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Nearly Seamless Transition to New Council

By *Sophie Braccini*



Moraga's new Town Council, left to right: Michael Metcalf, Ken Chew, David Trotter, Karen Mendonca, Howard Harpham Photo Sophie Braccini

There is always something joyful about the installment of newly elected officials. Only the winners and their supporters are present, filling the air with satisfaction and high hopes. Moraga is no exception, and on December 10th, after the charming ritual of the thanking of departing members, the remaining Council Members greeted the newcomers who vowed to dedicate their best efforts to the community. Dave Trotter was elected the new Mayor, and if it hadn't been for the dissenting voice of Mike Metcalf, the election of Ken Chew as Vice-Mayor would have capped an evening of perfect unison.

December 10th was the last Council meeting for Mayor Lynda Deschambault and Council Member Rochelle Bird, neither of whom ran for re-election. Trotter issued a tribute to Deschambault, giving her "green" gifts such as a gavel with a handle wrapped in green hemp. He claimed everything from his green gift bag was from sustainable businesses, until Bird discovered the "Made in China" inscription on the gavel.

The good humor of the evening continued with Metcalf offering a speech in praise of Bird. He gave her a home-made gift (due to the Town's budget restrictions), of a small trash can set in wooden blocks as a representation of her work with the Contra Costa Waste Authority.

After the two women departed, newly elected Karen Mendonca, Mike Metcalf and Howard Harpham swore the customary oath to the Constitution and gave their introductory speeches.

Mendonca started by saying "All votes count!" referring to the fact that after a recount, she had the highest number of votes in town by a margin of a single vote. She confirmed her campaign pledge of working in the best interest of the community, maintaining civility with her colleagues at all cost.

Mike Metcalf thanked his supporters as well, among them his wife Sharon. He explained his desire to serve again by pointing to the amount of important work that still needs to be done. He agreed with Mendonca that civility was important but added, "I will stick to my principles," in the customary tough-guy style that has been his signature.

Howard Harpham started his speech by reminding the audience of the significance of a pledge throughout history and affirmed that the oath he had just taken was an engagement to serve not his best interest, not the best interest of his supporters, but the best interest of the community as a whole. He expressed his deepest regrets about the nasty turns the campaign took at times, and

declared, "Karen Mendonca is a person of the highest integrity and I look forward to working with her, as well as with the rest of the Council."

The new Council then proceeded to the election of the new Mayor and Vice-Mayor. In keeping with Moraga tradition, Ken Chew nominated Dave Trotter to replace the departing Deschambault; Trotter was elected unanimously.

Now, the tradition in many cities and towns with "weak" mayors (mayors who have no more voting powers than the other council members) has been to rotate the position yearly, in an order dependent on the number of votes received. According to that customary but unwritten rule, Chew was next in line after Trotter. Metcalf, who had challenged this tradition on prior occasions, demonstrated his vow to "stick to his own principles" by nominating Karen Mendonca for Vice-Mayor instead of Chew.

Mendonca thanked Metcalf but declined; she then nominated Chew who was elected 4 to 1 (Metcalf opposing). Mayor Trotter presented his priorities for 2009 (see side bar) and Chew confirmed the budget as a first priority for the town.

Moraga Mayor Dave Trotter's Top 7 Priorities

"The first six months will be busy. The Council will need to keep focus on the very important challenges and opportunities for the town in 2009.

- 1- Recruit a new Town Manager in January or February.
- 2- Adopt a financially viable and attractive Specific Plan for the Moraga Center that meets the needs of the community and refurbishes the existing shopping center; 1st quarter 2009.
- 3- Adopt an updated housing element to the General Plan that incorporates the future new housing being considered for the Moraga center area; by 6/30/09.
- 4- Adopt a balanced budget for 2009-2010. The budget is balanced today but the equilibrium is uncertain due to State cuts and possible take-aways. The Town and the Council will need to keep a close watch and look for opportunities to enhance revenue.
- 5- Creation of a revenue enhancement committee, staffed by citizens and Council Members:
 - a. To exhaustively review the town's options both short term and long term;
 - b. Given the State's invasive priorities the town will need to develop sources of revenue that are not subject to being taken away;
 - c. Find revenues to pay for long term maintenance and replacement of Town infrastructure (roads, drainage) and other community facilities;
 - d. The estimated cost of delayed maintenance is \$30 million; that price tag will only go up in time, ignoring the problem won't make it go away.
 - e. Grants need to be pursued to maintain and repair the infrastructure.
- 6- Reach out to the local business community:
 - a. Make shopping Moraga first an ongoing theme in the town's publications and communication with Moraga residents;
 - b. Consider policies to streamline and simplify the process for approval of business signage.
- 7- Restore civility to the Council. "We are colleagues; we need all of us to respect each other and not let our disagreements over policies become personal. Civility is a choice and we need to make that choice."

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