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Published April 28th, 2010

Town Finance Survey

By Sophie Braccini

Since the Town of Moraga wants to educate residents about its finances, the first step is to find out what they already know. Enter the new Revenue Enhancement Community Outreach to Neighborhoods Program (RECON), which will employ polling methods and focus groups to obtain information. In the weeks to come, you, Moraga resident, might become part of this study.

When the Revenue Enhancement Committee (REC) presented its report to the Town last November, it highlighted that community education would need to take place to get residents to understand and support the several tax assessments that the REC recommended to address the long term financial needs of Moraga.

"Specifically, the Town Council needs to know what its citizens do and do not know about the Town's budget, its current financial condition, the services the Town provides to its citizens, and the Town's current and future infrastructure needs," says Dick Olsen, a member of the subcommittee charged with implementing the RECON program, "as well as what our community may or may not know about the potential solutions to those situations that the REC recommended in its report."

In addition to Olsen, the members of the RECON subcommittee are Council Members Howard Harpham and Mike Metcalf, and Ellen Beans of the Moraga Citizens Network. Staff is represented by Town Manager Mike Segrest and Finance Director Joan Streit.

Olsen, who was responsible for Transamerica Corporation's corporate advertising program, worked frequently with focus groups. He asked Dr. Larry Bienati to give his expertise to the town pro bono. Bienati, who is an experienced lecturer and consultant in human resources and management, agreed to be a facilitator for the focus groups and to set tools to poll residents.

"This project is on a fast track, but we are still refining the details," said Olsen. For example, the group is working on ways to select participants to make the assortment both random and representative of the population. By the same token, it will be decided how to record the focus group sessions to preserve both transparency and anonymity. Results will be presented to the Town Council, which will decide on the next steps.

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