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## Moraga Reduces Capital Expenses Plans for Town Offices at 329 Rheem scaled down

*By Sophie Braccini*

The Moraga Town Council has adopted a scaled-down plan for the Town Offices at 329 Rheem Boulevard. The retrofit of the building was originally scheduled to include an Emergency Operations Center and a Community Meeting Room in which meetings of the Council, the Town's various commissions, and the community could be held. Both were crossed off the list in view of newly discovered structural problems that would have increased the project's costs; less expensive alternatives have been found close by.

Since the Town is likely to ask voters to approve new taxes for infrastructure maintenance in November, the Council seemed eager to show restraint in its spending decisions. At the May 23 Council meeting, Town Manager Jill Keimach proposed alternatives to the original renovation plans for 329 Rheem that should save the Town about \$400,000: A partnership with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) to use one of its facilities as an Emergency Operations Center (EOC), and the utilization of existing Town-owned space at 331 Rheem as a new meeting room.

MOFD Fire Chief Randy Bradley spoke during the meeting. "In an emergency, we do not have an EOC. We support yours," he said. "Our station 42 (555 Moraga Road) is fully retrofitted. It has a kitchen, bedrooms, and is ready to become an EOC."

The Town will contribute some equipment so it can access its emergency information network. The Council unanimously approved the partnership with MOFD.

The issue of the Community Meeting Room and its proposed alternative was a bit more contentious. The Town has been holding its meetings in the Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School auditorium for years. The rental cost amounts to about \$4,200 per year, and staff must set up and take down the audio equipment and podium, which adds to its workload. But the initial plan to build a meeting room at 339 Rheem was considered by many to be an unnecessary luxury, so Keimach's suggestion to use existing vacant space in the Town's corporation yard at 331 Rheem was welcomed.

The Council was quick to dismiss diagonal street parking and landscaping that staff initially proposed for 331 Rheem and decided that sweeping and buying chairs would be enough. At first Mayor Mike Metcalf and Council Member Dave Trotter wanted to table this component of the project all together. "It is a perception issue," they said. The minimalist plan was eventually approved, with Trotter casting the lone dissenting vote.

Don't plan to attend meetings in the new space anytime soon - the project has yet to be put out to bid.

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