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Leading Moraga, Ken Chew Style

By Sophie Braccini



Ken Chew presiding at his first council meeting as Moraga's mayor Photo Sophie Braccini

It's probably the first time that Moraga's Mayor will speak fluent Bahasa Malaysia ("Malaysian language"). Ken Chew, who was born close to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, was raised speaking Mandarin and English as well as Malay. He chose the United States to study civil and environmental engineering, and Moraga to raise his family. Chew was elected to the Town Council in 2006 and he will be Mayor for the last year of his term. "I intend to preserve the wonderful dynamic on the Council," he said, adding, "There will be continuity of all well thought-out ideas and support for the successes accomplished."

A civil engineer, Chew graduated in 1986 from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and works for the California Department of Transportation in Oakland. In Madison he met his wife, Alayvahn, and after moving to the Bay Area they had two sons, one a freshman at Miramonte and the other studying at the University of Richmond in Virginia. "Richmond is in Division 1 soccer," explains Chew, "that sport plays a big part in Justin's life, and in Oliver's (the younger son)."

At the Department of Transportation Chew is in charge of project management control, maintaining the cost schedules of major projects, like new highways and bridges. In spite of having a family and a full time job, Chew felt early that he wanted to give back to the community. "When we moved to Moraga I became curious about who does what; in town, in schools -- Who makes the decisions? Who maintains the roads?" says Chew. "I always wanted to get involved and volunteered to the Planning Commission in February of 2003. I didn't think about running for Council so soon, but some people encouraged me to do so in 2006." Chew notes that he couldn't do it without the support of his wife.

Chew's political philosophy is rooted in his respect for democracy. "We should think of what's best for the community first," believes Chew, "the General Plan is a mandate from the people, and it requires us to protect the semi-rural character of Moraga." Chew appreciates when people participate in public debate, especially when the future of Moraga is being shaped, as it is by the Moraga Center Specific Plan. "It is healthy that people are paying attention to what is in the specific plan," he says, "we need a lot of feedback from people, and in the year to come we will study the possibility of having the council meetings recorded so it is easier for residents to stay informed."

Chew promises to try to keep council meetings as concise as possible so they do not run too late. "We could institute speaker cards (as in Lafayette and Orinda), keeping the individual speaking time to three minutes with a light," he says. Chew would like to hear the council members' reports at the beginning of the meeting, not at the end, including requests for new agenda items. "I'd like to see more efficient, less wordy meetings and increase the people's awareness and participation," says Chew, "and if sub-committees are needed, then more reporting back to Council is needed to suppress the appearance of closed-door decisions."

Chew wants feedback from his constituents, and ideas from the community. He wrote an ambitious list of 11 goals for Moraga in 2010 (see side bar). "I am confident that every single one of them is achievable in 2010, certainly with a productive and dynamic council, excellent staff, and the never ending spirit of volunteerism in Moraga," says Chew.

Mayor Chew's Goals for 2010:

1. Balance the town's budget for fiscal year 2010-2011.
2. Begin implementing measures recommended by the Revenue Enhancement Committee to address these three areas: Infrastructure, General Fund Revenue, and Economic Development.
3. Approval of the Moraga Center Specific Plan no later than first quarter of 2010; the formation of a development agreement subcommittee to work with the property owners towards the goal of getting a development agreement in place.
4. Apply to get the \$734k Measure WW Funds to make significant improvements to the Camino Pablo Elementary School playing field;

construction of these improvements before the start of summer 2010.

5. Reach out and support the business community by working with community groups such as the Moraga Chamber of Commerce and St. Mary's College, and enhance efforts to make our town more business friendly in a continued effort to reduce sales tax leakage out of Moraga.
6. Engage Kimco to encourage them to improve the vitality of the Rheem Shopping Center and seek cooperative effort to put life back into that struggling commercial center. In the mean time, complete the amendment to the Sign Ordinance in 2010.
7. Resolution of two pending land use appeals in 2010: the proposed Hetfield and Rancho Laguna development projects.
8. Rancho Laguna Park: Find a resolution, acceptable to all, for a spatial separation of park users.
9. Begin the remodeling of 329 Rheem as the Town Hall and relocate the corporation yard from the Hacienda to 331 Rheem in 2010.
10. 2010 should be the year to further enhance Moraga's ability to disseminate information to the public, by getting the Town's website revamped or redesigned, making navigation by users painless and updating of information by staff less cumbersome and less time consuming.
11. Pursue video recording and video streaming of Council meetings and making them a reality in 2010.

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