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At last, sinkhole repair to start this summer

By *Sophie Braccini*

Fixing the Moraga sinkhole is in sight as the town finally received the federal government's approval to bid on the repair of the hole that formed over a year ago.

Work will start this summer and will close the lower portion of Rheem Boulevard for several months. The town will eventually be reimbursed for the millions needed, but it is not clear yet when this will happen. When the town received the Federal Emergency Management Agency's agreement to fund the sinkhole repair last year, it came with strings attached: Moraga had to follow a long administrative process to get its bidding documents approved before being able to advertise it.

"We were ready for a long time," said Public Works Director Edric Kwan. He adds that Moraga's project was not considered by the federal administration an "emergency opening," like the Orinda sinkhole is. Moraga had to follow a different procedure, called "permanent restoration" that included environmental approvals and working with the other agencies involved with the sinkhole, such as PG&E.

But the approval finally came and Kwan immediately advertised the project as required. He expects to bring the bids to the council on June 14 for awarding the repair contract. Then the work will start.

Because approval came later than expected and because Kwan wants to minimize impacts on residents, he has increased the work hours and added Saturday shifts. The deadline is Oct. 15 for work completion, but he hopes it will be finished earlier.

For Moragans, the big impact will be the closure of Rheem Boulevard at its intersection with Moraga Road. Kwan said the town does not recommend using the shopping center as a detour, but to instead use alternate public roads. To make the shopping center an official detour would have required the town to negotiate access rights with the property owner, he said, which could have added a considerable amount of time. "We want to get the project started," Kwan said. The town will post signage to signal that Rheem is closed.

The federal government will reimburse Moraga, but the town - with only a small reserve and also a closed bridge to repair - had to find the money to upfront the construction costs that are estimated at \$2.7 million. Earlier this year the town appropriated money from its reserves and from the Palos Colorados developer fee account to fund the project.

Administrative Services Director Amy Cunningham says that the date the federal government will approve reimbursing the town is October of 2018, but adds that this does not mean that the town will see that money just yet. Moraga might have to wait until 2019.

"It is tough for a little town like us to be struck by two emergencies," adds Kwan.

Update on the Canyon bridge

Public Works Director Edric Kwan says that the Canyon bridge situation is different from the sinkhole since it is characterized as an emergency closing. He and his team have made the applications to get emergency funding to install a temporary one-lane bridge. At the time of this article there was no news about Moraga's eligibility. The town continues to monitor the hillside that moved and design a solution that will stabilize the site enough to protect the temporary solution.

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[back](#)

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