms. Deschambault queried the Town Staff in her email as to why there wasn't a fourth "crosswalk" because, as she said, "there seems to be a gap between #1 and #2 and #3".

The Town Council—A Failure to Communicate

Beyond not clearly communicating straight-up with Moraga citizens about the extreme height of the Camino Pablo speed bumps, these devices were approved, planned, designed and installed without consulting the Moraga-Orinda Fire District authorities, who—when they learned of the speed bumps—objected to them based on multiple speed tests they later conducted using actual fire and rescue equipment.

While the Town Council has since attempted to "band-aid" the speed bumps by doubling to twelve feet from six feet the approach ramps on both sides, they remain elevated: 1) well above the height communicated by the Town Council prior to installation; and, 2) more importantly, well above a design height acceptable to the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, who says the modified bumps still unacceptably delay fire and rescue response times. And, while these particular speed bumps primarily impact those living along the Camino Pablo corridor, they offer a glimpse of the future for the rest of town. So, the time to get informed is NOW, before any more "extreme traffic-calming" measures find their way to Moraga streets.

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Objects to Camino Pablo Extreme Speed Bumps

Fire Chief Pete Nowicki, supported by a unanimous vote of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors, on October 15 wrote to the Moraga Town Council a detailed objection to the Camino Pablo speed bumps, reprinted on this page. It describes the potential impact such speed bumps have on the response time for an ambulance, rescue vehicle or fire truck.

According to the Fire Chief's letter, the MOFD's first choice is "the removal of the three recently-installed 'speed bumps' on Camino Pablo as quickly as can be accomplished." The MOFD would accept a modification, but the Chief very specifically defined "modification" to mean converting the speed bumps into "speed cushions," which he described as "channels cut down to the pavement which allow traffic to proceed unimpeded" (our italics) To date, months later, the Town Council has failed to satisfy the Fire District's objections or to even notify Moraga residents of the letter's existence. The letter isn't even posted on the Town's website.

Emergency Vehicle Response Time Calculations*

2-Minute Vehicle Response Time	80% Survival Rate
4-Minute Vehicle Response Time	51% Survival Rate
5-Minute Vehicle Response Time	19% Survival Rate

*Source: Studies conducted by Thomas Kistler, retired Firefighter/Paramedic and former Acting Engineer for the City of El Cajon, CA.


"To the general public, 30 seconds to a minute isn't long, but it means life or death in many cases. I would ask you why emergency medical crews train to get to an emergency as fast as possible? The answer is simple, the faster they get there the more people they can save."

Thomas Kistler, October 29, 2002

At least one Town Council member's position on the matter is that he is simply free to defy fire and rescue authorities. Councilman Ken Chew's attitude is clear in his revealing—almost stunning—commentary in two separate emails:

"Keep in mind that the town is under no obligation to accept MOFD's recommendation. I like those raised crosswalks . . . I had to compromise in the end with my fellow council members and reluctantly agreed to a modification in width from six to twelve feet" (in the approach and decline ramps—our clarification) . . . "I personally dislike the added length." (Councilman Ken Chew email dated Oct. 18, 2007)

"Regardless, the council has no obligation to accept MOFD's recommendation. I don't anticipate council to consider the item again for more debate. We all have spent way too much time on the issue, and like you and many sensible residents, I would like to see this subject put to rest." (Councilman Ken Chew email dated Oct. 19, 2007)



Peter J. Nowicki
 Fire Chief
 Moraga-Orinda Fire District
 33 Orinda Way
 Orinda, CA 94563
 Phone: (925) 258-4599
 Fax: (925) 253-0511
 Voice Mail (925) 258-4500

October 15, 2007

Moraga Town Council
 c/o Town of Moraga
 329 Rheem Blvd
 Moraga, CA 94556

Dear Council Members,

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District and the Town of Moraga has enjoyed a fruitful relationship, cooperatively working together for the greater good of the residents of the community. Both the Town and the Fire District will continue to encounter new challenges and trials as we move forward, and we will continue to overcome these challenges as we work jointly to serve the citizens. Such a challenge is described below.

We have recently been made aware that the Town of Moraga installed a number of traffic calming devices in an attempt to enhance the safety of pedestrians in the Camino Pablo area. Unfortunately, input pertaining to the negative ramifications of such devices was not sought from the Fire District. The District has long had a relationship with the City of Orinda that the proposal of any such devices would first be brought to the Fire District for comment. This has not been the case with the Town of Moraga, but I am aware that the two entities are currently working together to ensure that all future proposals will be presented to the Fire District for study and comment.

Since the matter of 'speed bumps' on Camino Pablo was introduced to MOFD, the District has conducted a thorough investigative review studying the impact of such devices. First, the District re-evaluated all of the current literature pertaining to traffic calming devices and impacts such as the impact of such devices. Second, the District performed response timing tests on the recently installed 'speed bumps', utilizing different pieces of apparatus which would normally be called upon to respond to emergencies in that area. Third, this topic was presented and was discussed at length at a recent MOFD Board of Directors meeting. (All of the recommendations set forth in this document have been discussed at the October 12th Board meeting, and the MOFD Board of Directors strongly encourages the application of such.)

- The Fire District does not endorse nor condone the installation of any level three (aggressive devices for slowing traffic) measure on response routes which will hinder emergency response capabilities. Every saved second in a medical or fire emergency is precious in the quest of a positive and successful outcome. The publicly accepted time frame for brain death in a non-breathing patient is 4-6 minutes, a timeframe which is very similar to that of 'flashover' in a structure fire. Aggressive traffic calming devices require the slowing and then the re-acceleration of emergency vehicles, causing a delay in response. This delay becomes increasingly detrimental in areas where the District does not meet response times as set forth in the adopted 'Standards of Coverage' (6 minutes in urban areas and 10 1/2 minutes in rural areas).
- Every effort should be taken to preserve emergency vehicle access and response times as defined in the District response standards. If traffic calming devices are to be utilized, they should be designed to accommodate all emergency vehicles and to minimize any impacts on response times.
- The Fire District must be involved in the development and review process of traffic calming measures within its response jurisdiction.
- The Moraga-Orinda Fire District encourages the removal of the three recently installed 'speed bumps' on Camino Pablo as quickly as can be accomplished (or modify such devices so that they do not pose a negative response impact to emergency vehicles).

We urge the Town to pursue the above recommendations in order to avoid impact to emergency response capabilities. We look forward to our continued participation with the Traffic Safety Advisory Committee (TSAC), Moraga Police Department, as well as the other committees and groups who focus on traffic and pedestrian safety.

Once again, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District looks forward to working cooperatively with the Town of Moraga on this particular issue, as well as any other time that our collaboration will lead to enhancements to service and infrastructure in the community.

Sincerely,

Pete Nowicki
 Fire Chief

Cc: Mayor Michael Metcalf, Lori Salamack (Moraga Planning Director), Jill Mercurio (Moraga Public Works), John Wyro (MOFD Board President)

Is This What We Expect from Our Elected Officials?

What exactly is going on with the Moraga Town Council? Councilman Ken Chew asserts that he can arbitrarily dismiss input from fire and rescue authorities on matters of life and death? Is Councilman Chew prepared to personally assume the town's legal and financial liability for any tragedies that might occur due to his cavalier attitude toward fire and rescue authorities? More fundamentally, is this the quality of leadership we expect from our elected officials? It is actions like these that have us concerned about what other "extreme" surprises—traffic-calming or otherwise—these Council members really have on their agendas for our community.

Permanently Narrow Moraga Road Between Corliss and Donald Drive?

Another disturbing proposal being discussed is to permanently narrow Moraga Road to one lane of traffic from the current two lanes in both directions between Corliss and Donald Drive. That's because "traffic-calming" proponents on the Town Council believe that Moraga Road between Corliss and Donald is not "calm" enough to meet their standards and are seriously contemplating the reduction in lanes and installing a (planted) median in the middle of Moraga Road, with already a suggestion that the concept be extended to Rheem Blvd.

Now, anyone who regularly uses that stretch—which is to say all of us—knows how congested it can get during morning and evening rush hours in and out of Moraga, school commute periods at Rheem Elementary and Campolindo, and frequent special events at Campo such as swim meets, athletic games, and theatrical performances.

Importantly, to characterize this extreme action as simple "traffic-calming," or addressing it through the Moraga Beautification and Tree-Planting Committee because it might involve a median strip planted with flowers and trees, fails to properly alert the average, busy Moraga citizen to a substantial change on a major town thoroughfare that will surprise, impede, anger and frustrate Moraga drivers.

Note: The Town Council's potential timetable for making these extreme changes to Moraga Road is this coming summer when East Bay MUD will begin digging up the street for one of its capital projects. The idea being discussed is to have EBMUD put Moraga Road back together with only one lane in each direction following its work.

Re-Make Moraga Streets in the Image of Berkeley?

The "traffic-calming" actions to date, and proposals for the future detailed in this letter, are reminiscent of Berkeley, with its aggressive speed bumps, intrusive curb designs and medians, cement barriers, dead-end streets, and other unattractive and frustrating obstacles designed to "calm" traffic to the satisfaction of an extreme crowd. (Interestingly, in the irony of all ironies, even the city of Berkeley has placed a moratorium on Level 3 Aggressive speed bumps and has banned aggressive "traffic-calming" measures of any type on all major streets.)

Clearly, the "traffic-calming" vision being discussed for Moraga has the potential to significantly impact the character of the town and should be examined exhaustively, with lengthy deliberation, and with a bias

toward caution. Instead, one contingent of the Town Council has taken the position that the issues have been decided, debate is closed, and the "traffic-calming" train has left the station. ("Exhibit A" in this regard is the Oct. 19 Chew email quoted earlier in this letter.) Contrary to Mr. Chew's expressed desire to cut off debate, there's a far more compelling case to be made that his extreme vision of "traffic-calming" is more appropriately decided at the ballot box by *all* the residents of Moraga.

We Can Start the Debate by All Agreeing on One Thing: Safety is our Common Concern

We are all concerned about safety in Moraga, particularly protecting our children, areas around our schools, and the elderly living around town and in the two assisted living facilities adjacent to the Moraga Shopping Center. But with the benefit of community-wide involvement, a little common sense and an emphasis on open dialogue, we can develop viable alternatives that allow for ample protection of our most vulnerable citizens along with unimpeded emergency vehicle access throughout the community. And we can do this without resorting to the unsafe, divisive, extreme "traffic-calming" measures that have already been installed on Camino Pablo and are being considered for other areas of our town.

It is important that we have a fair and open debate of these issues and their impact on our community.

If extreme "traffic-calming" or the manner in which the Moraga Town Council is pursuing these measures in our community troubles you, it is important that your voice be heard. One way to do so would be to attend the Special January 16, 7:30 p.m. Town Council meeting at the Joaquin Moraga School auditorium. "Traffic-calming" proponents have been organizing and mobilizing support for their vision of Moraga and are urging their supporters to attend the January 16 meeting as well, so this could be the beginning of the comprehensive debate this important issue deserves.

To register your support for a more thoughtful approach to the extreme "traffic-calming" measures discussed in this letter, with broader and deeper Moraga community involvement, please visit our website at MoragaSafety.org.

Citizens for Moraga Safety www.MoragaSafety.org

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| Jack and Kathi Balousek | Jim Hermansen |
| Stan and Heather Roth | Harry Bergland |
| Joe and Margaret Mahoney | June Masuyama |
| Scott Bowhay | John and Susan Sanders |
| Rita Bowman | Len and Roberta Cohn |
| Marty and Judy Aufhauser | Stu and Nancy Scherr |
| Ed and Roxana Khachadourian | Al and Marcia Haro |
| Pete and Dianne Harlow | Ronald and Pilar Julian |
| Steve and Priscilla Rosenberg | Robert and Diane Gilbert |
| Ted Ting | Ed and Fay Schoenberger |
| Mike and Anita Korenstein | Tom and Marti Brindle |
| Lou and Valorie Hoskins | Daniel Roth |
| Larry Zedaker | Dave and Rosemary Way |
| Christine Pivacek | Reini Bowman |

(Partial list - additional signatories available on website)