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## Tax Increase in Moraga's Future?

*By Sophie Braccini*

A couple of years ago the Town of Moraga picked up a common thread in Lamorinda - the need to find a lot of money to repair and maintain its roads at acceptable levels. An ad-hoc committee dubbed RECON (Revenue Enhancement Community Outreach to Neighborhoods) has spent the intervening time looking at the issue and recently presented its findings to the Town Council. The committee also requested additional funding to finalize the study and prepare for a potential November ballot initiative that would secure financing, possibly in more than one form, for Moraga's roads.

A telephone survey scheduled for this month will help the Town determine how much residents might be willing to pay for infrastructure rehabilitation and ongoing road maintenance.

According to Jerry Bradshaw, the El Cerrito City Engineer under contract with the Town of Moraga to help finalize road repair plans, the Town needs to raise \$14 million; substantially less than the \$25 million originally estimated.

"At first we had planned to take the roads from an 'at risk' level (the present situation) to a 'good' level, then let them be for a few years before starting a maintenance program to keep them at a 'fair' level," Bradshaw explained.

"The recommended alternative is to bring the roads only up to the Bay Area's average of 'fair' and then immediately engage in a maintenance program that would cost \$1 million a year and would keep the infrastructure at that level; this plan is less expensive," Bradshaw said at the April 25 Town Council meeting.

Even the less expensive plan will be hard to finance. A parcel tax of \$100 would raise \$450,000 a year that the Town could bond for the roads, but the bond proceeds would be roughly \$8 million - \$6 million short of what's needed.

And there would still be the cost of ongoing maintenance; that's where a sales tax could play a role. "A percent added to the local sales tax would create \$900,000 in revenue a year for the Town," explained Mayor Mike Metcalf, who serves on RECON. "It is a fair tax because people who come to shop in Moraga will contribute to maintaining the roads."

At a previous meeting Bradshaw told the Council that a sales tax increase in El Cerrito had no adverse effect on business, in spite of serious competition from nearby cities. The City of Orinda is also considering raising its sales tax to make a dent in its infrastructure backlog.

The Town could opt for a combination of measures likely to include a parcel tax, in the form of a Community Facilities District (CFD, also known as Mello Roos), which needs a two-thirds majority approval, and a sales tax that can be passed with a 50 percent majority.

The Council unanimously approved funding for consultants who will conduct the survey, provide legal services regarding a possible CFD, and continue work on the engineering reports and maps necessary to conduct an election on a CFD. The three contracts total \$55,800.

The results of the survey are scheduled to be available in late May when the Council will further consider the funding options.

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