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Letters to the Editor

Editor:

The roads around my area have deteriorated so bad over the last few years that I can barely drive to the store without scraping the bottom of my car due to potholes, poor patch jobs and uneven surfaces.

I'm not talking about speeding around like a race car driver and exceeding the limits of the road, I'm talking about having to drive way under the speed limit and snaking around like I'm in a minefield in several areas to avoid leaving my exhaust behind.

Bad roads cause alignment issues, tire damage and unnecessary strain on engines and transmission.

Between our two cars, I'll probably spend \$500 this year in tire alignments to correct the damage done by our roads. What can we do to convince the city that this issue needs to be addressed?

Sincerely,
Mark Pitchford
Orinda

Editor:

The members of FAIR are in complete agreement with Orinda Mayor Victoria Smith's comment regarding our emergency services when she said, "the reasons that Orinda joined Moraga several years ago to form MOFD are still valid." Those reasons were that we wanted better service and, as then-Mayor Sarge Littlehale stated, "We must never again let the Supervisors spend \$2.8 million of Orinda's money elsewhere in the County, ignoring Orinda's needs."

Unfortunately, best intentions have not quite worked out as planned. Right off the bat, Orinda taxpayers were subsidizing Moraga emergency services by \$700,000. Since then it has gotten worse. Orinda taxpayers are still subsidizing Moraga with \$1,100,000 annually; \$170 per household (about the same amount that Measures Q and E were going to cost to fix our roads).

In 14 years since MOFD was formed, Orinda taxpayers have subsidized Moraga's emergency services by \$12 million (net of money used to bring Orinda's equipment up to standards) and in the next 10 years it is projected that the subsidy to Moraga will continue to increase. By 2022 it will be close to \$3 million annually and an additional \$20 million will have been spent "elsewhere in the County, ignoring Orinda's needs." Is this what Orinda voters agreed to in 1997? When is the subsidy so much that we need to take action?

We certainly have better service than we did in 1996 with a paramedic on every truck and our own dedicated ambulance however there are still service deficiencies.

In Sleepy Hollow and Orinda Downs, where 10% of our residents live, emergency response times, the crux of good service, are over 50% in excess of acceptable standards. 30% of the fire hydrants in Orinda are still sub-standard just as they were when MOFD was formed. MOFD has nothing in its long-range financial plan or strategic plan to address these issues.

In conclusion, while MOFD provides good service to Orinda, much better than we had before MOFD was formed, the taxpayers are paying more for the service and it is still substandard. MOFD has proven that it has no intention of acting on this as FAIR has been rebuffed for two years and both MOFD and Moraga have told Orinda Council Members, in a public meeting, that Orinda taxpayers' subsidy to Moraga "is Orinda's problem."

FAIR calls on the City Council to form its own Citizens Safety Advisory Task Force to investigate these issues and report back to the City Council on its findings.

Diana Stephens
Orinda
Editor:

Municipalities across the country are facing severe budgetary crises. Few are worse than those right here in California. House prices continue to fall around the country and will likely continue their slide lower -- yes, even here in beautiful Lafayette where at times homes can be in limited supply in part because of wise zoning requirements put in place many years ago to ensure that so many of our homes enjoy vistas of pristine ridgelines or forested creeks. Nonetheless, economists will tell you that deflationary spirals like that we are facing in housing are extremely hard to get out of . . . yes, even here in Lafayette. And as goes the local housing market, so goes the local fiscal balance. So when I read of the Lafayette Planning Commission's rejection of the Polichio's proposed addition of a second story on my neighboring Lucas Drive (Dec 22, 2010 issue) I thought it showed a lack of consideration of the big picture of which we are a part here in our little Burton Valley. Dr. Joel Libove of Orinda pointed out (Jan 5, 2011 issue) how their decision hurts home values and that protesting neighbors may actually be hurting their own property values by preventing tasteful home improvements in the neighborhood. I'd add that eventually -- even in the face of CA's horrendous Prop 13 -- higher nominal property values would help our state and local fiscal situation. But the issue is deeper than that. It's about what economists call the "multiplier effect" of spending on projects like the Polichio's renovation. It's the boom for the guy that gets picked up to work part-time on that job instead of filing an unemployment claim, a boost for our beloved Ace Hardware on Mt. Diablo when the workers run over there to pick

up a few extra supplies that ran short on the job-site. And it's a boost for everyone from the owners of the gas station to the 7-eleven in town. That is economics in a capitalist system. And that is why overly strenuous zoning and planning requirements make little sense at a time when our national, state and local economies have virtually no "multiplier" in them.

Recognizing that I have limited knowledge of municipal planning and the host of issues that the Commission faces in its difficult decisions to keep our community and the semi-rural Lafayette environment safe, natural, and generally a wonderful place to live, I only wish to suggest that we might reconsider the economic realities of the day. You, Mr. and Ms. Commission Member, are the multiplier effect that you thought was just something you read or heard about in a Ben Bernanke speech. And now is the time for you to bend a little more than you might have five years ago for the good of the Lamorinda economy.

Regards,
T.J. Connelly
Lafayette

Editor:

Moraga's ridgelines are more at risk than ever. Opponents of the 2008 Ballot Initiative (Measure K, which would have protected ridgelines) argued that ridgelines were already sufficiently protected. Special interest groups heavily outspent local efforts-and Measure K failed. Although the General Plan clearly states its intent to "protect ridgelines from development", Moraga has not adopted clear policies to ensure our remaining ridgelines are left intact. The town's attorney clearly explains that without Measure K, the discretion to protect our ridgelines remains in the hands of our elected officials. The Town Council has full legal authority to decide and interpret. We are fortunate to have our new Mayor Karen Mendonca and other councilmembers who ran on a clear platform to protect open space and ridgelines. Councilmember Dave Trotter has led a successful effort to relocate proposed houses off of the Rancho Laguna Laguna ridgeline. So far, Mendonca has agreed to relocate half of the proposed ridgeline homes to lower elevations where another 20 homes are already approved to be built. We are hopeful that these leaders will use their discretion and agree that "protect" means to relocate (or remove) the remaining six homes that are still proposed on the ridgeline. If constructed, the homes would require massive removal of as much as 24 feet of top soil-or the equivalent of lopping off dirt as deep as a two story home! Surely this is not how our councilmembers will use their discretion to interpret "protect ridgelines"? If the council were to decide to approve ANY ridgeline homes to be built, the town's ridgeline policies would be rendered utterly meaningless and ineffective. It would set a precedent that leaves all of Moraga's ridgelines vulnerable to development. Please let your elected officials know we are counting on them to represent us on this important issue. Let us take this opportunity to protect all remaining ridgelines for future generations to enjoy! Please note that this is not about stopping all development. The Rancho Laguna developer will still retain its rights to build the other 20 or so approved homes. And more than 1100 other homes have been recently approved and/or are underway to be built in Moraga. Attend the Jan 26th meeting (7:30 at JM auditorium) and/or write to your elected officials.

Lynda Deschambault
Moraga

Editor:

Hello all. My name is Tony Knox. I am a Boy Scout from Troop 246 in Moraga and I recently completed my Eagle Project, the Veteran's Memorial located at the Moraga Commons. This Memorial will be part of Lamorinda for years to come and I am so glad that I had the opportunity to be able to give something valuable to the community. However, I did not complete this project alone. There were many others that helped me along the way. I wanted to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped me with my project. The project was very challenging, but I was able to complete it with the support of the community and my fellow Scouts. For everyone who gave their time, guidance and financial contributions to help me with my project, I can't thank you enough. I especially want to thank the members of the Moraga Parks and Recreation Foundation and the Military Officers Association, who worked with me from start to finish. The Veteran's Memorial was made possible thanks to so many individuals and organizations and I appreciate the support so much. Thank you again.

Sincerely,
Tony Knox

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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