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Moraga community groups sponsor mayoral candidates forum

By Vera Kochan



Photo Vera Kochan

preserve public art and creativity. Her organization "would like to hear how the candidates think they can support these goals as we find creative ways to express the town's welcoming personality." Co-founder of Safe Moraga, Allison Anderman, stated that she was "excited for the opportunity to hear the candidates' views on how Moraga can continue to be courageous and proactive on gun safety." Finally, Suzanne Jones, founder of PLOS believed the forum would "allow voters to learn about the candidates' positions on open space development."

The proceedings began with moderator, Kathryn Oehlschlager, explaining the forum rules. Each candidate was allowed two minutes for an opening statement, one minute 30 seconds to answer each question and two minutes for a closing statement. They drew straws to determine who would go first and in what order. The questions were provided by each of the sponsoring groups.

When candidates were asked what they thought it will take to move the Moraga Specific Town Center Plan forward in real and actionable ways in the next 12 months, Trotter said he supports getting empty retail spaces filled quickly, especially the soon to be empty OSH building. He'd like to revitalize Moraga Center and an extension of School Street. McCluer believed that the Chamber of Commerce and Viva Moraga must work together to help the town move forward toward prosperity, and Woehleke said the town's relationship with contractors and property owners is acrimonious. A spirit of cooperation is necessary for progress.

As for whether they believe Moraga adopting a safe storage ordinance that requires unattended guns to be safely stored is necessary for public safety, McCluer said he supported the gun storage proposal, "because we can't have people selling guns out of homes or next to schools." Woehleke said he supported the ordinance because he lost a close friend to gun violence, and Trotter said he helped to beef up findings in support of the ordinance, and feels gun sales should not happen in neighborhoods and near schools.

When asked about the newly adopted hillside and ridgeline policies and which elements of the new policies they most strongly agree or disagree, all three candidates expressed support of the policies. Woehleke said he is fine with the regulations and believes in protecting open space in Moraga, Trotter noted how he became involved in Ridgeline protection five years ago, and said property owners should be given alternatives on their land for building, and McCluer agreed with all parts of the ridgeline protection, noting how he would like to limit building that blocks views. Moraga can still develop, he said, but with parameters.

As for the recently announced efforts by John Muir Land Trust to purchase the 84-acre Painted Rocks parcel, and what the candidates felt the Town Council's role, if any, should be in supporting such efforts to acquire open space for permanent conservation and public access, McCluer suggested building support for hiking trails with service groups, such as Kiwanis, that can raise interest/support for this. Woehleke said he also supports the collaboration approach, stating that the Town Council should take a leadership approach and approve a bond measure. And Trotter suggested providing an integrated trail network and collaborate with The John Muir Trust Fund.

While both Trotter and McCluer both supported art in public places as a good idea to beautify the town, McCluer suggested using General Fund fees to support the program, and Woehleke said he was not enthusiastic about applying 1 percent of development fees for art, since the town is currently fiscally challenged.

Preserve Lamorinda Open Space, Viva Moraga, We WILL and Safe Moraga facilitated a standing-room-only city council candidates forum - with audience members ranging in age from toddler to retiree - at the Moraga Library Sept. 17. The three candidates running to fill two positions on the Moraga Town Council are incumbent Dave Trotter, Mike McCluer and Steve Woehleke.

The interest shown by the size of the crowd mirrored Ana Moon of Safe Moraga's thoughts: "It's often difficult to differentiate candidate's positions just by looking at their websites or reading campaign mailers."

Each sponsor hoped the forum would enlighten voters regarding some of the key issues facing Moragans in the coming months. Viva Moraga's Stephanie Gray expects the town leaders to help attract new retail to the area. Darlene Bennett of We WILL, felt it was important to

"We can look outside everyday and see the art that is Moraga itself," Woehleke said.

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