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Progress update of 2023 Town Goals and Priorities

By Vera Kochan

Much has been accomplished last year with regards to Moraga's 2023 Goals and Priorities that had been set forth by the Town Council. There were 14 specific categories that were agreed upon, with a significant amount of completion having been achieved.

According to Town Manager Scott Mitnick's March 13 staff report, the town wanted to "continue to lay the foundation and create pathways for a better mix of housing and the re-vitalization of the Town's two commercial areas, including adopting a certified Housing Element, rezoning the commercial centers and Bollinger Canyon, updating the General Plan, and completing an evacuation study." The Town received State Certification of its Housing Element and rezoned two large commercial centers to allow for commercial, housing, and mixed-use projects to align with California's Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RNHA) requirement of 1,118 new housing units. Also, Rheem Valley Center Objective Design Standards, along with the Affordable Housing Ordinance, were adopted. The town also re-zoned the Bollinger Canyon Special Study Area & Adopted Development Standards. It began the General Plan 2040 Update Process and started work with Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA), Lafayette, and Orinda to prepare a Lamorinda Region Evacuation Study while applying for a Sustainable Communities Grant to fund it.

Mitnick's report noted another goal was to "maintain fiscal discipline, position the Town for long-term fiscal sustainability, and efficiently sustain core operations of the Town and services to our residents." The Town converted from an annual budget format to a biennial budget format, and adopted a balanced biennial operating & CIP budget for fiscal year 2023-2024 and fiscal year 2024-2025 which included a five-year CIP forecast. Moraga continued to adhere to a 50% General Fund Budget Reserve Policy, refunded \$4.7 million 2013 certificates of participation debt, and earned Standard & Poor's AAA General Government Credit Rating.

The Town is on track to "complete the second year of the 2022-2024 'Worst First Residential Streets' Pavement Reconstruction Project" and has thus far rehabilitated 3.6 miles of streets, improving Moraga's overall Pavement Condition Index (PCI) from 74 to 76. The percentage of "Poor Condition" and "Very Poor Condition" in all street categories has been reduced, and the overall residential streets "Poor Condition" category dropped from 3.4% (2020) to 1.1% (2024), while the "Very Poor Condition" category dropped from 1.1% (2020) to 0.6%. The Town's overall PCI ranking placed Moraga's streets in the Bay Area's top 20%. The Pavement Rehabilitation projects will be combined into one, which is currently out to bid, soon becoming the largest project of its kind for the Town.

The staff report discussed the continuation of the "Storm Drain Operations and Maintenance Program and completion of 2021-2023 storm drain capital improvement projects" by referring to the Annual Storm Drain Repairs Project which is out for a re-bid; the Moraga Road Drainage Improvements Project out for bid this summer; and the continuing work on the Laguna Creek Restoration at the Hacienda de las Flores Phase 2 project.

Also on the list was to "support high-quality police and emergency response services, including securing energy alternatives for emergencies, and coordinate with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) on fire safety and planning." The Moraga Police Department (MPD) ensured compliance with state training requirements for its police officers, including crisis intervention and de-escalation training. MPD worked with MOFD on emergency responses, special events, evacuation planning, and in responding to SB 1000 (environmental justice). There were community-wide virtual evacuation drills and training with Saint Mary's College public safety personnel. The General Plan Safety Element was updated with input from MPD and MOFD.

Moraga sought to "enhance the Town's parks, open space and facilities for the benefit of the public and move forward with public input into a Town-Wide Recreation and Open Space Plan." Mitnick's update stated that the Art in Public Spaces Committee approved four sculptures on loan from two artists and a mural to be located on the Corporate Yard wall. Moraga also completed the Commons Park Picnic Area Renovation Project; began the Disc Golf Course Improvements Project; completed two Eagle Scout Park Projects; worked with Contra Costa County Fire on vegetation abatement projects using Measure X Funding; completed carpet/furniture replacement and exterior lighting at the Moraga Library; completed the design and construction of Commons Park Picnic Area Renovation Project; and made progress on Commons Park Restroom Replacement Project.

The Town pursued "measures designed to improve traffic, pedestrian, and bicycle safety, especially around our schools, crosswalks, through routes, and residential street entry points to the Town's main roadways." According to Mitnick, MPD conducted patrols designed to address traffic complaints from residents. Also begun was the Moraga Road and Campolindo Drive Traffic Safety and Circulation Safety Study Project, Smart Signals Project Agreements, and an agreement with CCTA to move forward on the Moraga and Canyon Road (St. Mary's Road to Sanders Drive) Complete Streets Project. Additionally, the Federal Highway Safety Improvement Program Cycle-10 grant for Safety Improvement projects and a Caltrans authorized Cycle-11 SIP will begin. The Corliss Drive Safe Routes to School Project is moving forward, and the Town received a \$600,000 MTC Priority Development Area Planning Grant for its School Street Complete Streets Project.

Mitnick's report stated that the Town hoped to "work with the Moraga Chamber of Commerce, Saint Mary's College, and our local school districts to enhance Moraga's business and education climate." The Town coordinated with the Chamber to execute the Community Faire, Bunnies & Brews, and Hacienda Nights; encouraged its staff to attend Chamber mixer events; conducted General Plan 2040 outreach with Joaquin

Moraga Intermediate School's Safety Committee; conducted an outreach with SMC along with a "State of the Town" luncheon; and expanded After-School Enrichment Programs.

Moraga continued "outreach to the public and provided opportunities for input from all segments of the community." MPD participated in National Night Out, increased its presence on school campuses, and assigned a juvenile police officer to work with students. The Town completed a Moraga Parks and Recreation Community Survey, a Senior Programming Focus Group, a Corp Yard Wall Mural Survey, and conducted public outreach to community organizations, boards, commissions, and resident groups.

The staff report stated that the Town continued to "work with Wedgewood to enhance the Hacienda and address the impacts of operations on the neighborhood" by working with Wedgewood to provide window treatments to eastern second floor windows, negotiating with them to pay for full utility costs and certain capital improvements, continuing to monitor noise decibel readings, developing long-term operational solutions, and recurring financial payments that have increased.

Moraga has on-boarded the "new Town Manager with minimum disruption to staff and to operations, and collaboratively streamlined Town Council meetings."

Mitnick's first day with the Town was April 10, 2023. Additional support staff was hired to fill vacancies; the executive team is evolving into a top-notch leadership unit, staff morale continues to improve, Town Council Chamber operational and safety improvements have been implemented, and improvements have been made to staff presentations at Council meetings.

The Town strives to lessen its "impact on the environment by continuing to implement sustainability and resiliency initiatives and viable strategies in Moraga's Climate Action Plan and in the Town's Facility Energy Generation Study." Staff remains fully committed to implementing energy efficiency projects going forward and has worked on sustainability initiatives throughout the General Plan 2040. An energy consultant is developing a cost proposal to manage the Power Purchasing Agreement RFP process for selection of a Facility Energy Reliability Projects contractor.

Moraga conducted a "Town Council/Town Manager session focused on effectiveness and organizational competency" by holding a study session, and it approved revised Town Council Protocols.

Lastly, Mitnick's update cites the initiation of "the process of amending the Town-Wide Noise Ordinance" by awarding a Town-Wide Noise Study contract as part of the General Plan 2040 Update process with additional work to carry over into 2024.

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