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Published September 1st, 2010

## Council Candidates Address the Issues

By *Sophie Braccini*

In our last issue we introduced the five candidates who are running for the two open Town Council seats in the November general elections (to review their backgrounds go to <http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0412/And-the-Candidates-Are.html>). This week we asked the candidates to discuss some of the critical issues facing the Town of Moraga.

Ken Chew believes that his dedication to the values that most Moragans share makes him a good fit for the job. "My record shows that I lean more on the progressive side, that I am protecting our semi-rural environment, that I defend family values, and am very fiscally conservative."

Chew believes that the financial situation of the town is good; the budget is balanced with a surplus of about \$300,000. "Current staff is adequately compensated, very efficient and dedicated," he states, "and the process to select a new town manager should remain confidential to protect qualified candidates who are currently employed." He knows that additional funds have to be found for the town's infrastructure. "We have started that process with the Revenue Enhancement Committee," says Chew, "We're going to have to come with a revenue generating mechanism. We will need more communication to determine what the population will support."

As far as development is concerned, Chew participated in the approval of the Moraga Center Specific Plan; he is a supporter of open space. "If we want anything to happen in the downtown area we need to negotiate development agreements with the property owners," says Chew, "no progress has been made in that process, yet."

Chew thinks that progress has been made regarding the Rheem Center. "We met with Kimco and told them that we are very supportive of getting new businesses," says Chew, "As far as the Dollar Tree store, I am not too happy. When I think of Dollar store I think of 60,000 residents with a large mix of population. But there is limited power to the government. We live in a free society, and the market will dictate whether they will be successful or not." Chew has a few additional projects he is very interested in pursuing. "I would like to see an Environmental Task Force in place to begin producing results," says Chew, "Second, I want to lead an effort to put together an effective Moraga Disaster Response Plan in a joint effort between, Moraga PD, MOFD, SMC, the Community Emergency Response Team and unincorporated Canyon."

Seth R. Freeman positions himself as the only candidate with a strong business background. "There are fundamental priorities that need to be addressed, such as transparency in governance, poor finances, worn out infrastructure, recreation and planning that the incumbents have been ineffective in implementing," says Freeman, "I am volunteering my creative problem-solving and business management skills to help our Town."

Freeman believes in open public process. He wants to implement interactive web-casting of all public meetings to increase access, transparency and participation. He believes that recruiting a new town manager should be an open process, "Recruitment should start here in Moraga. I can think of a 1/2 dozen Moraga moms with advanced degrees that could run this town," he says.

Freeman believes that the current town council has allowed our roads to deteriorate and that it is imperative that some bond financing happen. "Grants should be aggressively pursued," states Freeman, "the public will have to be consulted and educated on these issues."

As far as development is concerned, Freeman believes that the Moraga Center Specific Plan may have been necessary for regulatory purposes, but is otherwise pure fantasy. "The notion that the Town needs additional office space is unfounded and 'Workforce Housing' is inconsistent with economics," said Freeman. He is also opposed to ridgeline development.

Regarding the commercial situation Freeman thinks that the current approach is not business-like. "For example the Town has advertised for a volunteer economic development position with a maximum 10 hours work per week. A better idea would be to engage a team of Saint Mary's and high school students to research prospective tenants and survey residents. This team approach would utilize inexpensive talent and provide valuable work experience," he said.

Finally Freeman places a very high priority on schools and recreation. "The Town should work closely with the Moraga School District to coordinate policies and promote our schools." Freeman believes that the Parks and Recreation Department should be examined and potentially restructured. "We need to pay more attention to our seniors' needs and Moraga teenagers should have something fun and safe to do in the evenings."

Dave Trotter sees himself as a political centrist and moderate, not an ideologue. He believes that his background as an attorney with experience in land use, civil litigation, real estate and environmental law gives him a knowledge base that has proven beneficial in dealing with a variety of matters that come before the Town Council, such as land use and planning issues. "From that position, my focus has been (and will be) on getting things accomplished (such as the Moraga Center Specific Plan) and managing the Town's affairs in a smart and cost-effective way," writes Trotter in an email.

Trotter says the financial condition of the Town is stable from an operating standpoint. "This is due in large part to budget reductions that occurred during my tenure as mayor in 2009," he writes, "I insisted the Town adopt a balanced budget and not dip into our General Fund reserves."

He served on the Revenue Enhancement Committee in 2009, and was directly involved in preparation of the final report that dealt in part with the insufficiency of funding for the town's infrastructure. "To keep our neighborhood

roads in repair will be one of my priorities," he states. He believes that making the case for a benefit assessment district could be part of the solution.

Trotter participated in the elaboration of the Moraga Center Specific Plan. He believes that this adoption has already attracted the attention of homebuilders and he wants to focus on ensuring that implementation of the Plan includes reinvestment in the existing shopping areas. As for undeveloped area, "we need to protect Moraga's remaining open ridgelines from development by applying the land use policies and guiding principles set forth in the General Plan," he writes.

Trotter favors new businesses coming to Moraga. "During my tenure as mayor, the Town adopted a policy waiving use permit application fees for businesses seeking to relocate into existing empty retail buildings," he writes, "The Town can and should do more to promote local businesses with respect to possible reforms to streamline the planning process."

Dennis Wanken and Eleni Wanken are running this race as a team, and chose to be interviewed together; Eleni Wanken also answered some questions by email.

Dennis Wanken was motivated to run for the election to Town Council, in spite of his busy schedule, because of his perception that town politics lack openness and inclusion. "I really feel that it's a call of duty," says Wanken, "when I talked in February of 2009 opposing the secrecy with which the Town Manager was recruited, my comments were not even acknowledged." Instead the candidate proposes an approach that is based on common sense and is respectful of everyone's perspective.

Wanken's proposal to address the financial situation of the town is to first reduce expenses. "We would look at every position on town staff and take a hard look at compensation and benefits," he says, "we have to be realistic about what the town can afford." For example, he believes that the town manager's position could be filled by a volunteer, "we have enough talent in this town," he adds. However, Wanken would like to see more police officers in town since security is one of his first priorities.

As far as development is concerned, Wanken favors promoting the building of new family homes rather than clustering higher density dwelling in the downtown area. "600 new units as planned in the Moraga Center Specific Plan is too much," he says, "I understand that we have to be in compliance with State law, but the implementation of this plan would bring increased traffic and services, and we have to be sensitive to Sonsara's homeowners who certainly do not want to see high density condominiums across the street." Instead he proposes to streamline the planning process so it is easier for developers to build single-family homes.

For the Rheem Center he proposes to eliminate fees for businesses that want to come to town and fast track the process. He favors the coming of the Dollar Tree store, "We won't have a Nordstrom here," says the candidate, "and there is a market for this kind of store, we buy a lot of supplies for our schools in these stores."

Eleni Wanken wants to serve her Town. "I don't need to do this," she says, "we are very busy people, but the town needs it." The candidate believes that as far as town management is concerned it is time to go back to the basics, take a hard look at overspending and re-visit the vision of the town's founders.

Wanken's views on town finance are very close to her husband's. "The financial situation of Moraga is at a crossroads. We have to be careful with our expenditures and closely examine how we can further reduce them, as well as make every effort to not run the risk of having to go the voters for additional taxes," she said, "In the current economic climate, I feel any tax increase would have a real impact on our families' abilities to pay their current bills. I would only use an additional tax after all other options have been exhausted."

For Wanken, the infrastructure issue has been passed along from one council to another. "At some point there is a day of reckoning. We are approaching that day," she says, "The council should make every effort to try and apply for any available stimulus monies for addressing this problem. Even if we were only able to get 1-2 million, it would help. Parcel taxes for such public works should only be considered as a last resort."

As far as development is concerned, she too believes that the 600 new units in the downtown area is too much. Wanken favors an approach that would involve the main property owner, the Bruzzone family. "It's a matter of trust," she said, "we've known them very well and for a very long time, it's about the community and working together. People are not working with them, you don't hate a family because they have succeeded, you work with them." With respect to Rancho Laguna 2, she feels the developer has satisfied the conditions to proceed with the project. "The time for placing obstacles and roadblocks for this project should stop, and stop as soon as possible," she said.

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