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## Storm drain fee vote: the business of ballots

By Sophie Braccini



Marty McInturf places ballots in the red locked box.

Photo Sophie Braccini

All Moraga property owners by now should have received the ballots to vote for or against the storm water fee. The fee includes the 12 parcels owned by the town, which are assessed approximately \$14,500 a year for the runoff from its properties into the storm drain system. The council decided to vote yes and Mayor Dave Trotter will sign the 12-vote ballot.

Town Clerk Marty McInturf, who receives the ballots, explained that up to 14 parcels can be listed on one ballot. As of April 12 she said she had received about 1,500 ballots. When they arrive, either given to her by hand in her office by a voter, or bulk delivered by mail, the ballots are put in the wired and padlocked red metal box that sits in her office. At night the ballots are taken to a safe location: the police department evidence room, which can only be accessed by the chief of police or his second in command.

McInturf warned that the deadline to physically receive the ballots is May 15 at 5 p.m. Since the ballots are handled by the post office as bulk mail, it goes through Oakland and can take several days to reach Moraga's town offices. McInturf therefore recommends mailing the ballots back ASAP, or hand delivering them at 329 Rheem Blvd. as the deadline nears.

The clerk explained that she gets two or three phone calls every day with questions about the ballots: property owners who can't find their ballots, people who say that only their spouse has received a ballot and not them. McInturf said that the fee is assessed per property and that each parcel gets one vote. If multiple people own one lot, they have to decide together what the vote will be; there is no splitting the vote.

If people cannot locate their ballot, McInturf will have SCI Consulting reissue a ballot to them. She added that the computer system that will read the votes has a registration of all the ballots that have been printed and will only count one vote per parcel. She expects that the vote count will take one or two days and the public is welcome to witness it.

There was discussion at the dais at the April 11 council meeting to decide whether or not the council should take a position and vote. It was noted at the meeting that some residents wrote letters to staff objecting to the town vote because of the weight carried by 12 votes. Town attorney Michelle Canyon indicated that the council should not campaign for or against the fee, but could vote. Council Member Jeanette Fritzky voted with her colleagues to endorse the fee, but decided against having the town vote for its parcels. She explained that when property owners vote it is with the authority derived from owning one or more parcels, but that the town owns property by virtue of residents paying taxes, and that this was a very different paradigm. She added that if she knew what the majority would choose, then that would be what the council should do, but it is not the case and the town should abstain from voting.

The other council members unanimously decided that since they were elected officials, it was their responsibility to vote and they did.

## A new Finestra (window) opens at the Hacienda

By Sophie Braccini

A special town meeting was scheduled on Tuesday, April 17 to discuss a lease contract between the Town of Moraga and Jeff Assadi to open a restaurant on part of the ground floor of the Hacienda de las Flores. The meeting happened after this paper went to press. At the time Lamorinda Weekly discussed with stakeholders, all were hopeful that this contract would be approved as they saw this partnership as the best possible option for the building.

For years the Hacienda subcommittee has worked with successive town staff and interested parties to find an economically viable solution for the Hacienda, a town landmark that exudes charm but is under-used and requires many updates.

The subcommittee was supposed to come to the council with the elements of a request for proposal, when Assadi contacted the town. The experienced restaurateur was running La Finestra until the building on Lafayette Circle burned to the ground last July. Assadi has been looking to resettle since.

The rush in the process – Assadi has other options and is on a timeline to be able to keep his onerous food and beverage license – ruffled some feathers, but the council decided that a special public meeting be conducted on April 17 to accommodate both the busy man and democratic transparency.

Wendy Scheck, a Moraga resident who sat on the committee for years, explains that the lease is a unique opportunity to fulfill several important requirements: maintain the Hacienda as a mixed-use community venue; increase revenues from the property; have it open every day, including weekends to the public; and address needed maintenance.

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## MCE Contra Costa

In April 2018, residents and businesses in Moraga, along with Concord, Danville, Martinez, Oakley, Pinole, Pittsburg, San Ramon, and unincorporated Contra Costa County, will have their electricity service upgraded to 50% renewable energy at lower cost than PG&E, or they can choose another service option.

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\*Please have your PG&E account number on hand.

#### How does MCE affect electricity services for Moraga residents and businesses?

Aside from having access to more renewable energy, not much will change. Residents and businesses can choose 50–100% renewable energy from a local public agency. MCE customers continue to enjoy the same reliable electricity service, with PG&E delivering power, maintaining the wires, and providing billing and gas services.

#### Does MCE cost less than PG&E?

Yes. MCE's 50% renewable electricity **costs less** than PG&E's 33% renewable electricity. You will save between 2-5% (3% on average) with MCE depending on your rate class. MCE has reduced rates the past two years in a row. For detailed rates and cost comparisons visit: [mceCleanEnergy.org/rates](http://mceCleanEnergy.org/rates)

#### Do CARE, Medical Baseline, and other discount programs continue with MCE?

Yes. Low-income assistance programs like CARE, FERA, and Medical Baseline are unaffected by enrollment; these customers receive the same discount with MCE as they would with PG&E. Customers in these programs do not need to re-enroll nor take any further action.

#### Will my billing change?

No. PG&E will continue to send one monthly bill. Instead of one fee that combines charges for the delivery and generation of your electricity, the bill will show separate charges — one for electric delivery (PG&E) and one for electric generation (MCE). **MCE's generation rates simply replace the generation charges you currently pay to PG&E;** they are not an additional charge.

#### Is MCE's power supply more renewable than PG&E's?

Yes, considerably! MCE's power supply contains a higher portion of renewable resources like solar, wind, bioenergy, and geothermal. According to the most recent California Energy Commission Power Content Labels, MCE's Light Green service is 55% renewable and PG&E's service is 33% renewable.

#### Which communities does MCE serve?

MCE has been serving Bay Area electric customers since 2010. Today, about 255,000 customers in Marin and Napa Counties, and the cities of Benicia, El Cerrito, Lafayette, Richmond, San Pablo, and Walnut Creek are buying more renewable energy from MCE. Concord, Danville, Martinez, Moraga, Oakley,

Pinole, Pittsburg, San Ramon, and unincorporated Contra Costa County will enroll with MCE in April.

#### What kind of organization is MCE and who controls it?

MCE is a local, not-for-profit, public agency directly controlled by its member communities — like Moraga. Formed by the public to buy cleaner power and re-invest ratepayer dollars locally, MCE always prioritizes the interests of its customers. MCE's Board of Directors are democratically elected leaders from each community MCE serves and are not paid for their role with MCE. In consultation with MCE's staff, the Board determines MCE's rates, policies and programs in meetings that are open to the public.

#### How is MCE funded?

Like PG&E, MCE is funded by electricity ratepayers through their monthly energy purchases. MCE is not funded by taxpayers. A cornerstone to MCE's mission is to redirect ratepayer dollars back to local economies, and reinvest in its communities by providing low, stable rates, supporting local workforce development, and partnering with community-based organizations.

#### HOW MCE WORKS

